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# EEA Financial Mechanism 2014-2021

## Baltic Research Programme

### Guidelines for Evaluators

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Further call information and guidelines are available on: <https://www.lmt.lt/en/competitive-research-funding/international-cooperation-programmes/baltic-research-programme/3344>

## 1. Objectives of the Baltic Research Programme

There are two main objectives of the EEA Grants; namely to reduce social and economic disparities in Europe and to strengthen bilateral cooperation of the targeted countries and Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein.

The main goal of the Baltic Research Programme is to **enhance research-based knowledge development in the Baltic States through research cooperation with Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein**. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are all targeted in the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), which is the first macro-regional strategy in Europe, approved by the European Council in 2009. The aim is to enable the Baltic Sea region to achieve a sustainable environment and an optimal economic and social development. The EEA Grants provide instruments for the realisation of the joint Baltic research cooperation aimed at approaching important challenges. As such, the Baltic Research Programme represents a true innovation, implemented in cooperation with Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein.

### Regional added value of the Baltic Research Programme

The Baltic countries share many cultural, geographical, political and social characteristics, and they face many of the same challenges. The collaboration should create outcomes and impact of greater value for the countries involved than could be achieved through national activities alone. Examples of such added value could be building critical mass; networking; sharing data, infrastructures and resources; enhancing scientific excellence; creating societal impacts; and contributing to research-based policymaking.

The projects funded under the Baltic Research Programme should have a detailed communication and knowledge exchange strategy. Where appropriate, the strategy should describe the processes by which research-based knowledge can feed into practice and policy in collaboration with stakeholders.

### Design of the programme and aims

The Programme is designed through competitive and open calls for proposals for joint research projects, to ensure the quality and high level of research. The first call was operated by Estonia, the next two calls – by Latvia and by Lithuania respectively.

The Programme shall strengthen multilateral relations with the aim of stimulating long-term cooperation, capacity and competence-building, and shall provide a step for future collaborative research projects on EU and regional level. An important objective of the Programme is to strengthen human resources in research through the facilitation of international relations and involving PhD students and postdocs in the projects.

The aim of the Programme is to foster the exchange of scientific knowledge between Norwegian, Icelandic, Liechtenstein's (hereafter Donor States) and Baltic States' researchers and to establish advanced collaborative research between research institutions in donor states and Baltic States.

The Programme will be implemented through joint research projects, enabling research teams to bring together complementary skills, knowledge, and resources to address jointly specific research tasks.

The Programme shall contribute to strengthen existing and create new long-term scientific relations between Baltic and Donor States' research institutions and research teams.

Some examples of expected results of the Baltic Research Programme:

- Internationally refereed joint publications published in the best journals of respective science areas as part of the projects: in a joint capacity minimum 2 Baltic States with least 1 Donor State (Norway, Iceland and/or Liechtenstein);
- New scientific methods acquired/training in relation to the scientific methods as part of the project, developing scientific methodology;
- Active involvement of PhD students and postdocs in the project;
- Preparation of joint applications to be submitted for further funding (e.g. EU framework programmes);
- Close cooperation between the partners involved in project from Baltic States and Donor States with the aim for building sustainable cooperation for future activities;
- Knowledge transfer, sharing expertise and best practices.

The Programme is open to the projects

- with or without additional funding from other sources;
- with different kind of and number of project partners involved;
- with already established cooperation with the project partner(s) to be involved as well as projects with the aim of establishing and building up new partnerships;
- with or without a link to other programmes.

**Please note** that these conditions (existing additional funding, number of partners, etc.) should not place any project automatically in a more favourable position compared to others in the evaluation process. **No additional points** based on these aspects will be awarded.

**Please note** that the **budget limits for experimental and non-experimental projects are the same**. Due to consumable costs, the experimental projects will have less funds available for personnel costs.

