

FFG
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EVALUATION MANUAL FOR FFG SELECTION PROCESS MODEL 4 FUNDING (COMPETITIVE CALLS)

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1 PREAMBLE

The FFG calls are carried out on the basis of harmonised funding instruments. These define the specific criteria and conditions for the individual projects (e.g. Company Project, Cooperative Research Project, Feasibility Study etc.). The calls use a specific mix of instruments depending on the call objectives. An overview of the [instruments](#) is given on the FFG website.

The instruments provide consistent selection and processing standards. The following evaluation manuals are used in the FFG selection procedure:

Figure 1: Overview of evaluation manuals

| Application procedure – ongoing submission | Competitive procedure |
|---|---|
| <p>Model 1 Fast-track procedure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Evaluation: internal and/or external reviews, simplified evaluation scheme – Funding recommendation: call management or advisory committee | <p>Model 3 External evaluation committee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Evaluation: internal and/or external reviews – Funding recommendation: external evaluation committee (FFG has no vote) – Distinction between <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Model 3a for funding – Model 3b for financing |
| <p>Model 2 Standard procedure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Evaluation: internal reviews, external reviews if necessary – Funding recommendation: advisory committee (FFG has no vote) | <p>Model 4 External evaluation committee plus hearing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Evaluation: internal and/or external reviews – Hearings: essential element of the evaluation process – Funding recommendation: external evaluation committee (FFG has no vote) |

The technical guidelines for the individual funding instruments specify which selection procedure/evaluation manual is to be applied.

2 KEY FACTS AT A GLANCE

The present evaluation manual refers exclusively to selection procedures according to Model 4. Model 4 differs from Model 3 in that additional hearings are held as specified in the relevant technical guidelines. Model 4 is used for calls with a low number of funding applications, which are often characterised by high funding volumes and/or high complexity due to their project size. The hearing allows the funding applicants to present their project and provides room for questions and discussions between the members of the evaluation committee and the funding applicants.

The aim of the selection procedure is to select eligible projects from the formally correct funding applications submitted in good time and to rank them.

All funding applications are ranked based on an evaluation carried out by an evaluation committee. The strengths and weaknesses of the funding application will determine its place in the ranking and decide whether it is eligible or not.

The evaluation committee is put together depending on the expertise required to evaluate the funding applications submitted and is composed of national and/or international, independent and unbiased experts.

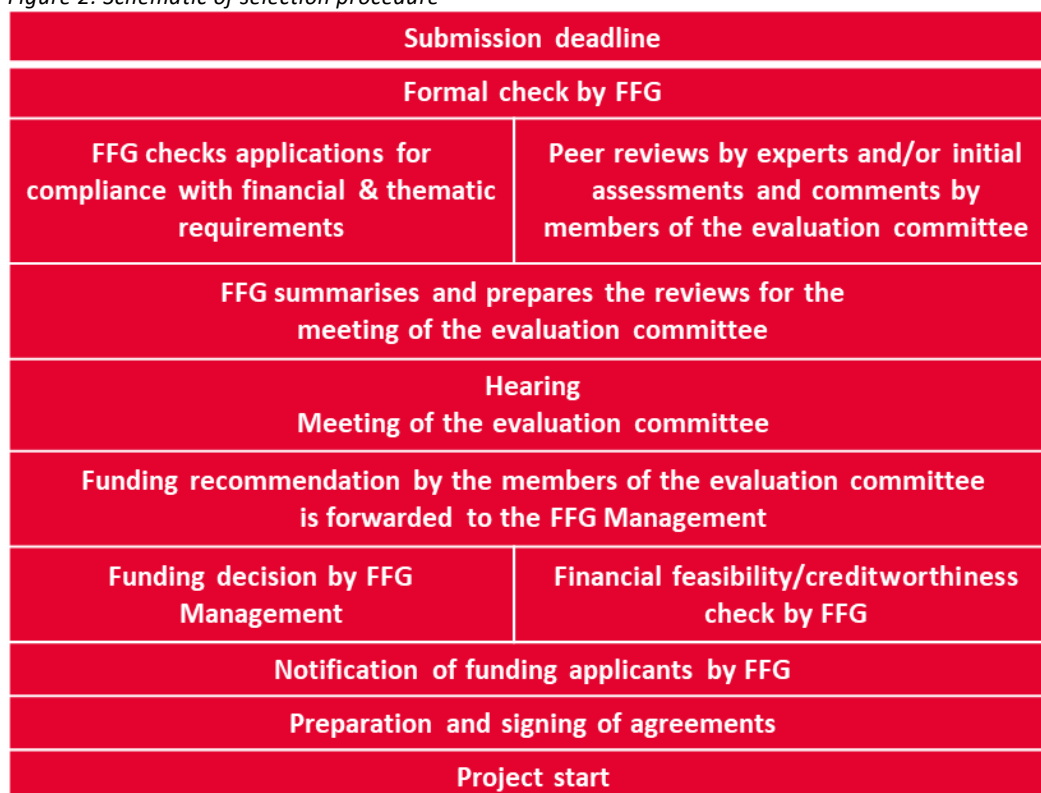
The names of the persons involved in the evaluation process (peer reviewers, members of the evaluation committee, chair of the evaluation committee and observers) remain anonymous as a matter of principle and will not be communicated externally.

