

# Joint Call for Proposals on

## Digital Transformations and Robotics in Sustainable Agriculture

## EVALUATION PROCESS GUIDELINES

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### TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. The EIG CONCERT-Japan Joint Call Evaluation Process	
1.1. Aim and scope of the EIG CONCERT-Japan joint call	
1.2. Overall evaluation process	
1.3. Online evaluations	
1.4. PT-Outline evaluation tool	
1.5. Evaluation criteria and scoring system	
1.6. Scientific Committee evaluation	
1.7. Funding Organizations' Forum meeting	
1.8. Conflict of interest and confidentiality	
1.9. Feedback to applicants	
1.10. Indicative timetable	
1.11. Evaluation process overview	
2. Instructions on how to use the PT-Outline evaluation tool	

## 1. The EIG CONCERT-Japan Joint Call Evaluation Process

## 1.1. Aim and scope of the EIG CONCERT-Japan joint call

The aim of this EIG CONCERT-Japan joint call is to bring together Japanese and European researchers to collaborate on a joint thematic research area of mutual interest to enable long- lasting cooperation between research institutions from Europe and Japan.

# This EIG CONCERT-Japan joint call is titled **Digital Transformations and Robotics in Sustainable Agriculture.**

Each project consortium that submits a proposal for funding must consist of at least three eligible partners, which must include at least one from Japan and at least two from two different European countries participating in the joint call. Such a partner must be an entity capable of carrying out research and eligible for receiving funding from its respective country funding agency. The number of partners in a project consortium should be appropriate for the aims of the research project and reasonably balanced in terms of multilateral participation. Applications should clearly demonstrate the added value of international collaboration. Additionally, partners that are not eligible for funding from the participating funders or who do not seek financial support from the participating funders may participate with their own funding, as self-funded partners. These partners do not count towards the minimum number of partners to form an eligible consortium.

In general, beneficiaries eligible for funding in this EIG CONCERT-Japan joint call are public and private legal RTD entities, higher education institutions and non-university research establishments, as well as small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)<sup>1</sup> and other kinds of organizations depending on the individual national/regional regulations and restrictions of each participating funding agency. The participating funding agencies will individually decide on the eligible beneficiaries in their countries/regions according to their national/regional regulations and restrictions.

## **1.2. Overall evaluation process**

A **Program Secretariat** (PS) is entrusted with the overall preparation and operational management of this EIG CONCERT-Japan joint call. The Program Secretariat is located at the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) and will be the main contact point for the online evaluators and the Scientific Committee members. **National/Regional Contact Persons** are representatives for each funding agency from each country/region participating in the joint call. Their main role is to support the Program Secretariat in the overall implementation of the joint call and to execute all necessary tasks at national/regional level.

A five-step evaluation process will be implemented for proposals submitted within this EIG CONCERT-Japan joint call.

#### Step 1: Eligibility check

The Program Secretariat and the National and Regional Contact Persons will check the eligibility of all submitted proposals taking into consideration the general joint call criteria and the individual national/regional criteria respectively. If a partner is found to be ineligible by one of the funding agency, the entire proposal may be rejected without further review unless the ineligibility issue is minor enough so that

SMEs are enterprises which employ fewer than 250 persons and which have an annual turnover not exceeding 50 million euros, and/or an annual balance sheet total not exceeding 43 million euros

it can be resolved swiftly and without a significant revision of the substance of the proposal, based on the judgment of the involved funding agencies. Such applicants will be given a joint deadline for amending their proposal within a week.

#### The general eligibility criteria are:

- Appropriate length and layout of the proposal (maximum number of pages adhered to and use of template for the Project Description)
- Inclusion of all necessary information in English
- Eligibility of all project partners
- Participation of at least three partners (beneficiaries) requesting funding, from a minimum of two different call-participating European countries and Japan
- Eligible thematic focus
- Eligibility of requested funding
- Inclusion of a confirmation letter from the external sponsoring institution in case of additional partners that need to secure their own funding (Self-funded Partners)

The national/regional eligibility criteria of the participating funding agencies are given in the Call Text (see Part 2).

