

Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009–2014
Norway Grants

CZECH-NORWEGIAN RESEARCH PROGRAMME
GUIDELINES FOR REVIEWERS

Reallocation of Unused Institutional Support
to Additional Activities
within the Area of the Social Sciences and Humanities
for already Approved Projects
in the Czech-Norwegian Research Programme CZ09

Approved by the Programme Committee on 19 February 2016

Annex 1 Declaration on Conflict of Interest

Annex 2 Individual Review Form

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The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports as the Programme Operator (hereinafter “the Programme Operator”) of the Czech-Norwegian Research Programme (hereinafter “the Programme”) has prepared these Guidelines for Reviewers in accordance with the *Regulation on the Implementation of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2009–2014* (hereinafter “the Regulation”) for the purpose of evaluating proposals submitted to the redistribution of an unused institutional support in the Programme.

1. GENERAL INFORMATION

1.1. PROGRAMME AND REALLOCATION OBJECTIVES

The Programme’s goal is to enhance science and research cooperation between Czech and Norwegian entities and fund the creation of new scientific knowledge and quality outputs through bilateral projects in basic and applied research and experimental development.

The Programme emphasizes the horizontal aspects, i.e. the bilateral research projects include activities aimed at the support of young researchers (participation of Ph.D. students and postdocs, participation of researchers after parental leave, mobility support of researchers and other participants directly related to the project, etc.).

1.2. THEMATIC AREA

Proposals for additional project activities must fall only within the following thematic area of research and/or must contribute to the prioritized thematic area:

- **Social Sciences and Humanities.**

Note: The support is not provided to activities within the Environment and Health thematic areas.

1.3. CONDITIONS OF REALLOCATION

The reallocation is available to projects:

- which were selected in the Call announced on November 29, 2013 (with the identification code in the system of the Research and Development SMSM 2014 7F1), approved by the Programme Operator and institutionally supported from the Programme;
- with or without additional funding from other sources;
- with different kinds and number of project partners involved;

1.4. SUPPORTED ADDITIONAL RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Basic research, industrial research and experimental development as defined by the Framework for State Aid for Research, Development and Innovation (2014/C 198/1) are the research categories supported under the Programme.

The activities must extend the existing project objectives, or promote new project objectives and results, and/or will contribute to this thematic area – the Social Sciences and Humanities. At the same time, the activities will contribute to achieving the overall objectives of the Programme.

1.5. ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

Eligible applicants – small and medium sized enterprises and research organizations (Project Promoters and Project Partners) – are only the beneficiaries whose projects have been already selected in the Call announced on November 29, 2013 (with the identification code in the system of the Research and Development SMSM 2014 7F1) and approved by the Programme Operator. So the support is intended for all already supported and running 7F projects.

The selected beneficiaries and approved projects which are eligible for the reallocation of institutional support can be found at: <http://www.msmt.cz/vyzkum-a-vyvoj-2/projects>.

A third party (other project partners outside the Czech Republic and Norway) already approved by the Programme Operator may participate in the activities, but it is not supported by the Programme, and it will cover its expenses from other sources. Any involvement of new partners is not allowed.

Members of a research team (e.g. a (post)doctoral student, a scientist) must have at least a master's degree or its equivalent and appropriate qualifications in the given field.

2. EVALUATION PROCESS

The evaluation rests on a number of well-established principles:

- a) **Excellence** - Projects selected for funding must demonstrate a high quality in the context of the topic and criteria set out.
- b) **Transparency** - Funding decisions must be based on clearly described rules and procedures, and applicants should receive adequate feedback on the outcome of the evaluation of their proposals.
- c) **Fairness and impartiality** - All proposals submitted are treated equally. They are evaluated impartially on their merits, irrespective of their origin or the identity of the applicants.
- d) **Confidentiality** - All proposals and related data, knowledge and documents communicated to the Programme Operator are treated in confidence.

- e) **Efficiency and speed** - Evaluation, award and contract preparation should be as rapid as possible, commensurate with maintaining the quality of the evaluation and respecting the legal framework.
- f) **Ethical and security considerations** - Any proposals which contravene fundamental ethical principles may be excluded at any time from the process of evaluation, selection and award. The provision of false information as well as plagiarism will result in a rejection of the proposal.