3 EVALUATION AND SELECTION PROCESS

3.1 Overview

The following diagram shows the evaluation and selection procedure.

Figure 2: Schematic of selection procedure



3.2 Checks by FFG

The FFG will check all applications submitted within the deadline for compliance with formal, financial and thematic requirements in accordance with the specified process and the check lists/templates.

The results of the formal and compliance checks will be documented in the FFG's electronic documentation systems.

Formal check:

The FFG will check the applications for completeness based on check lists and will ensure data capture. The criteria examined in the formal check can be found in the Call Guidelines. The funding applicants will be informed about the result of the formal check in good time. The applicants will be notified of any correctable deficiencies detected and will be requested to make appropriate corrections within a reasonable period of time prior to the meeting of the evaluation committee, or the application will be excluded from the further process for formal reasons.

The formal check is designed to examine whether the information provided by the funding applicant meets the call requirements, but not whether it is true and correct (e.g. SME status). Applications may also be excluded if the information provided is found to be incorrect in the course of the subsequent compliance checks (see below).

Compliance checks:

All funding applications approved for further evaluation following the formal check will be prepared for the evaluation committee by FFG staff. This involves the following compliance checks:

– **Check for compliance with thematic requirements:**

This check covers topics such as multiple funding, project history, incentive effect, unusual ownership structure and call-specific aspects.

– **Check for compliance with financial requirements:**

The FFG checks the funding applications for compliance with the guidelines (compliance with any specific funding conditions, allocation to correct organisation category, correct and transparent cost breakdown, compliance with cost limits for work packages, ...) and may make suggestions for cost cuts.

– **Check of SME status:**

Since small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) may profit from better funding conditions in many cases, the details provided on company size must be checked in accordance with the European Commission's User Guide to the SME Definition. Like the financial feasibility/creditworthiness check (see below), the SME status check may also be carried out after the meeting of the evaluation committee unless call-specific reasons suggest otherwise.

The FFG Call Management compiles the results of these compliance checks and the results of the reviews (peer reviews and/or initial assessment) for the evaluation committee and presents them at the committee meeting.

These FFG compliance checks are designed to compile information provided in the funding applications for the evaluation committee but not to assess their contents. In no case will a project be excluded due to its contents at this stage of the selection procedure.

Financial feasibility/creditworthiness check:

Once the funding recommendation has been made (see section 3.5.4.1), the FFG will check the financial capacity of companies involved in the projects recommended for funding. The check includes both the financial situation (creditworthiness) of the company and the financial feasibility of the funding application (residual financing). In order for funding to be granted both the financial feasibility check and the creditworthiness check must be positive. If this is not the case, the companies concerned will not be eligible for funding. The creditworthiness check also serves to examine whether the company is an undertaking in difficulty¹. Undertakings in difficulty are not eligible for funding.

3.3 Peer reviews

Should the assessment of funding applications require specialist expertise not covered by the members of the evaluation committee, the FFG will request additional peer reviews, which will also be made available to the members of the evaluation committee in advance or during the committee meeting.

No points are generally awarded in the peer review process. In justified exceptional cases, however, peer reviewers may give an assessment including the awarding of points.