#### Step 2: Online evaluation of proposals

Each proposal is assessed in detail and scored by at least two online evaluators.

#### Step 3: Scientific Committee Member Review

A Scientific Committee is composed of high-level scientists nominated by the funding agencies participating in the joint call. In preparation for a meeting of this committee, two Scientific Committee members, designated as first reader and second reader, will each produce a score and summary review for each proposal, taking the online evaluations into account. Scientific Committee members should form an independent opinion of the proposal, after which the online evaluations will be incorporated for reference. Based on the reader scores, a preliminary ranking list is prepared.

#### Step 4: Meeting of the Scientific Committee

A meeting of the Scientific Committee is held and chaired by an independent chairperson. It will review the preliminary ranking list based on reader scores and confirm their recommendation for proposals for funding to the Funding Organizations Forum.

#### Step 5: Meeting of the Funding Organizations Forum

The Funding Organizations' Forum consisting of representatives of the funding agencies participating in the joint call will take a final decision on the proposals to be funded on a consensus basis, based on the recommendations of the Scientific Committee. It will discuss and approve the recommended projects according to the ranking list and available budget.

## 1.3. Online evaluations

**Online evaluators** will evaluate the submitted proposals according to evaluation criteria defined by the Funding Organizations' Forum. The online evaluators are selected on the basis of their scientific experience, irrespective of their nationality, age and affiliation. Candidates for online evaluators will be recommended from the participating funding agencies, in consultation with the chairperson as well as online recruitment by the Program Secretariat. Suitable online evaluators may also be nominated in each

proposal.

In general, online evaluators need to have skills and knowledge appropriate to the relevant scientific and technological fields in which they are asked to assist. In addition, online evaluators must have the appropriate English language skills required for evaluation and a proven experience in the below areas:

- Management or evaluation of S&T projects
- International collaboration in science and technology
- · Use of the results of research and technological development projects
- Technology transfer and innovation

Each proposal is assessed by at least two online evaluators. As a target, each online evaluator will be attributed three to five proposals for evaluation. Online evaluators have access to the full project proposals assigned to them as well as the call documents.

The allocation of proposals to the online evaluators is done by an independent expert, typically the chairperson, with the assistance of the Program Secretariat, by matching the proposal topic with the area of expertise of the online evaluators. The online evaluators are asked to submit their evaluations online in English, using PT-Outline, a specific web-tool for online evaluations. Submission of a printed version of the evaluations is not necessary.

Online evaluators who cannot undertake an evaluation due to a conflict of interest should inform the Program Secretariat which will then assign the proposal to another online evaluator.

The online evaluation will take place over a period of approximately one month, as indicated in the indicative timetable. The online evaluators will be compensated with 50 EUR per proposal evaluated. After the procedure is completed, all online evaluators will be informed about the outcome of the evaluation and about the final selection of proposals for funding.

For any matters related to the evaluation process, online evaluators are asked to communicate with the Program Secretary only.

## **1.4. PT-Outline evaluation tool**

PT-Outline is an online tool for electronic data processing via web forms to be accessed at:

#### https://ptoutline.eu/app/eigjapan jc2024

All online evaluators will be registered in PT-Outline by the Program Secretary. Starting from the beginning of the online evaluation period, each online evaluator will receive an own login username and password in order to proceed with the online evaluation.

Access is limited to the proposals the online evaluator is assigned to. Changes in the review reports are possible up until the deadline for finalizing the evaluations.

For more information on how to use the PT-Outline evaluation tool, please refer to section 2.

## 1.5. Evaluation criteria and scoring system

#### **Online Evaluation Criteria**

Proposals should be evaluated according to the three evaluation criteria of this EIG CONCERTJapan

joint call:

#### 1: Scientific excellence (scoring from 0 to 5 points)

- Sound research concept and quality of objectives
- Ambition, innovative potential and uniqueness of the research idea
- Scientific track record and potential of the partners (including publications in scientific journals)
- · Scientific standing of the organizations the applicants belong to

#### 2: Impact of project results (scoring 0 to 5 points)

- · Impact of the project on the scientific field/community
- · Contribution to enhancing innovation capacity and integration of new knowledge
- Expected exploitation and dissemination of the results
- Added value of the multilateral project consortium

#### 3: Implementation (scoring 0 to 5 points)

- · Quality and effectiveness of the methodology
- Feasibility of the work plan (in relation to governance, adequate budget, resources, time schedule)
- Collaborative interaction and complementarity of project partners
- · Expected sustainability of the collaboration
- Interdisciplinarity
- Active involvement of early-stage researchers and gender balance

#### Scoring Interpretation

The **scoring system** is as follows:

**5: EXCELLENT** - The proposal fully satisfies all relevant aspects of the criterion in question. Any shortcomings are minor.