2.1. ELIGIBILITY OF PROPOSALS

In order to be retained for further evaluation, the proposal must fulfill all of the administrative formal eligibility criteria. For more details please see the eligibility criteria described in 2.3.1.

The eligibility check is carried out by the Programme Operator.

2.2. EVALUATION OF PROPOSALS

The Programme Operator evaluates eligible proposals with assistance of external independent experts and the members of the Programme Committee.

2.2.1 Conflict of interest

Experts are required to confirm that they have no conflict of interest for each proposal they are asked to evaluate (Annex 1 of the Guidelines).

A potential conflict of interest may arise if a person:

- was involved in the preparation of the proposal,
- has had personal, business or other relation with the applicant that could influence the evaluation,
- could benefit directly should the proposal be accepted,
- was employed by one of the applicant organizations stated in a proposal within the previous three years,
- is involved in a contract or research collaboration with an applicant organization, or has been so in the previous three years,
- is in any other situation that could cast doubt on his or her ability to evaluate the proposal impartially, or that could reasonably appear to do so in the eyes of an external third party.

2.2.2 Description of proposal evaluation

The Programme Operator briefs the experts in writing on the evaluation process and procedures as well as the selection criteria to be applied. The core information of

the appointment letter is the content of these Guidelines and the Declaration on Conflict of Interest (including Confidentiality matters). It also specifies the description of work, associated deadlines and condition of payment (as stipulated in a work agreement).

2.2.2.1 Individual evaluation of proposals

In the initial phase of the evaluation an independent expert works individually, and gives scores and comments for each criterion.

The expert also indicates if the proposal:

- is coherent with the prioritized thematic area of the Programme; and
- deals with sensitive ethical issues.

As a result of the individual evaluation of the proposal, the expert completes an **Individual Review Form** (Annex 2 of the Guidelines), specifying comments and scoring of the proposal. If the proposal is considered to be out of scope by the expert, it will be considered to be ineligible.

2.3. ELIGIBILITY AND SELECTION CRITERIA

First, the Programme Operator checks formally whether the proposal meets the set conditions and requirements. At this stage, the proposal is evaluated in terms of formal legitimacy, correctness, eligibility and complementarity of the proposed additional activities that can be submitted.

2.3.1 Eligibility check criteria

The success of the proposal depends on fulfilment of formal criteria, the ability to properly define the project objectives and relation of the additional activities to the topic.

The following eligibility criteria apply to all proposals submitted as follows:

1. Receipt of the proposal within the set deadline – by March 24, 2016;
2. The submission by the eligible applicants;
3. The relation of the proposal to the Social Sciences and Humanities thematic area;
4. Completeness of the proposal, i.e. the presence of completed form and all mandatory annexes (the eligibility checks only apply to the presence of the appropriate parts of the proposal);
5. The proposal is written in English (exceptionally specific parts if relevant);
6. Minimum conditions concerning the number of participants (at least one Czech and one Norwegian entity eligible);

7. The project accomplishment must not exceed the duration of the eligibility which is on April 30, 2017;
8. The requested amount of the grant must be between the limits^{1,2};
9. The proposed eligible costs (budget) is in CZK;
10. The proposal must specify all financial resources to be used for the realization if relevant;
11. The submission in two formats – a. in paper and b. electronically. Both versions must be identical;
12. Containing signatures of all members of the statutory authority, or any authorized member of the statutory body of the applicants in accordance with the charter, certificate of incorporation etc. In case of more project participants, all statutory representatives of all candidates must sign the proposal. A missing signature of any member of the statutory body may be a reason for revision or exclusion from the evaluation;
 - The proposal must be furnished with original signatures of statutory authorities of the Promoter and the Czech Partner(s). For Partners from Norway copies of signatures are accepted.
 - The obligation to substantiate the document from which the signature authority emerges is not demanded from directors or authorized directors from public research institutions and rectors or rectresses of public higher education entities (e.g. universities).
13. If relevant, if a person gets authorized to sign the required documents on behalf of the statutory authority, the proper document from which signing authority is clear such as power of attorney/internal regulations must be attached to the proposal (e.g. a letter of attorney).