The peer reviews may in a further step be compiled for the members of the evaluation committee. In any event they will be made available to the evaluation committee as a decision-making basis.

If required, e.g. if the reviews are contradictory or inconclusive, an additional peer review may be requested.

Peer reviewers must sign a **Declaration of Confidentiality and Impartiality** before being given access to the documents required for reviewing a funding application.

3.4 Initial assessment by the members of the evaluation committee

The members of the evaluation committee (see also section 3.5.2) receive the following documents electronically as a basis for the initial assessment of the funding applications assigned to them and for further information:

- Guide for Evaluators
- the funding applications including annexes
- peer reviews, if any

¹ The decision on whether a company is regarded as being “in difficulty” will be based on the definition provided in the General Block Exemption Regulation (OJ L 187 p. 19), which is the legal basis for the relevant funding scheme under EU law.

Members of the evaluation committee must sign a **Declaration of Confidentiality and Impartiality** before being given access to the documents required for evaluating a funding application. The members of the evaluation committee carry out an initial assessment of each funding application assigned to them in compliance with the Declaration of Confidentiality and Impartiality and complete a separate online evaluation form for each application, including their assessments and substantiations. The evaluation forms required are made available electronically to the members of the evaluation committee and must be completed within a specified deadline. In this evaluation process, each funding application is (initially) assessed by a minimum of 3 members of the evaluation committee.²

The initial assessments of all members of the evaluation committee are prepared for the committee meeting by the Call Management. The anonymised results of the initial assessment (e.g. comments, points, preliminary ranking) can be made available electronically to the members of the evaluation committee in advance in preparation for the committee meeting.

The result of the initial assessment may be adjusted following discussions with other members of the evaluation committee in the committee meeting.

In justified exceptional cases the initial assessment (verbal assessment including point rating) is carried out by peer reviewers. In a further step, the peer reviews are prepared for and made available to the members of the evaluation committee.

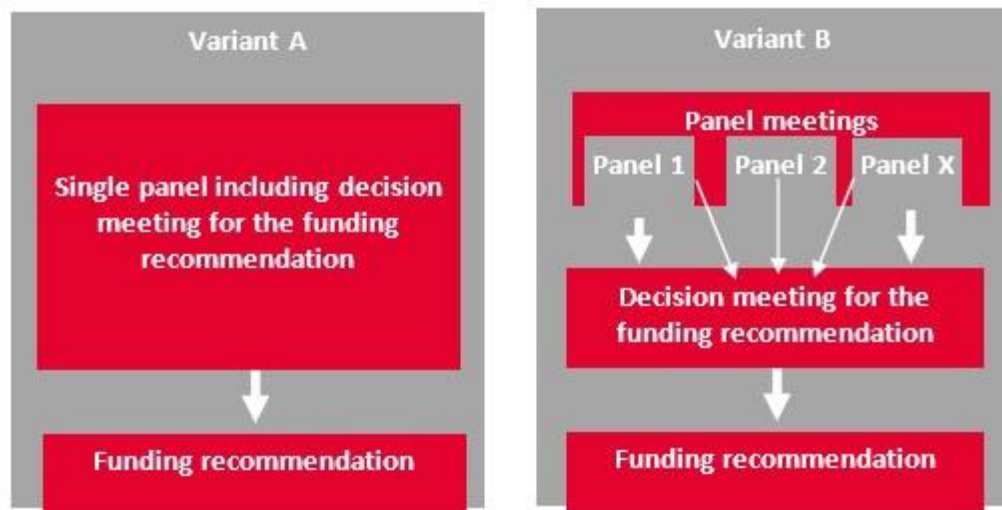
3.5 Meeting of the evaluation committee

Rules of procedure will be issued for the meeting of the evaluation committee based on the guidelines applicable to the relevant call.

All funding applications submitted will be given a final assessment at the meeting of the evaluation committee, which will provide the basis for the ranking of the applications. The hearings will be taken into account in the assessment without the funding applicants being present. The funding recommendation may be formulated in a single panel (variant A) or in a decision meeting with preceding parallel panels (variant B).

² In the event of deviations from the process (e.g. one member of the evaluation committee pulls out at short notice) the person in charge of call management suggests a solution to the relevant head of division, who will decide on how to proceed. This will be indicated on the cover sheet of the minutes.

