

The following is a translation from Estonian. In case of disputes, the Estonian text shall prevail.

Guidelines for Evaluating Proof-of-Concept Grant Applications

1. Scope

- 1.1. This directive establishes the evaluation criteria and the principles for evaluating and compiling the ranking lists of the preliminary and full applications submitted according to the “Conditions and Procedure for Proof-of-Concept Grants”.
- 1.2. The Estonian Research Council (hereinafter *Council*) is entitled to make well-considered decisions and consult experts where necessary in relation to matters not covered by this directive.

2. Evaluation of preliminary applications

- 2.1. The evaluation of preliminary applications is carried out by the Expert Panel, who will give their justified evaluation to each application and propose whether the preliminary application
 - 2.1.1. meets the requirements for applying for a proof-of-concept grant;
 - 2.1.2. does not meet the requirements for applying for a proof-of-concept grant.
- 2.2. The following evaluation criteria and guiding questions are to be used for evaluating the preliminary applications and for justifying the opinions and ratings:

Criterion	Guiding questions	Rating scale
1. Innovation potential , incl. whether the expected outcomes of the project are innovative and how; how would they help to improve the existing solutions, products, and/or services; is the initial and final TRL of the project adequate and realistic	1.1. Has the innovation potential of the idea been outlined clearly?	Yes/No
	1.2. Is the connection with the previous research on which the idea for the project is based on coherent and justified?	Yes/No
	1.3. Is the initial TRL (i.e., the final TRL of the previous research on which the project is based on) adequate and does it meet the requirements for proof-of-concept grant applications (at least 4 and not greater than 6)?	Yes/No
	1.4. Are the expected outcomes of the project innovative and/or distinctive compared to the existing solutions, products, and/or services, based on the analysis of their competitive position and market analysis of the sector?	Yes/No
	1.5. Is the proposed final TRL realistic?	Yes/No
	Other comments on criterion 1.	

2. Potential impact , incl. the expected effect or benefits of the outcomes of the project for Estonian economy, society, public policy, and/or services; the scope of the impact; the ways to achieve the impact and to extend its scope; the possibilities for achieving the commercialisation or applicability of the outcomes	2.1. Has the economic and/or societal impact expected from the project been outlined clearly?	Yes/No
	2.2. Do the outcomes of the project have an <u>a potential</u> effect on or <u>potential</u> benefits for Estonian economy, society, public policy and/or services?	Yes/No
	2.3. Has the applicant clearly described how such benefits will be achieved and what is the scope of their impact?	Yes/No
	2.4. Has the applicant described the possibilities for achieving the commercialisation or applicability of the outcomes of the project?	Yes/No
	Other comments on criterion 2.	

3. Rating scale

An undifferentiated Yes/No rating scale is used for the evaluation of the preliminary applications. Each guiding question for criteria 1 and 2 will be marked with “yes” or “no”.

4. Threshold

The preliminary applications which receive “yes” marks for at least four guiding questions in criterion 1 and for at least three guiding questions in criterion 2 will be considered eligible for the second stage of the application process. The applications which receive the mark “no” for the guiding question 1.3 in criterion 1 and/or for the guiding question 2.2 in criterion 2 will be automatically considered ineligible and will not proceed to the second stage of the application process.

5. Evaluation of full applications

5.1. Evaluation process

- 5.1.1. Each application will be given justified evaluations and scores by at least two independent reviewers.
- 5.1.2. Although non-binding, the Expert Panel shall rely on the evaluations and scores given by the reviewers when compiling a combined evaluation for each full application.
- 5.1.3. The Expert Panel will compile a non-field-specific ranking list of the applications.
- 5.1.4. The Evaluation Committee will give each application its final evaluation and score, and will approve the non-field-specific ranking list of the applications, based on the combined evaluations given by the Expert Panel, the position of the application in the non-field-specific ranking list, and on the outcomes of the hearing (if applicable).
- 5.1.5. The applications of equal standing will be ranked by the Evaluation Committee according to the principles described in clause 8.3.