**Please note:**

- An application submitted to the calls administered by Latvia or Lithuania will not be considered for support if a similar application already was funded by the Baltic Research Programme under its first call (administered by Estonia). Both theme and research group (Principal Investigator) will be considered in this regard.
- Similar applications sent to both the call in Latvia and in Lithuania will only be considered for support under one of the calls. Both theme and research group (Principal Investigator) will be considered in this regard.

**For the Lithuanian call in 2020, applications have to address the challenges of the Baltic region in the following areas:**

### **1. Technologies and innovation development**

*This thematic area tackles global issues of climate change, fostering energy efficiency, decarbonization and more responsible using of resources by creating new technologies and innovations. The project should address at least one of the following subtopics.*

- Efficient urban energy systems (buildings, industry, services, transport and mobility);
- Renewable energy for local energy systems;
- Alternative fuels for transport and heating;
- The development of waste-to-resource (can refer to any kind of waste, e.g. food, materials, water – and technological solutions converting it into a new resource);
- Safe and sustainable food systems;
- Sustainable management of water and aquatic resources.

### **2. Cyber security**

*This thematic area contributes towards exploring possibilities of using artificial intelligence for developing new technologies in the fields of digital security, infrastructure security and the public safety. The project should address at least one of the following subtopics.*

- Security of critical infrastructure (prevention, detection, response and reduction of common physical and cyber threats) by applying artificial intelligence;
- Public security and the fight against crime and terrorism (prevention, detection, response and reduction of common physical, biological and cyber threats), including creation and development of new technologies;
- Digital security (governmental institutions, private enterprises and individuals digital privacy and data protection).

### **3. Preventive and personalized medicine**

*This thematic area aims to obtain knowledge and develop new approaches about chronic diseases prevention and personalized patient care. The project should address at least one of the following subtopics.*

- Population based studies on health behaviours (alcohol and drug use and addiction; physical activity, sedentary lifestyle and diet; mental health) and implications for disease prevention;
- Risk assessment, personalized care, secondary and tertiary prevention of chronic diseases.

#### 4. Culture, migration and inclusive society

*This thematic area addresses various aspects of change of cultural-social environment in the Baltic region and Scandinavia tackling challenges that raises from globalization, migration, inequalities and segregation. The project should address at least one of the following subtopics.*

- Cultural, social, political aspects of migration between Baltic countries, Scandinavia and third countries;
- Identifying cultural and social patterns as causes for segregation and exclusion;
- Preservation and management of cultural resources of the region in order to increase social awareness, cohesion and inclusive cooperation;
- Facilitation of social inclusiveness by fighting inequalities (gender, education, languages, age, ethnic) in various fields such as everyday life, social infrastructure, labor market or legal systems.

#### 5. Economic, social challenges and innovative society

*This thematic area contributes towards exploring processes of social and economic development and tackling challenges to sustainable growth, social inclusion and public services. The project should address at least one of the following subtopics.*

- Dynamics in labor markets and income in contemporary societies, and their impact on social services and welfare;
- Social and economic innovations in such areas as education, new business models, social services, labor market;
- Effects of demographic, social, economic and technological transformations on access to public services (education, health care and social services, cultural services).

Evaluators will be provided with **an overview of the call results** (how many applicants, related to which challenges, available budget, etc.) and information about the funding conditions of the call in Lithuania.

## 2. Evaluation

### 2.1. Eligibility of proposals

In order to be retained, the proposals must fulfil all the following administrative eligibility criteria:

- 1) Proposals must be submitted by an eligible Project Promoter (higher education and research organization<sup>2</sup> included in the State Register of Education and Research Institutions in the Information, Consultation and Guidance System<sup>1</sup>; see 1.5.2 in the Guidelines for Applicants);

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.aikos.smm.lt>

<sup>2</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/competition/state\\_aid/modernisation/rdi\\_framework\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/competition/state_aid/modernisation/rdi_framework_en.pdf), Ref section 1.3.ee on p.11

- 2) Proposals must be submitted using the online application form via JUNKIS submission system of the Research Council of Lithuania ([junkis.lmt.lt](http://junkis.lmt.lt)) before the submission deadline 3 April, 2020;
- 3) Proposals must meet the criteria concerning the number of participants (at least 1 entity from Lithuania (Project promoter), 1 from Latvia, 1 from Estonia and 1 from Donor States; see 1.5.1. in the Guidelines for Applicants);
- 4) Proposals must meet the criteria concerning the eligibility of project partners (see 1.5.3 in the Guidelines for Applicants)
- 5) Proposals must be completed by following the prescribed format of application with letters of intent from the Institutions of participants attached (see 2.2 and 3.1. in the Guidelines for Applicants).