Figure 3: Meeting of the evaluation committee, variants A and B



Variant A:

The meeting takes place in a single panel, including a decision meeting for the funding recommendation, in which all members of the evaluation committee participate. The meeting results in a funding recommendation (including rejections and waiting list, if applicable). Table 3 in section 3.5.1 describes the procedure and contents of the evaluation committee meetings.³

Variant B:

The funding applications are distributed among parallel panels, where each application is evaluated and ranked by a minimum of 3 members of the evaluation committee. The results of the individual panels are then merged into a final result at the decision meeting for the funding recommendation.⁴

If necessary, the observer and/or chairperson of the meeting of the evaluation committee prepare a report on the committee meeting for the FFG.

This procedure results in the funding recommendation of the evaluation committee, which will be forwarded to the FFG Management in the form of committee meeting minutes.

³ In the event of deviations from the process (e.g. one member of the evaluation committee pulls out at short notice) the person in charge of call management suggests a solution to the relevant head of division, who will decide on how to proceed. This will be indicated on the cover sheet of the minutes.

⁴ In the event of deviations from the process (e.g. one member of the evaluation committee pulls out at short notice) the person in charge of call management suggests a solution to the relevant head of division, who will decide on how to proceed. This will be indicated on the cover sheet of the minutes.

3.5.1 Goal and procedure of evaluation committee meetings

Goal of the meeting:

- A recommendation of eligibility for funding has been made for each funding application:
 - Conditions and recommendations have been formulated, if necessary.
 - Rejections have been justified consistently.
- Overall costs and funding amounts have been set for each funding application.
- **Additionally for variant B:** The results of the evaluations and discussions in the individual panels are explained to the participants of the decision meeting for the funding recommendation. The purpose of the decision meeting for the funding recommendation is to ensure the consistency of the results and comparability of the evaluations and to establish an overall ranking of all funding applications (see Figure 1).

All funding applications are evaluated in the course of the meeting. The following table describes the procedure for evaluating the funding applications at the meeting of the evaluation committee.

Table 1: Procedure for evaluating the funding applications at the meeting of the evaluation committee

| Procedure | Details |
|--|---|
| Short presentation of application by FFG | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Key data of application – Result of checks carried out by FFG – Peer reviews, if applicable – Presentation of the results of the initial assessments |
| Discussion of funding application | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Each member of the evaluation committee briefly justifies the results of their initial assessment – The members of the evaluation committee discuss the funding application based on the specified criteria, the initial assessments and the hearing |
| Evaluation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The funding applications are evaluated based on the strengths and weaknesses in the main and sub-criteria |
| Eligibility for funding | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Eligible for funding with/without conditions, not eligible for funding |
| Funding conditions or reasons for rejection | <p>Funding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Determination of eligible costs – Justification for cost cuts, if applicable – Determination of funding rate – Formulation of recommendations, if applicable – Formulation of conditions, if applicable <p>Rejection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Formulation of rejection letter |

3.5.2 Roles and duties at the meeting of the evaluation committee

The following will take part in the meeting of the evaluation committee: chairperson of the meeting of the evaluation committee, members of the evaluation committee, FFG, contracting authority (if applicable), co-financing regional governments (if applicable) and observers (if applicable).

Each appointed member of the evaluation committee (including the chairperson if he/she is a member of the evaluation committee) has **one vote** unless provided otherwise in the rules of procedure.

Representatives of the FFG, observers, informants, representatives of the regional governments and the contracting authority are **not eligible to vote**.

The chairperson of the evaluation committee, and the panel chairpersons (if applicable), will be appointed in advance.

3.5.2.1 Duties of the members of the evaluation committee

The voting members of the evaluation committee will assess the applications in a confidential, fair, neutral, unbiased and independent manner based on the procedure set out in this Evaluation Manual, which is described in more detail in the Guide for Evaluators. The points awarded in the main and sub-criteria must be substantiated by comments. This is done by indicating the **strengths and/or weaknesses** in the individual criteria and by giving **key arguments** justifying the funding recommendation or rejection in the overall assessment.