4: VERY GOOD - The proposal addresses the criterion very well, although certain improvements are possible.

- **3: GOOD** The proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but major improvements are possible.
- 2: **FAIR** There are serious inherent weaknesses in relation to the criterion in question.
- 1: **POOR** The criterion is addressed in an inadequate and unsatisfactory manner.

2: FAILS / INCOMPLETE INFORMATION - The proposal fails to address the criterion in question or cannot be judged due to missing or incomplete information.

In addition to the score, a succinct but substantial explanatory comment should be provided for each criterion (in the open text fields). The comments should take the form of a statement and explanation of key strengths and key weaknesses, in the light of the criteria.

#### Scientific Committee Preliminary Summary

On the basis of the evaluations for each proposal given by the Scientific Committee members, a preliminary summary of all the proposals' evaluations will be prepared for the Scientific Committee meeting.

## **1.6. Scientific Committee evaluation**

A Scientific Committee will be established for the thematic area of this EIG CONCERT-Japan joint call. The Scientific Committee is composed of high-level scientists nominated by the funding agencies participating in the joint call. Online evaluators who have already participated in the online evaluation cannot be nominated as members of the Scientific Committee.

The Scientific Committee meeting will be chaired by an independent chairperson. The chairperson should assist the Scientific Committee members in reaching a consensus on the grading of the proposals and to ensure that the evaluation process is conducted properly, fairly and thoroughly. The chairperson only has an advisory function and is not expected to express views on the proposals under examination. The chairperson should also make sure that the evaluation criteria are adhered to. The chairperson of the Scientific Committee will report on the discussions of the Scientific Committee at the meeting of the FOF and will support them with making the final funding decision.

The members of the Scientific Committee, having an overview of all submitted proposals, should make sure that each proposal benefits from a fair evaluation and that the online evaluations have been accounted for in the final grading.

The Scientific Committee will grade the proposals A to C based on the online evaluations and internal discussion and recommend to the FOF a list of proposals to be funded.

Category	Description	Consequence
А	Excellent	Proposals are outstanding and highly recommended for funding
A-		Proposals are strongly recommended for funding, although some minor improvements to the projects are possible.
В		
B-		Proposals are recommended for funding, in case resources are still available. Major improvements are possible.
	Poor	Proposals are not recommended for funding.
С	Disqualifed	Proposals fail to adequately address the criteria or cannot be judged due to missing or incomplete information and are therefore not recommended for funding

The scientific evaluation of the proposals and their grading according to excellence are the main tasks of the Scientific Committee. Any budgetary issues resulting from the fact that the EIG CONCERT-Japan call is financed from a virtual common pot will be handled by the Funding Organizations' Forum.

#### Process:

- The Program Secretariat will establish a preliminary summary of the proposal evaluations on the basis of the results of the online evaluations and Scientific Committee's online review and produce an overview of the reports.
- The Scientific Committee members will be given access to the full project proposals, the online reviews and the preliminary evaluation summary list at least 10 working days before the scheduled Scientific Committee meeting. In preparation for the meeting, every member of the Scientific Committee will be assigned a certain number of proposals by the chairperson.
- For each proposal a first and a second reader will be chosen from among the Scientific Committee members. Both readers are each requested to prepare an overall reader evaluation, including a score based on the interpretation given in 1.5 and short comments on the proposal and its corresponding online evaluations. After forming an independent assessment

of each proposal, the readers should draw on the online evaluations to adjust the evaluation if necessary. After this, the evaluations should be submitted to the Program Secretariat in time before the Scientific Committee meeting. The Program Secretariat will establish a preliminary summary of the proposal evaluations based on the average scores of the Scientific Committee members.