Eligibility check is carried out by the Research Council of Lithuania (hereafter „ RCL“).

## 2.2. Evaluation process

The evaluation of the proposals submitted to the Programme includes the following steps:

1. Evaluation of proposals will be done electronically through expert evaluation submission system of RCL ([vertinimas.lmt.lt](http://vertinimas.lmt.lt)).
2. RCL as the implementing agency of the Programme checks the proposals against the eligibility criteria listed in the Guidelines for Applicants (see 5.1 of the Guidelines for Applicants).
3. The eligible proposals are evaluated against the criteria presented below in the chapter 4 and according to the principles of confidentiality and the rules on the conflicts of interest.
4. The eligible proposals are distributed to expert panels, which consist of independent international experts (with a doctoral degree or an equivalent academic degree) based on their closest possible competence in relation to the topic of the proposal and expertise necessary to cover the evaluation criteria set. Experts are assigned by RCL.
5. A two-stage evaluation process is used: during the first stage, each proposal is evaluated by three independent international reviewers who provide an individual expert review with the scores remotely and anonymously in expert evaluation submission system of RCL by the given deadline.
6. Experts need to check first whether there is no conflict of interest related to the proposals appointed to her/him. Before starting to submit the individual evaluation reviews with the scores to the RCL, the expert has to confirm that there is no conflict of interest related to the proposal(s) that is to be evaluated. In case of any doubt, experts are advised to consult the RCL. With submitting the contract, the contractor declares that he/she has read the Procedural Rules of the Conflict of Interest and fully understands its meaning and scope; and have no such interest in the results of the evaluation that could influence his/her impartiality.
7. The second stage is the panel's assessment followed by the consensus reports with the scores. During the panel meeting, one of the experts who evaluated the proposal(s) and participates in the panel meeting is assigned as a rapporteur to prepare a consensus report(s) with scores on the proposal(s). A consensus report is prepared

based on the discussions and conclusion in the panel. Panels are composed of the experts who provided individual reviews and in regards to research areas of the proposals.

8. The final consensus report for each proposal shall also include a recommended amount of grant following the evaluation. If a recommended grant differs from the grant requested by the applicants, an explanation shall be included (e.g. in case of mistakes in budget calculation, explanation should include recommendations which costs should be cut).
9. According to the final summary scores of evaluation of the proposals, each expert panel provides a ranking list of proposals. In accordance with ranking lists provided by each expert panel, an overall preliminary ranking list is prepared by RCL.
10. RCL presents these preliminary ranking lists of the proposals to the Programme Committee.
11. RCL will prepare and present to the Programme Committee the following information:
  - a list of any proposals having been found ineligible during the evaluation;
  - a list of evaluated proposals having failed one or more thresholds in the consensus report and not recommended for funding;
  - the ranking lists of proposals passing all thresholds in the consensus report and a summary of recommendations from the independent experts.
12. The Programme Committee's selection meeting in Vilnius is preliminary scheduled for the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2020. Programme Committee shall rank the proposals according to their contribution to the achievement of policy objectives and challenges specified in the call. The Programme Committee shall review the RCL's preliminary ranking list and on basis of this, draw up a final ranking list.
13. The Programme Operator in cooperation with the Programme Committee will make its final decision to finance/refuse to finance an application on the basis of the ranking list based on both preliminary ranking provided by RCL and the final ranking list by the Programme Committee's opinion.

N. B. The provision of false information as well as plagiarism may result in a rejection of the proposal. The proposal that contravenes fundamental ethical principles may be excluded at any time from the process of evaluation, selection and award.

