



Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency

Creative Europe: Culture

**CREATIVE EUROPE**

**GUIDE FOR EXPERTS**

**ON**

**QUALITY ASSESSMENT OF CREATIVE EUROPE**

**'CULTURE SUB-PROGRAMME'**

**managed by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The European Commission's Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (hereafter the 'Agency') is responsible for the implementation of the Creative Europe Programme<sup>1</sup> under the supervision of the European Commission. This means that the Agency is in charge of the selection of projects to be funded under the Culture Sub-programme.

The Agency runs these selections with the assistance of independent external experts. The aim is to ensure that only proposals<sup>2</sup> of the highest quality are selected for funding. The experts hired by the Agency have an advisory role; the final decision on the selection or rejection of applications remains with the Agency. For each selection round, the Agency appoints an Evaluation Committee for each call for proposals whose role it is to give an advisory opinion to the authorising officer in view of taking the financing decision on the award of grants based on the quality assessments. The Committee is composed of representatives of the Executive Agency and the European Commission.

In order to guarantee transparency, equal treatment and impartial decisions, the assessment process is organised based on a peer review system further described in the coming sections of this document.

This guide is a tool for experts providing instructions and guidance in order to ensure a standardised and high quality assessment of applications.

## 2. ROLE AND APPOINTMENT OF EXPERTS

### 2.1 Role of experts

The role of independent experts is to **advise the Agency on the quality and the value for money** investment of project proposals in relation to the policy objectives of the Creative Europe Culture Sub-programme and the priorities for the concerned scheme.

The quality assessment is an essential part of the selection procedure. Based on the experts' assessment and the recommendations of the Evaluation Committee, a list of grant applications in quality order is established. This list then serves as a basis for the Agency to determine which proposals may be financed<sup>3</sup>. The feedback on applications sent to applicants at the end of the selection also builds on these assessments (*see section 4 Feedback to applicants*).

Experts are **recruited** through an open [call for expression of interest](#)<sup>4</sup>. They are appointed on the basis of their skills (including language skills) and expertise in the cultural and creative sector

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<sup>1</sup> The Creative Europe Programme was established by the Regulation (EU) No 1295/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 establishing the 'Creative Europe Programme (2014 to 2020)': and repealing Decisions No 1718/2006/EC, No 1855/2006/EC and No 1041/2009/EC

<sup>2</sup> Please note that the terms "proposal" and "application" are used interchangeably in this Guide.

<sup>3</sup> The grant award decision is taken by the authorising officer on the basis of the quality of the applications and the budget available (see Article 133 of the Financial Regulations applicable to the general budget of the Union: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2012:298:0001:0096:EN:PDF>)

<sup>4</sup> The list resulting from this call for expression of interest is valid for the duration of the current generation of programmes managed by the Agency, i.e. until 31.12.2020 [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/about-eacea/working-expert/call-for-expressions-interest-n%C2%B0-eacea201301\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/about-eacea/working-expert/call-for-expressions-interest-n%C2%B0-eacea201301_en)

in which they are asked to assess applications. Experts may be asked to assess a number of interdisciplinary proposals.

The Agency does not disclose information or contact details on experts in relation with a given proposal they assess. The Agency however publishes each year on its website a list with the details on experts who have concluded a contract of more than 15.000€ per year (see [point 13.6 Ex post transparency of the call for expression of interest](#))<sup>5</sup>.

Experts perform evaluations on a personal basis, not as representatives of their country, their employer or any other entity.

## 2.2 Code of conduct and conflict of interest

Experts must perform their task to the highest professional standards and within the deadline agreed with the Agency. They are further bound to a code of conduct as set out in the call (section 13.4) and contract with the Agency. In that respect, expert's attention is drawn to the following aspects:

### Conflict of interest

- Experts must not have a conflict of interest<sup>6</sup> **at the time of their appointment** and sign a declaration that no such conflict exists (see template in annex 2).
- They also inform the Executive Agency should such a conflict arise **in any of the applications** they have been allocated.