5.2. Evaluation criteria

The following evaluation criteria and guiding questions are to be used for evaluating the full applications and for justifying the opinions and ratings:

Criterion	Guiding questions	Rating scale
<p>1. Innovation potential, incl. whether the expected outcomes of the project are innovative and how; how would they help to improve the existing solutions, products, and/or services; a description of the competitive position and market analysis of the sector; is the initial and final TRL of the project adequate and realistic</p>	1.1. Has the proof-of-concept idea been outlined clearly?	From 1 to 5
	1.2. Is the analysis of the existing solutions, products, and/or services, the improvement on which the project is aimed at, adequate and sufficient?	
	1.3. Is the proof-of-concept idea original (compared to already existing solutions, products, and/or services)?	
	1.4. Is the proof-of-concept idea relevant, considering the solutions products, and/or services that already exist?	
	1.5. Is the description of the competitive position of the experimental development and the market analysis of the sector adequate?	
	1.6. Is the connection with the previous research on which the idea for the project is based on coherent and justified?	
	1.7. Is the initial TRL (i.e., the final TRL of the previous research on which the project is based on) sufficient for achieving the planned outcomes?	
	1.8. Have the objectives and hypotheses been carefully considered and presented?	
	1.9. Do the outcomes of the project have the potential for commercial and/or social innovation (e.g., is the proposed final TRL sufficiently ambitious and realistic)?	
	Other comments on criterion 1.	
<p>2. Applicability and potential impact, incl. the scope of the impact; the possible/essential future activities necessary for achieving the commercialisation or applicability of the outcomes</p>	2.1. Has the economic and/or societal impact expected from the project been outlined clearly?	From 1 to 5
	2.2. Do the expected outcomes of the project have a clear applicability potential?	
	2.3. Are the outcomes of the project expected to have a positive impact on the economy, society, public policy and/or services?	
	2.4. Has the applicant clearly described how this impact will be achieved and what is the extent of this impact?	
	2.5. Have the potential customers and stakeholders been identified specifically and adequately (incl. their interest and capacity for implementing the outcomes is verifiable)?	
	2.6. Are the expected outcomes of the project innovative and/or distinctive compared to the existing	

	<p>solutions, products, and/or services on the basis of the presented analysis of their competitive position and market analysis of the sector?</p> <p>2.7. Has the applicant clearly and specifically described possible follow-up activities for achieving the commercialisation and/or applicability of the outcomes of the project?</p> <p>2.8. Are the planned dissemination activities for the general public sufficient for supporting knowledge transfer?</p> <p>2.9. Is the proposed TRL by the end of the project realistic?</p> <p>Other comments on criterion 2.</p>	
<p>3. Feasibility, incl. the plausibility of achieving the objectives; the relevance and sufficiency of resources; cost effectiveness</p>	<p>3.1. Is the achievement of objectives of the project plausible, considering the work plan, chosen methods, planned activities, risk management plan, and expected timeframe?</p>	<p>From 1 to 5</p>
	<p>3.2. Is the achievement of the outcomes realistic, considering the composition and expertise of the research team, and the distribution of their tasks (the members of the research team have led or participated in the research projects on which the idea for this project is based on; representatives of various fields and implementing bodies are part of the research team (if applicable), etc.)?</p>	
	<p>3.3. Is the expected TRL by the end of the project realistic, considering the TRL of the outcomes of the previous research on which the idea for this project is based on?</p>	
	<p>3.4. Is the achievement of the outcomes realistic, considering the availability of the resources (necessary infrastructure, equipment and materials, grant amount, co-funding instruments provided by the partner(s), etc.)?</p>	
	<p>3.5. Is the estimation of the costs realistic against the objectives (i.e., cost effectiveness)?</p>	
	<p>3.6. Have the intellectual/industrial property issues been adequately considered?</p>	
	<p>Other comments on criterion 3.</p>	
	<p>4. Ethical issues</p>	