The following funding recommendations can be made as a result of the evaluation:

- Funding without conditions
- Funding subject to conditions:
 - The conditions must be clearly formulated such that they can be communicated to the applicants, verified by the FFG and implemented within a specified period of time.
 - As a rule of thumb, not more than three conditions and requirements relating to the thematic content should be imposed, otherwise the funding application is to be questioned in its entirety.
 - Conditions and requirements involving a substantial change to the funding application should be avoided.
 - Conditions and requirements intervening in the consortium structure should be avoided.
- Rejection:
 - Rejections must be formulated clearly, in accordance with the relevant selection criteria and in a form that can be communicated to the funding applicants.

The members of the evaluation committee shall examine the submitted costs for plausibility and may cut costs, if necessary, taking into account the following:

- They should provide a clear and substantiated statement indicating which cost category of which partner will be affected by the cost cuts, and to what extent.
- Global cost cuts at project level should be generally avoided and are only admissible in justified exceptional cases.
- The funding guidelines must be observed, for example, whether the cooperative relationship will be negatively affected by the cost cuts.

The members of the evaluation committee may make additional recommendations concerning the funding application. In contrast to conditions and requirements, however, recommendations are not binding.

Option: In cases where the members of the evaluation committee do not provide a written initial assessment, it is not absolutely necessary to award points in the committee meeting. In these cases, the meeting distinguishes only between eligible for funding and not eligible for funding.

3.5.2.2 Duties of the chairperson of the evaluation committee

The chairperson of the evaluation committee may be a member of the evaluation committee.

Guideline: If more than 5 panels have been established, the chairperson should not be a member of the evaluation committee so that he/she can participate in all panels.

Duties:

- Leads the discussion of the members of the evaluation committee and compiles the panel results, if applicable.
- Ranks the funding applications based on the discussions, if necessary.
- Ensures consistency between the oral discussions in the single panel/in the panels, written assessments and points awarded, if applicable.
- Ensures that the overall result is of high quality and in accordance with the call objectives.
- Ensures that the funding recommendation is properly and clearly formulated and recorded.

3.5.2.3 Duties of the panel spokesperson

If a panel spokesperson has been appointed, his/her duties are defined as follows:

- Ensures consistency between the oral discussions in the panels, written assessments and points awarded.
- Presents and represents the panel results in the decision meeting for the funding recommendation and supports the chairperson of the evaluation committee in compiling the panel results and establishing an overall ranking.
- The panel spokesperson is proposed by the FFG prior to the meeting of the evaluation committee and confirmed by the participants prior to the start of the meeting.

3.5.2.4 Duties of the external observer

If an external observer has been appointed for the meeting of the evaluation committee, his/her duties are defined as follows:

- Observes the evaluation process in general and the meeting of the evaluation committee.
- Has access to all panels and the decision meeting for the funding recommendation.
- Is not entitled to vote in the evaluation process.
- Is responsible for verifying that the evaluation is carried out correctly (documentation, schedule, etc.).
- Provides a brief report on the course of the evaluation process to the contracting authority and the FFG.

3.5.2.5 Duties of the representatives of the contracting authority

The representatives of the contracting authority present at the meeting of the evaluation committee

- are neutral observers,
- can present the goals of the call at the meeting, if necessary, and
- can provide information about the call (e.g. goals, strategic focus) at the request of the members of the evaluation committee.

The representatives of the contracting authority are not voting members of the evaluation committee.

3.5.2.6 Duties of the representatives of the FFG

The representatives of the FFG

- support the chairperson of the evaluation committee in a neutral way through moderation and time management,
- ensure a transparent, verifiable documentation of the evaluation results in the panel tool, and
- may, upon request, provide information about previous projects, content aspects, the funding applicants, key project data, and evaluations or comments made by the members of the evaluation committee in the initial assessment or the peer reviewers, if applicable.

The representatives of the FFG are not voting members of the evaluation committee.

3.5.3 Hearing

The peer reviewers and/or members of the evaluation committee may formulate questions to enable the funding applicants to prepare for the hearing. The questions are compiled by the FFG and forwarded to the funding applicants.

The funding applicants may send a maximum of 5 persons to the hearing. The project manager must be present. The funding applicant is allowed a specified amount of time to present the application and to answer questions from the peer reviewers and/or the members of the evaluation committee.