When a potential conflict of interest is reported by the expert or brought to the attention of the Agency by any means, the Agency will analyse the circumstances and any objective elements of information at its disposal. If the Agency comes to the conclusion that there is conflict of interest, the expert is either excluded from the assessment of that particular application, or from the entire selection round.

### Confidentiality

Experts are bound by confidentiality, as all information relating to the assessment process is strictly confidential. They are not allowed to disclose any information about the applications submitted and results of the assessment and selection to anyone.

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<sup>5</sup> [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/about-eacea/working-expert/call-for-expressions-interest-n%C2%B0-eacea201301\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/about-eacea/working-expert/call-for-expressions-interest-n%C2%B0-eacea201301_en)

<sup>6</sup> Financial Regulation Art. 57(2): « ... a conflict of interests exists where the impartial and objective exercise of the functions of a financial actor or other person, ..., is compromised for reasons involving family, emotional life, political or national affinity, economic interest or any other shared interest with a recipient.» <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2012:298:0001:0096:EN:PDF>

### 3. ASSESSMENT OF APPLICATIONS

The assessment procedure generally consists of the following main steps described in more detail below:

- **Briefing of experts;**
- **Individual & consolidated assessments** including quality review and editing of final comments;
- **Final panel & establishment of grant application list proposed for funding;**
- **Feedback to applicants.**

#### 3.1 The assessment process

##### *3.1.1. Expert briefing*

In order to ensure high quality of evaluations, the Agency makes certain that experts receive all necessary information and training before they start working. Therefore they generally participate in one or several briefing sessions which will ensure that they are fully in a position to fulfil the tasks they were assigned.

##### *3.1.2 Individual assessments*

Each expert first works individually and independently, gives scores and comments for each award criterion, summarises his assessment in the assessment form and submits it electronically<sup>7</sup>.

##### *3.1.3 Consolidated assessments*

Proposals are evaluated by two experts. Once both individual assessments have been finalised and submitted electronically, the Agency puts the experts in contact to consolidate their views on the proposal and produce single agreed scores and comments on each of the award criteria<sup>8</sup>.

The consolidated assessment is considered the final assessment of a given application. It means that in case of applications for a grant, the consolidated assessment and scores form the basis for ranking the application on the list of eligible grant applications.

##### *3.1.4 Final panel & establishment of grant application lists*

Once the consolidation phase is complete, a group of experts may meet, online or onsite in Brussels, to discuss certain projects for which the evaluation raised specific concerns and establish the final ranking list of project proposals in order of merit. Projects that do not reach the threshold imposed by the available budget will not be considered for funding.

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<sup>7</sup> Only full points can be used.

<sup>8</sup> Only full points can be used.

### 3.2 Assessment of award criteria and scoring

Experts assess applications against the award criteria defined in the Guidelines related to each scheme (see Annex 1).

The award criteria for 'Support for European cooperation projects' (both for category 1 smaller scale and for category 2 larger scale) are:

- 1. Relevance;
- 2. Quality of the content and activities;
- 3. Communication and dissemination;
- 4. Quality of the partnership

Each of the award criteria is defined through several elements which must be taken into account by experts when analysing an application. These elements form an exhaustive list of points to be considered before scoring the criterion. They are intended to guide experts through the evaluation of the criterion in question but they must not be scored individually.

When assessing applications against award criteria, experts make a judgement on the extent to which these applications meet the defined criteria. This judgement must be based on information provided by the applicant only. Experts must not assume information that is not stated explicitly or search the internet. Information relevant to a specific award criterion may appear in different parts of the application. Experts take all of it into consideration.

Experts must duly consider the type of project, the scale of the activities and the grant requested when analysing the grant applications. As projects may vary widely in terms of their size, complexity, experience of the participating organisations, whether they are more process or product oriented etc., experts have to integrate the proportionality principle<sup>9</sup> into the assessment of all award criteria.