- The first reader will present a summary, followed by both readers briefly reporting their views
  on the respective proposals during the Scientific Committee meeting to stimulate
  discussions among all Scientific Committee members. The Scientific Committee members are
  highly encouraged to make themselves familiar with all proposals; they should at least read in
  detail the proposals to which they are assigned as first or second reader. Each proposal should
  be graded A-C and their grade confirmed for fairness and consistency at the end of the
  discussion.
- The Scientific Committee must establish a final list of graded proposals based on the meeting evaluations and confirm that it meets its funding recommendations as interpreted in the grading Section 1.6. Proposals should not be ranked or given additional grades within their grade category.
- To accompany the final grading list and to provide feedback to applicants, short summary remarks on the strengths and weaknesses of each proposal will also be prepared by the Scientific Committee. The first reader may be asked to submit this statement to the Chair after the meeting. All summaries with a A- or lower grade must include some comment of shortcoming(s) of the proposal.

The final outcome of the evaluation, including the summary remarks of the meeting but excluding the letter grade and evaluator names, will be made available to the project leaders of the proposals after the evaluation and selection procedure has been completed.

#### Schedule and Logistics

The meeting of the Scientific Committee is scheduled according to the indicative timetable in 1.10.

All costs for the participation of the members of the Scientific Committee meeting (i.e. costs for travel and accommodation) will be paid for by their nominating funding agency. In addition, all

Scientific Committee members will receive an honorarium payment of 150 EUR for their participation.

Travel costs incurred by the chairperson, as well as an honorarium payment of 150 EUR per day (i.e. two days in case of participation in both SC and FOF meeting), will be paid.

## **1.7. Funding Organizations' Forum meeting**

The Funding Organizations Forum, comprising representatives of each participating funding agency, will make **the final decision on the proposals to be funded on a consensus basis**, based on the recommendations of the Scientific Committee. The FOF will discuss and approve the recommended projects according to the final grading list and the available budget. The chairperson of the Scientific Committee will assist the Funding Organizations' Forum with their decision-making and if necessary provide detailed information about the grading decision and the merit of each proposal.

The FOF meeting, during which the funding decision will be taken, will be held back-to-back with the Scientific Committee Meeting. In preparation for this meeting, the final proposal list of the Scientific Committee and minutes of their meeting, along with the overall joint call budget breakdown will be sent to the FOF members. The grading list will also highlight any bottlenecks that might arise due to the limited funds of the participating joint call funding agencies.

At their meeting, the FOF members will discuss and approve the recommended projects according to the ranking list and the available budget. FOF members cannot change the ranking list. It is expected that about six projects will be funded in total.

The proposals from ratings "A" to "B-" will be discussed for funding in descending order, as long as funds remain available. "C" proposals will not be funded even if funds are available.

If the number of proposals recommended for funding by the Scientific Committee is smaller than what can be supported by the overall call budget, only part of the available budget will be used. If the number of proposals recommended for funding by the Scientific Committee is greater than can be supported by the individual budget commitments from certain countries, the FOF will discuss alternative options for funding the recommended proposals.

If only one or some but not all proposals with the same grade can be funded, they will be ranked internally according to the below tiebreaker criteria in descending order:

- 1) Number of call participating countries in proposal not in any other to-be-funded proposal
- 2) Number of call participating countries in proposal
- 3) Sum of budget available for proposal committed by call participating countries

Funding gaps may arise in the case that one of the funding agencies participating in the joint call runs out of money to support all recommended proposals. If one of the partners participating in a project consortium cannot be financed by their respective funding agency due to such budget restraints, and no other possibility of financing is available, the consortium and thus the proposal as a whole will be rejected. The members of the FOF are mandated to preliminarily decide upon funding in the name of their agency, pending a later official decision. They are also the main actors in negotiating a solution in case of discrepancies between requested and available budget.

The FOF meeting will result in a final list of projects that will be funded in the frame of this EIG CONCERT-Japan Joint Call.