	4.2. Has a clear and relevant action plan for adhering to the principles of research ethics been described in the application, incl. if it is necessary to obtain a licence from a specific ethics committee for the implementation of the project?	From 0 to 1
	Other comments on criterion 4.	
5. Data management	5.1. Have data management issues, incl. data storage and back-up, data protection, and data ownership questions been sufficiently, carefully, and properly described in the application, incl. will the data be made public (according to the principles of open science), and how will the data be shared and made public?	From 0 to 1
	Other comments on criterion 5.	
6. Importance for Estonian economy, society, public policy, and/or services	6.1. Has the applicant specifically and adequately described the importance of the project for Estonia?	From 1 to 5
	6.2. Could the objectives of the project enhance cultural enrichment, quality of life, health and/or well-being?	
	6.3. Could the outcomes of the project improve evidence-based policy-making and influence public policies and legislation?	
	6.4. Could the outcomes of project improve social welfare, social cohesion and/or national security?	
	6.5. Does the project contribute to environmental protection, environmental impact reduction, sustainable development, sustainable use of resources, etc.?	
	6.6. Does the project enhance the efficiency, (cost)effectiveness, and/or quality of enterprises/organisations, and/or public services?	
	6.7. Do the objectives of the project correspond to any Estonian strategic documents (e.g., the R&D&I strategy, smart specialisation, etc.)?	
	6.8. Does the project include cooperation between R&D institutions, enterprises, and/or government authorities?	
	6.9. Have the ways to evaluate the success of the project been planned and have they been described adequately?	
	Other comments on criterion 6.	

6. Rating scales and the generation of the scores

6.1. Each guiding question for each criterion will be marked with “yes”, “partially”, or “no”, which will generate the score for each criterion as shown in the table below:

Criterion	Answer to the guiding question		
	yes	partially	no
1, 2, and 6	0.55	0.25	0
3	0.8	0.4	0
4	0.5	0.25	0
5	1	0.5	0

6.2. The points corresponding to the answers for the guiding questions will be summed up and rounded up to one decimal place to form a score for each relevant criterion according to the rating scale described in clauses 6.3 and 6.4.

6.3. A differentiated nine-point rating scale is used for evaluating criteria 1, 2, 3, and 6:

- Outstanding (5)
- Very good-outstanding (4.5)
- Very good (4)
- Good-very good (3.5)
- Good (3)
- Satisfactory-good (2.5)
- Satisfactory (2)
- Unsatisfactory-satisfactory (1.5)
- Unsatisfactory (1)

6.4. A differentiated three-point rating scale is used for evaluating criterion 4 and 5:

- Appropriate (1)
- Partially appropriate (0.5)
- Inappropriate (0).

7. Threshold

The final score can range from 4 to 22 points. If an application receives less than 3 points for criteria 1, 2, 3, and/or 6, or receives the mark “no” for guiding questions 1.7, 2.3, 4.1, 4.2, and/or 5.1, it does not qualify for funding.

8. Overall assessment and the final score for the application

8.1. The final score for the application is a sum of justified assessment scores for all criteria (1-6). Together with the final score for the application, the Expert Panel will compile the overall assessment, in which the main arguments underlying the scores as well as the main strengths and weaknesses will be pointed out.

8.2. Based on the final evaluation and scores, the Evaluation Committee will compile a non-field-specific ranking list of applications.

8.3. If the budget for proof-of-concept is too small for approving all the applications which have passed the threshold, then the procedure shall be as follows:

8.3.1. the applications will be approved in the order they appear in the non-field-specific ranking list;

- 8.3.2.the applications of equal standing will be ranked according to the scores received during the evaluation process in the very order of the evaluation criteria;
- 8.3.3.the applications which sustain the equal standing after the ranking procedure described in clause 8.3.2. will be prioritised according to the inclusion of the representatives of the implementing bodies of the outcomes (if applicable);
- 8.3.4.the applications which sustain the equal standing after the ranking procedure described in clause 8.3.3. will be will be prioritised according to the underrepresented R&D (sub)fields among the applicants whose applications rank above the applications of equal standing;
- 8.3.5.the applications which sustain the equal standing after the ranking procedure described in clause 8.3.4. will be will be prioritised according to the underrepresented gender among the applicants whose applications rank above the applications of equal standing;
- 8.3.6.the ranking of the applications which sustain equal standing after the ranking procedure described in 8.3.5. will be decided by lot in accordance with the conditions established by the Council.