¹ The amount of total project costs and related amount of support provided for the project completion or research objective for the whole project period shall not be changed during the project realization by more than 50 % of the amount of total project costs or the amount of support provided for in the Project Contract.

² The minimum available amount of support per project applied for is CZK 500 000 (EUR 19 462); the maximum amount is CZK 7 000 000 (EUR 272 479). The exchange rate of the European Commission for October 2013 related to the Call 2013 - CZK 25.69/EUR 1.

2.3.2 Selection criteria

The selection criteria are shown in the following table:

Table 1: Selection criteria

Criteria	Description
1. Relevance in relation to the objectives and prioritized area of the Programme	1.1 Coherence with the thematic area – the Social Sciences and Humanities
2. Scientific and/or technical excellence	2.1 Innovativeness of the idea
	2.2 Appropriateness of the approach
3. Quality and efficiency of the implementation and management	3.1 Competence and expertise of the applicant team
	3.2 Feasibility and efficiency of the project plan
4. Potential impact of additional activities	4.1 Contribution to capacity and competence building
	4.2 Intended short-term outcomes
	4.3 Intended long-term outcomes

2.3.2.1 Relevance in relation to the objectives and prioritized thematic area of the Programme

This criterion is considered as an elimination criterion. The proposal should be assessed only if it fits the reallocation thematic topic. The activities must extend and supply the existing project objectives, or promote new project objectives and outcomes, and/or will have benefits for the prioritized thematic area.

If the answer is “no”, the proposal is rejected and there is no need for further evaluation. Please note that the answer “no” should be given only in clear cases. If it is unclear whether the proposal falls within the thematic area, reviewers should write their comments, evaluate the proposal and leave it for the next stage to make a final decision on this matter.

2.3.2.2 Scientific and/or technical excellence

The scientific quality and/or technical excellence of the research and development is an important criterion in evaluating the proposal. The following aspects will be evaluated:

- **Innovativeness of idea** - originality of idea, ambition and challenge to address scientific or technological problems of current interests;
- **Appropriateness of approach** - methods proposed have to be sound, rigorous, state-of-the-art and appropriate to the proposed activities, proposed goals should be achieved using a methodology/approach presenting the level of risk that is inherent in a challenging research and development project.

2.3.2.3 Quality and efficiency of implementation and management

The quality and efficiency of the implementation and management are an important criterion in evaluating the proposal. The following aspects will be evaluated:

- **Competence and expertise of the research team** - Project Promoter's knowledge and experience in the field of research and development and his/her general qualifications to lead the project, relevance and strengths of partners (including resources and infrastructure), quality of previous work of the research team involved and the level of previous and current (financial) support in the field;
- **Feasibility and efficiency of the plan of activities** - schedule and milestones, compatible with resources, either available or requested, appropriateness of human resources (number of personnel and their qualifications) per partner, appropriateness of budget with respect to planned work.

The additional activities should be ambitious and feasible at the same time. The plan has to be evaluated according to the level of competence of the research team and the efficiency of the work plan.

Moreover, the proposal must make clear why they should be developed cooperatively between participating countries/institutions and what added value will be created through this collaboration. It is expected that the collaborations developed between Czech and Norwegian entities will deliver significant synergy effects.

The proposed budget should reflect the actual contribution made by each party and should be subject to negotiation between the Project Promoter and the Project Partner. Should the division of the budget be significantly unbalanced, this must be explained and justified.

2.3.2.4 Potential impact of additional activities

The potential impact of additional research and development activities is an important criterion in evaluating the proposal. The following aspects will be taken into account:

- **Contribution to capacity and competence building** - how the activities will build experience and competence of the researchers/organizations involved;

- **Intended short-term outcomes** – ambition and balance of acquisition of expertise, actual research work and dissemination of results, dissemination of results among the potential users;
- **Intended long-term outcomes** – planned strategies for disseminating and using results during and after the project as well as a description of how potential users are to be involved in the activities in view of using the results, i.e. exploitation of intellectual property generated, technical innovations, spin-offs, raising scientific awareness, improvement of quality of life, intended technical, economic, environmental and societal impacts, decreasing social and economic disparities, and social and economic sustainability.