An application can receive a maximum total of 100 points. The number of points to be attributed per award criterion is indicated in Section 8 – AWARD CRITERIA of each call for proposals guidelines.

The table below shows the relative points of each criterion for 'support for European cooperation projects':

<b><u>Award criteria</u></b>	<b>Maximum points for 'support for European cooperation projects' (both COOP1 and 2)</b>
<u>Relevance</u>	30
<u>Quality of the content and activities</u>	30
<u>Communication and dissemination</u>	20

<sup>9</sup> E.g. does the amount of the grant or the scale of the activities correspond to the concerned type of project? And/or is there a coherence between the grant requested and the activities and outputs proposed? Is the size of the project or the number of participants in proportion to the regional and sectoral reality?

<u>Quality of the partnership</u>	20
<b><u>TOTAL</u></b>	100

Experts assess the application on the basis of the given award criteria and score each criterion with maxima as set above.

In order to ensure quality standards and coherence in approach, four ranges of scores and quality levels for applications have been defined.

The table below shows the ranges of scores for the individual quality standards depending on the maximum score of the award criterion.

	<b>30 points</b>	<b>20 points</b>	
<b>Very good</b>	30-26	20-17	+/- 86-100%
<b>Good</b>	25-20	16-13	+/- 69-86%
<b>Fair</b>	19-13	12-8	+/- 43-69%
<b>Weak</b>	12-0	7-0	+/- 0-43%

Ranges of scores correspond to the following standards:

- Very good – the application addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion in question convincingly and successfully. It provides all the information and evidence needed and there are no concerns or areas of weakness.
- Good – the application addresses the criterion well, although some small improvements could be made. It gives clear information on all or nearly all of the evidence needed.
- Fair – the application broadly addresses the criterion, but there are some weaknesses. It gives some relevant information, but there are several areas where detail is lacking or the information is unclear.
- Weak – the application fails to address the criterion or cannot be judged due to missing or incomplete information. It does not address the question asked, or gives very little relevant information.

Experts must provide comments on each award criterion and, in their comments, refer explicitly to the elements of analysis under the relevant criterion. The comments on each award criterion have to reflect and justify the score given for it. They should emphasize the proposal's strengths and weaknesses.

Experts must assess all applications in full, regardless of the score given to any award criterion.

### 3.3 Funding threshold

The number of applications that can be funded is dependent on the budget available for an action as stipulated in the [annual work programme of the Commission<sup>10</sup>](#). Applications are ranked in order of merit and considered for funding until the budget runs out. If enough applications of sufficient quality are available, the Agency usually draws up a **reserve list** of applications. These could be considered for funding in the event that:

- ✓ one or several applications on the main list can no longer be funded;
- ✓ additional budget becomes available.

### 3.4 Quality assurance

The Agency aims at the highest level of quality at every stage of the evaluation process. Therefore particular emphasis is put on:

**Training of experts & communication:** the Agency sets up interactive and flexible briefing sessions to make sure that all aspects of the assessment procedure are clearly understood by experts before they start working. Where possible, an Online Expert Community allows on-going dialogue and exchange on thematic, methodological and technical issues among peers and with Agency staff (see section 3.1).

**Quality review:** The Agency closely monitors the quality of expert assessments and can require the expert to revise the assessment if it fails to meet the quality standards. The Agency may call upon experienced experts, commonly referred to as quality / lead experts, to assist the team in carrying out quality review of individual and/or consolidated assessments. The aim is to ensure:

- ✓ formal correctness;
- ✓ appropriateness, clarity and completeness of comments;
- ✓ coherence between scores and comments.

Agency staff or lead experts will not, however, influence the opinion of the independent experts.

## 4. Feedback to applicants

The Agency notifies the applicant in writing of the result of their application. Each applicant receives detailed feedback on scores and comments. This feedback is based on the consolidated final assessment and is given in English.