## 2.3. Role of persons involved in the evaluation process

### 2.3.1. Role of evaluators

Evaluators are international independent experts (with a doctoral degree or an equivalent academic degree) in a specific subject who are invited to evaluate a research proposal(s) closely related to their field of expertise and to submit a written individual report(s). Evaluators must be working in a personal capacity and in performing their work, must not represent any organisation. Evaluators are briefed by the RCL on the evaluation procedure before the assessment of the proposals. Each eligible proposal will be send to three independent international experts.

They are requested to:

- Carefully read the Programme documents and the present Guidelines for Evaluators;
- Sign in advance a Confidentiality Agreement;



- Thoroughly read the assigned proposal;
- Complete and submit an individual evaluation form providing comments and individual scoring of the proposal;

The RCL concludes a Contract of Services with each expert. The Contract of Services binds the expert to a code of conduct, establishes the essential provisions regarding confidentiality, and specifies in particular, the description of work and conditions of payment.

When evaluating research proposals, evaluators should comment briefly on each selection criterion to the best of his/her abilities, his/her professional skills, knowledge and ethics. The proposals are evaluated on a basis of their individual merits applying the criteria presented in these guidelines, according to the principles of confidentiality and the conflicts of interest rules.

Each expert examines the received proposal(s) individually and submits an individual evaluation form on each proposal separately in the expert evaluation submission system of the RCL ([vertinimas.lmt.lt](http://vertinimas.lmt.lt)) by the deadline set. The RCL helpdesk is always ready to assist and can be reached by email [asta.aleksandraviciene@lmt.lt](mailto:asta.aleksandraviciene@lmt.lt) or phone +370 676 18297 or +370 676 14629 (daily from 9 am to 4 pm (ET)). In case of any major problems the materials can be sent by e-mail.

**Please note** that editing and modifying of the individual evaluation forms is possible in expert evaluation submission system of the RCL until the deadline set for the evaluators.

### 2.3.2. Role of expert panel(s) and rapporteur(s)

The expert panel(s) is appointed by RCL according to given research areas of the proposals. The panel is composed of the evaluators who prepared individual reviews on the proposals. RCL will appoint a chairperson of a panel from the panel members. A panel examines all individual reviews provided by evaluators on each proposal in a comparing manner. Attention will be paid to comments and marks of individual evaluators. The panel prepares a preliminary ranking list of the proposals in a given research area, including comments and scores for each proposal.

The rapporteur is one of the evaluators working in a panel who have been assigned for the same proposal(s) by RCL. The rapporteur is responsible for formulating a consensus report on the assigned proposal(s).

Rapporteur has access to the individual evaluations of the proposal(s) and to the consensus report form. A consensus report is prepared based on discussions and conclusions in a relevant panel. Each consensus report has to be approved by all experts. In a case there is no consensus, the report sets out the majority view of the experts in the panel but it also make records of any dissenting views from any particular expert(s). Comments given in the consensus report must be suitable for feedback will be given to the proposal's Project Promoter.

The RCL will take the necessary steps to assure the quality of the evaluation process of the proposals, with particular attention to clarity, consistency, and an appropriate level of detail. If changes are necessary, the reports will be conveyed back to the rapporteurs concerned. The RCL provides a Programme Committee with a preliminary ranking list of all eligible proposals based on the evaluation results in the panels.

**Please note** that only the proposals passing all thresholds in the consensus report will be considered for funding. Nevertheless, due to budgetary limits, not all of them will be awarded with grant.