The hearing is moderated by the FFG. The evaluation committee meeting evaluates the funding applications after the hearing (without the applicants being present) in order to be able to take the results of the hearing into account in the final assessment. The meeting of the evaluation committee may either take place subsequently (max. 1 – 2 weeks) or as part of the meeting.

If the hearings take place prior to the meeting of the evaluation committee/decision meeting, at least one member of the evaluation committee must attend the hearings. If the hearings take place as part of the meeting of the evaluation committee, all members must attend the hearings.

3.5.4 Results of the meeting of the evaluation committee

3.5.4.1 Funding recommendation

The result of the meeting of the evaluation committee is an overall list ranking the funding applications by points. Where several applications have the same number of points the ranking will be established either by the members of the evaluation committee or the panel spokespersons (variant B). This ranking must be consistent with the written justification. The overall list and the minutes of the evaluation committee meeting form the **funding recommendation**.

The funding recommendation is forwarded to the FFG Management in the form of minutes of the evaluation committee meeting.

The results of the evaluation process are reported in accordance with Annex A of the Financing Agreement.

3.5.4.2 Financial feasibility/creditworthiness check

Once the funding recommendation has been made, the FFG will check the financial capacity of the companies involved in the projects recommended for funding (see 3.2).

3.6 From funding decision to contract

The funding recommendation, consisting of the minutes of the evaluation committee meeting and the ranking of the projects, if applicable, will be submitted to the FFG Management immediately after the evaluation committee meeting. The funding decision will be made on the basis of the funding recommendation submitted and reported in accordance with Annex A of the Financing Agreement.

Following formal approval (= funding decision), all funding applicants will be notified of the result in writing subject to a positive financial feasibility/creditworthiness check by the FFG.

The subsequent contract preparation process will be initiated by the FFG. The minutes and the funding recommendation/decision form the basis for this process. The FFG is responsible for monitoring compliance with the conditions imposed, for contract preparation as well as for project monitoring and administration.

4 EVALUATION DETAILS

The funding applications are assessed according to the following 4 main criteria:

- 1 Quality of the funding application
- 2 Suitability of the funding applicants/project participants
- 3 Benefit and exploitation
- 4 Relevance of the funding application to the call

The main criteria and the defined sub-criteria (including weightings) can be found in the relevant technical guidelines and call guidelines (in the event of combined guidelines).

Criteria that are not applicable can be omitted if this is consistent with the logic of the funding instrument or call. This must be defined in the technical guidelines or call guidelines, if required.

The evaluation scheme is divided into 6 levels:

Table 2: Evaluation scheme

| Sign | Explanation | Points | Description |
|------|--------------|--------|--|
| +++ | Excellent | 100 | The project meets the criterion very well and to the full extent . The assessment has revealed only strengths and no relevant weaknesses. |
| ++ | Good | 80 | The project meets the criterion well and to a predominant extent . In addition to the predominant strengths, several concrete weaknesses have been identified. |
| + | Sufficient | 60 | The project meets the criterion to a sufficient extent . The strengths slightly outweigh the weaknesses. |
| - | Poor | 40 | The project meets the criterion to an inadequate extent . The weaknesses outweigh the strengths. |
| -- | Very poor | 20 | The project addresses/meets the criterion to a very inadequate extent . The weaknesses clearly outweigh the few strengths. |
| --- | Insufficient | 0 | The project does not meet the criterion. |

The points awarded for each criterion must be accompanied by a written justification for the assessment. This written justification is of key importance as it provides the basis for discussion at the evaluation committee meeting and communication of the results of the selection procedure to the funding applicants (e.g. formulation of reasons for rejection if the application has been assessed as not eligible for funding).

The funding applications are assessed by formulating the strengths and weaknesses of the application with regard to each of the sub-criteria specified in the evaluation scheme.

These strengths and weaknesses of the funding application form the basis for the overall evaluation and the awarding of points.

In the overall evaluation the members of the evaluation committee formulate their key arguments for and against funding of the application based on their previous assessment and the discussions during the evaluation committee meeting. These arguments refer to the strengths and weaknesses identified in the individual evaluation criteria.

These arguments and the specific strengths and weaknesses of the application form the basis for written communications to the funding applicants.

The overall evaluation may also be used to formulate conditions and/or recommendations.