

Iceland  
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Norway grants



REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA  
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION  
AND RESEARCH



Eesti Teadusagentuur  
Estonian Research Council

# EEA Financial Mechanism 2014-2021

## Baltic Research Programme

### Guidelines for Evaluators

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Further call information and guidelines are available on:

<http://www.etag.ee/en/funding/partnership-funding/eea-financial-mechanism-2014-2021-baltic-research-programme/>

## 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.

The Programme is designed, through competitive and open calls for proposals for research projects, to ensure the quality and high level of research. The first call is operated by Estonian Research Council and the next ones will come in Latvia and in Lithuania.

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 jointly address specific research problems.

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 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 experiences 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** will be added based on these conditions.

**Please note** that applications with partners from the other two Baltic States, in addition to the Donor State partner(s) can apply for higher grant and can, based on proposed collaboration plan, **awarded up to 0.5 extra points by Programme Committee** evaluating the Project.

**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.

Proposals for collaborative research projects are invited in all areas of fundamental and applied sciences. **In 2018 call, priority is being given to the applications addressing the following challenges in the Baltic region:**

- Public health; translational medicine; health technologies
- Migration; social inclusion
- Regional cyber security; public security
- Environmentally friendly solutions
- Regional economic development; employment; labour market regulations and social policy
- More effective use of resources

**Please note** that the proposals' relevance to these challenges is also evaluated by the Programme Committee and **can be awarded up to 0.5 additional points**.

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

## 2. Evaluation

### 2.1. Eligibility of proposals

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

- 1) Proposals must be submitted by an eligible Project Promoter (positively evaluated research and development institution<sup>1</sup>; see 1.5.2 in the Guidelines for Applicants);
- 2) Proposals must be submitted via the online application form in Estonian Research Information System ETIS before the submission deadline 31.01.2019;
- 3) Proposals must meet the criterion concerning the number of participants (at least 1 entity from the Baltic States 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 and approved by the Institution (see 3.1. in the Guidelines for Applicants).

Eligibility check is carried out by the Estonian Research Council (hereafter „the ETAG“). The provision of false information as well as plagiarism may result in a rejection of the proposal. The proposal which contravenes fundamental ethical principles may be excluded at any time from the process of evaluation, selection and award.

### 2.2. Evaluation process

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

- 1) ETAG as the implementing agency of the Programme checks the proposals against the eligibility criteria listed in the Guidelines for Applicants.
- 2) Each eligible proposal is sent to three independent international experts based on their closest possible competence in relation to the topic of the proposal and expertise necessary to cover the evaluation criteria set. The ETAG appoints one of the experts as the rapporteur for the group of evaluators working on the same proposal, making him/her responsible for formulating a consensus report on the proposal.
- 3) Each expert examines the received proposals individually and submits an individual evaluation report on each proposal separately through the Estonian Research Information System (hereinafter referred to as the ETIS) by a given deadline. The proposals are evaluated on the basis of their individual merits applying the criteria presented in these guidelines, according to the principles of confidentiality and the conflicts of interest rules. The evaluation is done by the experts alone.
- 4) After the deadline of submissions set for the evaluators, the rapporteur goes through the individual evaluation reports of the proposals under his/her responsibility and prepares

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.etis.ee/Portal/Institutions/Index>

in the ETIS a consensus report which must be approved by all the experts working on the same proposal.

- 5) ETAG 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;
  - a ranking list of proposals passing all thresholds in the consensus report and a summary of recommendations from the independent experts.
  
- 6) The Programme Committee's evaluation meeting in Tallinn is scheduled for 7-8 May 2019. The Committee evaluates the applications from overall programme's perspective to provide input to the strategic direction of programme and ensure a good overall balance of proposals in the call. Programme Committee shall rank the proposals according to their contribution to the achievement of policy objectives and challenges specified in the call; and potential added value from the perspective of Baltic regional cooperation and bilateral cooperation with donor state partners.
  
- 7) 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 experts' and Programme Committee's evaluations.

## 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 closely related to their field of expertise and to submit a written individual report. Evaluators are briefed by the ETAG on the evaluation procedure before the assessment of the proposals. Each eligible proposal is sent 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 ETAG 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 the 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 through the Estonian Research Portal ETIS by the deadline set. The ETIS helpdesk is always ready to assist and can be reached by email [etis@etag.ee](mailto:etis@etag.ee) or phone +3727 300 373 (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 the ETIS until the deadline set for the evaluators.

### 2.3.2. Role of rapporteur

Rapporteur is one of the evaluators working on the same proposal appointed by the ETAG to make him/her responsible for formulating a consensus report on the proposal.

Rapporteur has access to the individual evaluations and to the consensus report form. Consensus report has to be approved by all three experts. In the case that it is impossible to reach a consensus, the report sets out the majority view of the experts but also records any dissenting views from any particular expert(s). Comments given in the consensus report must be suitable for feedback given to the proposal's Project Promoter.

The ETAG will take the necessary steps to assure the quality of the consensus reports, with particular attention given to clarity, consistency, and an appropriate level of detail. If changes are necessary, the reports will be referred back to the rapporteurs concerned.

**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 and Guidelines for Evaluators

### 2.3.4. Role of ETAG

The ETAG 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 a 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;

A 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 ETAG should be informed immediately. The work cannot be delegated to another person without the prior written agreement of the ETAG.

## 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>• expected gender balance in the project (Project Promoter)</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>• researcher training</li> <li>• strengths of consortium</li> <li>• complementarity of skills</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 relevant</li> <li>• 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 11.**

#### 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 successfully 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 the 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 evaluates the proposals based on the 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.

Where necessary, the Programme Committee shall rank the proposals having passed the applicable thresholds through giving additional points, according to:

- their contribution to the achievement of policy objectives and challenges specified in the call (0.5 additional points)
- potential added value from the perspective of Baltic regional cooperation and bilateral cooperation with donor state partners (0.5 additional points)

The Programme Committee may also propose adjustments to the ranking of proposals in as far as needed to ensure the consistency of given scores to written evaluation.

Based on this 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 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 quality and sustainability of cooperation;
- 3) proposals addressing the challenges listed in the call;

- 4) proposals having a good gender balance (project promoter), are considered to have the priority.

The outcome of the evaluation meeting is a report entailing a final report for each proposal, including explanatory statements, scores based on consensus report and possible additional points awarded by the Programme Committee. The final report shall also include a recommended amount of grant following the evaluation. If the recommended grant is different from the grant requested by the applicants, an explanation shall be included.