### 2.3.3. Role of the Programme Committee

The Programme Committee consists of eight persons (2 from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Norway) representing the members of the research community and main research users in the Baltic States and Donor States (Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein). In particular, the Programme Committee is to support the Programme Operator and to monitor the implementation of the programme. The tasks of the Programme Committee include:

- approving the selection criteria and the texts of the calls for proposals
- recommending to the Programme Operator which proposals to select for funding and final awarding of grants
- reviewing progress made towards achieving the objectives of the programme
- reviewing annual programme reports
- proposing revisions of the programme likely to facilitate the achievement of the programme's objectives
- adopting the Guidelines for Applicants, Guidelines for Evaluators, Implementation Guide for Project Promoters & Project Partners

### 2.3.4. Role of RCL

The RCL will support all involved experts during the evaluation process. The Programme staff will take care that the Programme rules and procedures are respected. They do not provide any information regarding the status of the applications to the applicants while the evaluation procedure is in progress and until the funding decision has been taken.

## 3. Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest

### 3.1. Confidentiality

All research plans and evaluation statements are confidential documents. Application documents should therefore be handled with care and treated as confidential before, during and after the evaluation process.

Evaluators, Programme Committee members and observers must not disclose any information concerning application documents or evaluations to outsiders, nor should they use confidential information to their own or any other party's benefit or disadvantage.

Evaluators, Programme Committee members and observers must not communicate with applicants on topics related to applications.

Evaluators' and Programme Committee members' advice to the Programme Operator on any proposal may not be communicated by them to the applicants or to any other person.

The evaluators will be held personally responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of any documents or electronic files sent, and for returning, erasing or destroying all confidential documents or files upon completing the evaluation as instructed.

Evaluators and Programme Committee members and observers may not show the contents of proposals or information on applicants to third parties.

### 3.2. Conflict of interest

All persons involved in the evaluation process are required to declare any personal interests according to the following criteria.

#### 3.2.1. Circumstances in which a conflict of interest may exist

Circumstances that could be interpreted as disqualifying Conflicts of Interest (Col) are laid down in the following criteria:

1. First-degree relationship, marriage, life partnership, domestic partnership;
2. Personal interest in the application's success or financial interest by persons listed in the numbers 7-12;
3. Current or planned close scientific cooperation;
4. Dependent employment relationship or supervisory relationship (e.g. teacher-student relationship up to and including the postdoctoral phase) extending five years beyond the conclusion of the relationship;
5. The affiliation or pending transfer to the applying institutes/organisations;
6. Researchers who are active in a council or similar supervisory board of the applying institution are excluded from participating in the review and decision-making process for applications originating from this institution;

Potential Conflicts of Interest (Col) may exist, even in cases not covered by the clear disqualifying conflicts indicated above, in the following circumstances:

7. Relationships that do not fall under no. 1, other personal ties or conflicts;
8. Financial interests of persons listed under no. 7;
9. Participation in university bodies other than those listed under no. 6, e.g. in scientific advisory committees in the research environment;
10. Research cooperation within the last three years, e.g. joint publications;
11. Preparation of an application or implementation of a project with a closely related research topic (competition); and
12. Participating in an on-going scientific or inter-personal conflict with the applicant(s).

Persons involved in the evaluation process must also declare a conflict of interest at any time during the process.

#### 3.2.2. Inability to perform obligations and termination

If for some reason the reviewers are not able to fulfil their obligations for a given work, the RCL should be informed immediately. The work cannot be delegated to another person without the prior written agreement of the RCL.

## 4. The Principles of the Evaluation Procedure

### 4.1. The core evaluation criteria, scores and thresholds

The experts are invited to review the quality of the submitted proposals based on three core evaluation criteria. Evaluation scores will be awarded for each of the three criteria (according to the scoring scale; see p 4.2). Each criterion will be scored out of 5. Half point scores may be given. No weightings will apply.