2.3.3 Suggestions for writing evaluations

- The assessment should be more than just scores, they also need proper justification.
- The assessment should indicate the most important strengths and weaknesses of the proposal.
- The overall scoring should match the comments – otherwise the applicants might not have confidence in the assessment.
- Generalists in the field should be able to understand the recommendation.
- Bias in favour of reviewers' own specialization should be avoided.
- Balanced feedback and constructive criticism should be given.
- Assessments would be carried out against the highest international standards.

2.4. SCORING AND THRESHOLDS

The proposal can receive a **maximum number of 15 points** in the evaluation procedure (sum of scores of 3 criteria: excellence, quality and impact). To be recommended for funding, **the proposal must pass all the thresholds** presented in the table 2 below.

2.4.1 Proposal scoring

Experts examine the issues to be considered comprising each evaluation criterion (excellence, objectives, management and impact).

Half-scores may be given within the scale from 0 to 5 (e.g. 3.5 or 4.5).

For each criterion under examination, score values indicate the following assessments:

- 0 – The proposal fails to address the criterion** under examination or cannot be judged due to missing or incomplete information.
- 1 – Poor.** The criterion is addressed in an inadequate manner, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.

- 2 – **Fair.** While the proposal broadly addresses the criterion, there are significant weaknesses.
- 3 – **Good.** The proposal addresses the criterion well although improvements would be necessary.
- 4 – **Very good.** The proposal addresses the criterion very well although certain improvements are still possible.
- 5 – **Excellent.** The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion in question. Any shortcomings are minor.

The use of the whole scale is recommended, i.e. experts should not hesitate to score below “3 – good” when appropriate. Comments have to be given to justify every score.

2.4.2 Thresholds

Thresholds for all of the criteria are set. A proposal failing to achieve the set threshold score for one or more criteria will be rejected.

Table 2: Criteria thresholds

Criteria	Thresholds
1. Relevance in relation to the objectives and the prioritized area of the Programme – Social Sciences and Humanities	YES
2. Scientific and/or technical excellence	3.5 (out of 5)
3. Quality and efficiency of the implementation and management	3.0 (out of 5)
4. Potential impact of the project	3.5 (out of 5)

Note: No weighting is applied.

2.5. FINALISATION OF RESULTS

Based on the evaluation outcomes (evaluation by experts and list of proposals passing all thresholds), the Programme Operator draws up a ranking list of the proposals submitted to be discussed and recommended by the Programme Committee. The Programme Operator makes its own assessment of the proposals, in particular a review of the Programme Operator’s financial contribution. There will be only **one ranking list** of the submitted proposals.

2.5.1 Ranking

The reviewed proposals are ranked according to the evaluation results.

The Programme Operator draws up a list of proposals for possible funding from those that passed the evaluation thresholds, on the basis of the results of the evaluation by experts in the Individual Review Report. Due account is taken of the scores received and of any advice from the experts. A suggested grant amount is determined for each of these proposals.

Funding decisions are made on the basis of this ranking.

2.5.2 Programme Committee evaluation meeting

The Programme Committee has been established by the Programme Operator, and it consists of five members representing the Czech Republic and Norway. The Rules of procedure and the current composition can be found at <http://www.msmt.cz/vyzkum-a-vyvoj/programovy-vybor-a-jeho-uloha-v-cesko-norskem-vyzkumnem>.

Based on the ranking list of proposals, the Programme Operator prepares and presents to the Programme Committee:

- a) a list of any proposals having been found ineligible during the eligibility check or evaluation;
- b) a list of evaluated proposals having failed one or more thresholds in the Individual Review Reports;
- c) a ranking list of proposals passing all thresholds in the Individual Review Reports and a summary of recommendations from the independent experts;
- d) Individual Review Report for each proposal and a list of experts carrying out the evaluations.

The Programme Committee is presented with a list of proposals to be selected for funding by the Programme Operator, including the suggested financial contribution for each proposal (with a reserve list). The Programme Committee then makes a recommendation to the Programme Operator on the award of grants.