## 1.8. Conflict of interest and confidentiality

Online evaluators and members of the Scientific Committee should not be put in a situation in which their impartiality might be questioned, or where the suspicion could arise that recommendations are affected by elements that lie outside the scope of the review.

A **conflict of interest** in evaluating a proposal exists when an applicant and/or an online evaluator/Scientific Committee member have:

- a. Relatives, personal ties or conflicts
- b. Close scientific collaboration, e.g. implementation of joint projects or joint publications within the past 3 years
- c. Direct scientific competition with personal projects or plans
- d. Close proximity, e.g. member of the same scientific institution or impending change of the evaluator to the institution of the applicant or vice versa

- e. Teacher/student relationship, unless a following independent scientific activity of more than 10 years exists
- f. Dependent relationship in employment during the past 3 years
- g. Participation in current or recently concluded professorial appointment proceedings
- h. Current or prior common activity in advisory bodies of the applicant's institution, e.g. scientific advisory boards
- i. Personal economic interests in the funding decision

Online evaluators/Scientific Committee members who encounter a conflict of interest should inform the Program Secretariat immediately, which will then assign the proposal to another evaluator.

All proposals, the correspondence forwarded to online evaluators/Scientific Committee members, as well as the evaluation reports themselves, must be treated as **strictly confidential**. Identities of applicants must not be revealed to third parties under any circumstances. Therefore, the responsibilities of an online evaluator/a Scientific Committee member may only be undertaken personally and may not be delegated to third parties. Furthermore, an online evaluator/a Scientific Committee member should not identify himself/herself as an evaluator to an applicant or to any third party.

Accepting the nomination to become an online evaluator/a Scientific Committee member for this Joint Call constitutes agreement that the scientific content of any and all proposals cannot be exploited for personal or other scientific purposes.

After the end of the evaluation process and once the funding decision has been taken, the funding agencies participating in this Joint Call reserve the right to publish the names of the online evaluators/Scientific Committee members, but without indicating which project each online evaluator/Scientific Committee member has evaluated.

## 1.9. Feedback to applicants

The final outcome of the evaluation, including the select result and summary remarks of the Scientific Committee meeting will be made available to the project leaders of the proposals after the evaluation and selection procedure has been completed.

## **1.10. Indicative timetable**

-
14 May 2024
23 July 2024 (10 weeks)
23 July – 1st August 2024 (9 days)
1st August - 12 September 2024 (6 weeks)
29 October 2024
30 October 2024
December 2024
December 2024 - February 2025
April 2025
First year of research
Second year of research
Second year of research
Last year of research
Last year of research

[\* This is an approximate implementation schedule and is subject to change]

## 1.11. Evaluation process overview

	Who ?	When ?	
Step 1 : Online evaluation	Online evaluators	August	(ONLINE) → Reviewing 2 to 3 proposals each
Step 2 : Online evaluation	Program Secretary		Summarizing evaluations and comments
Step 3 : SC members online review	Scientific Committee Members + Chair	September	<ul> <li>(ONLINE)</li> <li>For each proposal, at least 2 readers.</li> <li>→ Reviewing proposals and adjusting the Online evaluation score</li> <li>→ 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Reader : overall reader evaluation</li> </ul>
Step 4 : SC members review summary	Program Secretary		Summarizing evaluations and comments
Step 5 : SC Meeting	Scientific Committee Members + Chair	October	<ul> <li>(IN PERSON)</li> <li>→ Final grading list</li> <li>→ Summary remarks on the strengths and weaknesses of each proposal.</li> </ul>

## 2. Instructions on how to use the PT-Outline evaluation tool

**Step 1**: To access the evaluation tool please use the login and the password sent to you by the Program Secretariat, and go to the following links:

https://ptoutline.eu/app/eigjapan jc2	<u>024</u>
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^∎experts PT-Outline				Site notice Support
		Login Recover password		
	E-Mail:			
	Password			
	Login			
	Forgot your password?			
	Forgot your password?			
			Copyright ©	
				DLR Projekttrager

Step 2: When accessing the website you will have an overview of the proposals you are asked to evaluate.