Criteria	Aspects to be evaluated	Score	Threshold
<b>Scientific and/or technical excellence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sound concept, and quality of objectives;</li> <li>• progress beyond the state-of-the-art</li> <li>• quality and effectiveness of the scientific methodology and associated work plan</li> <li>• innovation and new approaches</li> </ul>	0-5	3,5
<b>Quality and efficiency of the implementation and the management, added value from the international cooperation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• appropriateness of the Project Promoter and Project Partners participating in the project</li> <li>• appropriateness of the work plan</li> <li>• appropriate allocation and justification of the resources to be committed (personnel, travel, subcontracting and other costs)</li> <li>• appropriateness of research environment for the proposed research</li> <li>• strengths of consortium</li> <li>• complementarity of skills</li> <li>• researcher training</li> <li>• international cooperation beyond the project, quality and sustainability of forward looking cooperation between the partners</li> </ul>	0-5	4
<b>Potential impact through the development, dissemination and use of project results</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• relevance of the proposal in relation to the objectives of the Programme and challenges of the call</li> <li>• impact from the project to research-based knowledge development in the Baltic region</li> <li>• potential of the research topic to be internationally competitive</li> <li>• potential take up and use of the project results' by end-users including the clarity, appropriateness and efficiency of the planned knowledge transfer measures</li> </ul>	0-5	3,5

**Total: score 0-15, threshold 12,5.**

## 4.2. The scoring scale

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

Score	Grade	Description
0	Unsatisfactory	The proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.
1	Poor	The criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
2	Fair	The proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.
3	Good	The proposal addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present.
4	Very good	The proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present.
5	Excellent	The proposal fully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

Experts examine the issues to be considered comprising each evaluation criterion, and score these on a scale from 0 to 5. Half point scores may be given.

On the electronic evaluation form, the half point scores will be presented as follows:

Score	Grade
0	Unsatisfactory
0,5	Unsatisfactory - Poor
1	Poor
1,5	Poor - Fair
2	Fair
2,5	Fair - Good
3	Good
3,5	Good - Very good
4	Very good
4,5	Very good - Excellent
5	Excellent

**Please note** that the use of the whole scale is recommended and evaluators should not hesitate to score below “3 - Good” when appropriate. Due to budgetary limits, many projects that will pass threshold will ultimately not be funded. Therefore, experts are advised to consider carefully their “very-good”, “very good-excellent” and “excellent” grades, as 0.5 point will likely have a decisive role in funding decision.

**Please note** that comments for every score to justify the opinion should be given.

## 5. Meeting of the Programme Committee

According to the Guideline for Research Programmes, the Programme Committee shall provide input to the strategic direction of the Baltic Research Programme. The Programme Committee shall recommend to the Programme Operator which proposals to select for funding and final awarding of grants. The Programme Committee reviews the proposals based on the preliminary ranking list submitted by the Programme Operator based on the evaluation scores, and according to the proposals' relevance to the call. The Programme Committee shall contribute to the achievement of the objectives given in the Programme Agreement, implemented through the call.

The Programme Committee selects at least one project proposal from each thematic priority, which is above the threshold (12.5). If in some thematic priorities the project proposals have not reached the threshold, then the rest of the funding will be distributed according to the overall ranking list.

Based on the ranking list, the Programme Operator in cooperation with the Programme Committee will make its final decision to finance/refuse to finance an application. The Programme Operator should address any 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 to allow for eventualities such as the failure of negotiations on the projects, the withdrawal of proposals, budget savings agreed during negotiation, or the availability of additional budget from other sources.

Before the evaluation meeting, Programme Committee members have to declare if they have conflict of interest with any submitted proposal. If a conflict of interest appears, the committee member should immediately inform the chairperson about this. If a Programme Committee member has a conflict of interests with respect to an item on the agenda, the expert must declare this at the start of the meeting and remove him or her from discussions of such an item on the agenda and leave the meeting room for the time of discussion.

Within the groups of equally scored proposals, the criteria for ranking are applied in the following order:

- 1) proposals are prioritised according to the scores they have been awarded for the criterion „Scientific excellence“;
- 2) proposals are prioritised according to the scores they have been awarded for the criterion „Quality and efficiency of the implementation and the management, added value from the international cooperation“ paying special attention to Baltic regional added value and sustainability of bilateral cooperation;
- 3) proposals having a good gender balance (project promoter) are considered to have the priority.

The outcome of the selection meeting is a report entailing a recommendation to the Programme Operator which proposals to select for funding and final awarding of grants.