In the event of a request for further information or appeal by an applicant, the Agency may ask the experts involved in the quality assessment of the proposal in question to provide additional information on the assessment if necessary.

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<sup>10</sup> The annual Work programme is available on the Internet page of DG Education & Culture [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/more\\_info/awp/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/more_info/awp/index_en.htm)

## **Annex 1 Reference documents**

- Guidelines documents

Cooperation projects: [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/creative-europe/funding/cooperation-projects-2016\\_en](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/creative-europe/funding/cooperation-projects-2016_en)

- Legal basis Creative Europe Programme:

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32013R1295>

- Creative Europe European Commission DG EAC website:

[http://ec.europa.eu/culture/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/index_en.htm)

- Annexes to the application form:

- E-form and all relevant documentation provided by the applicants





Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency

## Declaration of absence of conflict of interests and of confidentiality

Title of Call for proposals: [replace this text]

Reference: Call for proposal [include reference here]

### I. Conflict of interests

I, the undersigned [Surname, family name], having been appointed as an expert for the abovementioned call, declare that I am aware of Article 57 of the Financial Regulation, which states that:

*"1. Financial actors and other persons involved in budget implementation and management, including acts preparatory thereto, audit or control shall not take any action which may bring their own interests into conflict with those of the Union.*

*Where such a risk exists, the person in question shall refrain from such action and shall refer the matter to the authorising officer by delegation who shall confirm in writing whether a conflict of interests exists. The person in question shall also inform his or her hierarchical superior. Where a conflict of interests is found to exist, the person in question shall cease all activities in the matter. The authorising officer by delegation shall personally take any further appropriate action.*

*2. For the purposes of paragraph 1, a conflict of interests exists where the impartial and objective exercise of the functions of a financial actor or other person, as referred to in paragraph 1, is compromised for reasons involving family, emotional life, political or national affinity, economic interest or any other shared interest with a recipient."*

I hereby declare that I do not fall under any of the following circumstances in which a conflict of interests might exist. I confirm that, if I discover before or during the evaluation that a conflict of interests exists, I will declare it immediately to the Agency.

#### **1/Disqualifying conflict of interests:**

- Involvement in the preparation of the proposal;
- Direct benefit in case of acceptance of the proposal;
- Close family relationship with any person representing a participating organisation in the proposal;
- Director, trustee or partner of a participating organisation;

- Current employment by a participating organisation;
- Current involvement in a contract or collaboration with a participating organisation;
- Any other situation that compromises my ability to evaluate the proposal impartially.

**2/Potential conflict of interests:**

- Employment by one of the participating organisation within the previous three years;
- Involvement in a contract or collaboration with a participating organisation within the previous three years;
- Any other situation that could cast doubt on my ability to evaluate the proposal impartially, or that could reasonably appear to do so in the eyes of a third party (*Ex. Past or current personal relationships, nationality, political affinity, etc.*).

I hereby declare that I fall under one or more of the above circumstances (please specify which and explain) \* :

*\*Ex. In case of employment by a structure including different departments or institutes, please specify the degree of autonomy between them.*

I hereby declare on my honour that the disclosed information is true and complete to the best of my knowledge.<sup>11</sup>

**II. Confidentiality and personal data protection**

I also confirm that I will keep all matters entrusted to me confidential and will process the personal data I receive only for the purposes of the performance of the present evaluation. If unnecessary or excessive personal data are contained in the documents submitted by the applicant, I will not process them further or take them into account for the evaluation of the proposal. I will not communicate outside the panel any confidential information that is revealed to me or that I have discovered. I will not make any adverse use of information given to me.

Signed: .....

Date/Place:

Name (in capitals):

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<sup>11</sup> In case of false, incomplete or incorrect statements or failure to provide information in an attempt to obtain the contract or any benefit resulting therefrom, or where this was the effect of the action, this constitutes a breach of the contract between the Agency and the expert. The Agency may decide to terminate the contract and to recover any sums paid to the Contractor under the order (cf. Article 8 of the General Conditions).