#### For safety reasons your session is terminated automatically after about two hours of inactivity.

Each proposal can be visualized by clicking on the icons and <sup>®</sup> in order to download the following documents:

- the **data sheet** with the names and contact information of the project partners and the main general project information including a short abstract.
- the **project description** with information on the project, the time plan and the project partners' CVs.

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EIG_)	CLIAPAN-005	A REAL PROPERTY.	1		Biotechnology	JST-RARP	RARI	Public research organisation	Other	

**Step 3**: To open the evaluation form, please click on the proposal ID in the red box (e.g. EIG\_JC1JAPAN-006). A form will appear below the proposal.

**Step 4:** The screenshot below shows the assessment form starting with the part "Conflict of Interest". Please indicate if you identify any conflict of interest, and if so, please contact directly the EIG CONCERT-Japan Program Secretariat to inform it.

y.	
pur evaluation is 17th June 2016	
the application if a conflict of interest exists or could be perceived to exist. Peer reviewers who encounter a conflict of interest should inform the n as possible which will then assign the proposal to another peer reviewer.	EIG CON
proposal exists if one of the following criteria applies to the evaluator:	
nflicts e.g. implementation of joint projects or joint publications within the past 3 years ith personal projects or plans of the same scientific institution or impending change of the reviewer to the institution of the applicant or vice versa unless a following independent scientific activity of more than 10 years exists Joyment during the past 3 years ently concluded professorial appointment proceedings isory bodies of the applicant's institution, e.g. scientific advisory boards a the funding decision	
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I fully satisfies all relevant aspects of the criterion in question. Any shortcomings are minor. al addresses the criterion very well, although certain improvements are possible. dly addresses the criterion, but improvements are necessary. iherent weaknesses in relation to the criterion in question. Iressed in an inadequate and unsatisfactory manner. IRMATION - The proposal fails to address the criterion in question or cannot be judged due to missing or incomplete	
ey weaknesses, in the light of the criteria.	atement a
	but substantial explanatory comment should be provided for each criterion (in the open text fields). The comments should take the form of a sta ay weaknesses, in the light of the criteria. calculated automatically. Iled out. Please make sure not to exceed the allowed number of characters (spaces are also counted as characters) but you are

**Step 5**: Please read carefully the description of the three criteria against which you are asked to assess the proposals:

- 1. Scientific excellence,
- 2. Impact of project results,
- 3. Implementation.

#### For each of the three criteria please insert:

- **a short but consistent commentary**, between 500 and 3000 characters (spaces are also counted as characters).
- **a score** between 0 (fails / incomplete information) and 5 (excellent). The scoring system is detailed under the conflict of interest statement.

#### All fields are mandatory.

VERCENTERPANDER - Experts review \* The re

Criterion 2: score

After you have given a commentary and a score for each of the three criteria, please give a **short** comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the overall project.

You can also add additional comments if needed (no obligation to fill it out).

Do not forget to **save** your comments by pressing the button "<u>Save</u>" at the top of the form. Then a green bar will temporarily appear to confirmation the action.

	/ EIG_JC1 JAPAN-006 - Exp	erts review - Form input has been successfully applied. The colouring of the proposal ID box in the overview table helps you to identify the status of your evaluations:
-		: no or incomplete review,
-		. review is present and can be finalized
-		. review is finalized.

Step 6: When you have finished your evaluation, please press the blue button "Finalize" at the top of the

tab, next to "Save" and "Save and close". The colour of the proposal ID will then turn into green in the overview table.

**Step 7:** Please proceed in the same way with evaluating the other proposals that have been assigned to you by pressing on another project ID to open a new evaluation form.

After finalization of all of your evaluations, you can leave the PT-Outline tool by clicking on the button "Logout" at the top left-hand side of the website.

For technical support with the PT-Outline webtool, please contact:

DLR Projekttrager Bereich Kompetenzzentren und Services IKT - Dienstleistungen Rosa-Luxemburg-Str. 2 10178 Berlin

E-mail: <u>support-request@ptoutline.de</u> Phone:+49 30 67055-767

For any questions related to the content of the EIG CONCERT-Japan Joint Call and the evaluation procedure, please contact the Program Secretariat:

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