The Programme Operator should address financial aspects that would need to be modified during negotiation, based on the advice of the experts. A number of proposals may be kept in reserve in case of budget savings agreed during negotiation of initially selected projects or withdrawing of a proposal.

Before the meeting, the members of the Programme Committee must declare if they have a **conflict of interest** with any submitted proposal. The criteria for conflict of interest are presented in 2.2.1 above. If a conflict of interest arises, the Committee member should immediately inform the chairperson. If a member of the Programme Committee has a conflict of interest with respect to an item on the agenda, the member must declare this at the beginning of the meeting, remove him- or herself from discussions of this item

on the agenda and leave the meeting room at the time of discussion. A vice-member may replace the member declaring a conflict of interest for this specific agenda item.

The main task of the evaluation meeting of the Programme Committee is to provide its recommendation to the Programme Operator of the final ranking order of the proposals on the basis of the evaluation and scores awarded to the projects.

The Programme Committee takes into due account the available budget, the strategic objectives of the Programme, coherence to the Social Sciences and Humanities thematic area, as well as the overall balance of proposals to be funded.

2.6. REJECTION DECISIONS

The Programme Operator formally decides to reject those proposals found to be ineligible, failing any of the thresholds for evaluation criteria, and those that, because they fall below a certain ranking, cannot be funded because the available budget is insufficient. The Programme Operator bases its decision on the Programme Committee recommendation.

2.7. FEEDBACK TO APPLICANTS

Feedback to applicants will be given in the form of a letter ("**initial information letter**") sent electronically.

Project Promoters of proposals found to be ineligible will be informed of the grounds for such a decision.

After a rejection decision, Project Promoters of rejected proposals are informed in writing of the Programme Operator's decision. The letter informing them also includes an explanation of the reasons for rejection in the form of an **Evaluation summary report**. On request of the Project Promoter the individual assessment forms excluding the names of reviewers will be provided.

3. GRANT CONFIRMATION

The Project Promoter of proposal that has been accepted, and for which funding is available, is asked by the Programme Operator whether the grant amount approved is accepted by the Project Promoter, or not.

The Project Promoter's statement may **only concern financial aspects** of the proposal. The financial aspects should cover the establishment of the financial contribution, from up to a set limit, the amount of the advance payments in each budgetary year, the estimated breakdown of the budget and financial contribution per additional activity and per participant, and the financial assessment of the financial capacity of the Project Promoter and any other participants if needed.

The Programme Operator regards this phase terminated and rejects the proposal when the Project Promoter refuses the grant.

4. AWARD OF GRANT

After the Programme Committee's recommendation, the Programme Operator completes its internal procedures and adopts the respective selection decision. The deadline for this decision is June 1, 2016 at the latest.

The list of projects selected for a grant, including the identification of the Project Promoter, Project Partner(s), principal investigator, acronym, the grant assistance from the Programme, the amount of institutional support (grant) and the total eligible costs of the project will be made public on the web site of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and the Research Council of Norway.

5. PROGRAMME CONTACTS

5.1 Contacts at the Programme Operator – the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports:

- Štěpán Obrtlík +420 234 811 132 (stepan.obrtlik@msmt.cz)
- Jan Aschermann +420 234 811 112 (jan.aschermann@msmt.cz)
- Klára Musilová +420 234 811 131 (klara.musilova@msmt.cz)

Queries and consultations on working days, from 9 am to 3 pm CET /Prague/.

5.2 Contact at the Donor Programme Partner - the Research Council of Norway:

- Aleksandra Witczak Haugstad +47 22 03 74 16 (awh@rcn.no)

5.3 The Programme web page

- <http://www.msmt.cz/vyzkum-a-vyvoj-2/norske-fondy> (CZ)
- <http://www.msmt.cz/vyzkum-a-vyvoj-2/czech-norwegian-research-programme> (EN)

5.4 Projects overview

- <http://www.msmt.cz/vyzkum-a-vyvoj-2/projekty-1> (CZ)
- <http://www.msmt.cz/vyzkum-a-vyvoj-2/projects> (EN)