

FFG
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EVALUATION MANUAL FOR FFG SELECTION PROCESS MODEL 3B FINANCING (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 3b (financing).

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

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

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

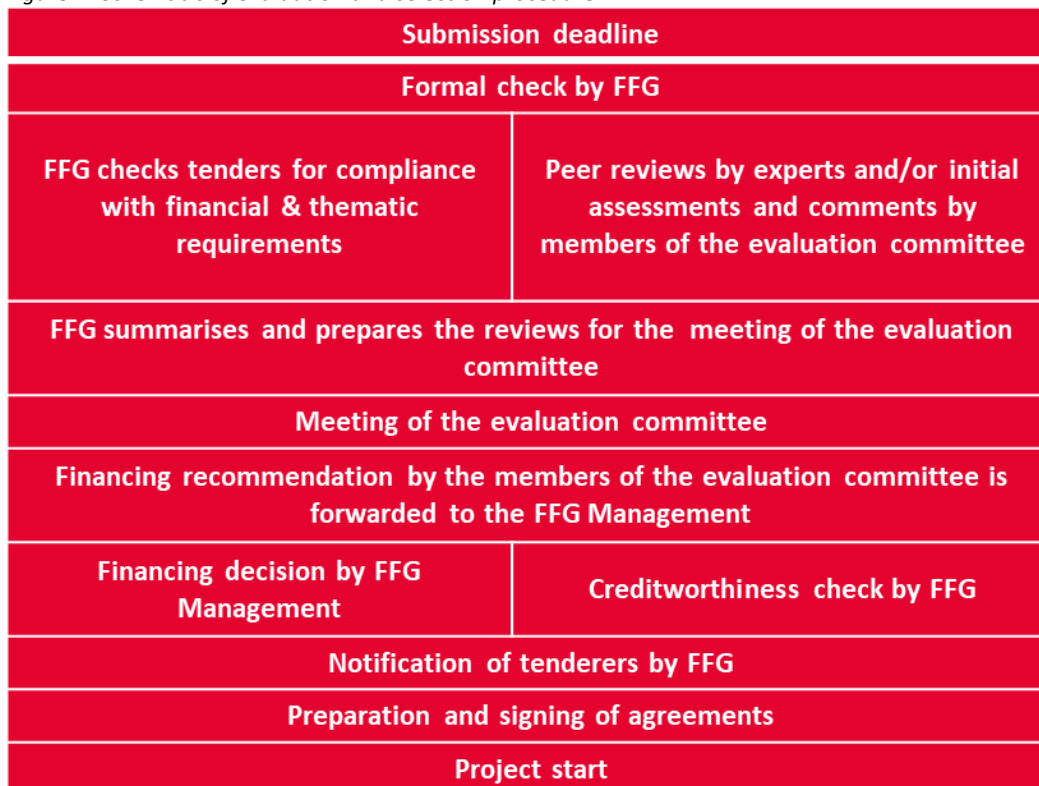
The names of the persons involved in the evaluation process (peer reviewers, members of the evaluation committee, chair of the evaluation committee and observers) remain anonymous as a matter of principle and will not be communicated externally.

3 HEADLINE HEADING 3

3.1 Overview

The following diagram shows the evaluation and selection procedure.

Figure 2: Schematic of evaluation and selection procedure



3.2 Checks by FFG

The FFG will check all tenders 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 tenders 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 tenderers will be informed about the result of the formal check in good time. The tenderers 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 tender will be excluded from the further process for formal reasons.

The formal check is only designed to examine whether the information provided by the tenderers meets the call requirements, but not whether it is true and correct (e.g. SME status). Tenders 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 tenders 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 project history, unusual ownership structure and call-specific aspects.
- **Check for compliance with financial requirements:**
The FFG checks the tenders for correct and transparent cost breakdown and compliance with cost limits and may make suggestions for cost cuts, if this has been indicated in the call guideline.

The FFG 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 checks are designed to compile information provided in the tenders 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.

Creditworthiness check:

Once the financing recommendation has been made (see section 3.5.3.1), the FFG will check the financial capability of companies involved in the tenders recommended for financing. The check involves examining the financial situation (creditworthiness) of the company. The creditworthiness check must be positive in order to receive financing. If this is not the case, the companies concerned will not be eligible for financing. The creditworthiness check also serves to examine whether the company is an undertaking in difficulty¹. Undertakings in difficulty do not receive financing.

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.

3.3 Peer reviews

Should the assessment of tenders 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 panel 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 tender.

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 tenders assigned to them and for further information:

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

Members of the evaluation committee must sign a **Declaration of Confidentiality and Impartiality** before being given access to the documents required for evaluating a tender. The members of the evaluation committee carry out an initial assessment of each tender assigned to them in compliance with the Declaration of Confidentiality and Impartiality and complete a separate online evaluation form for each tender, 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 tender 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 FFG 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.

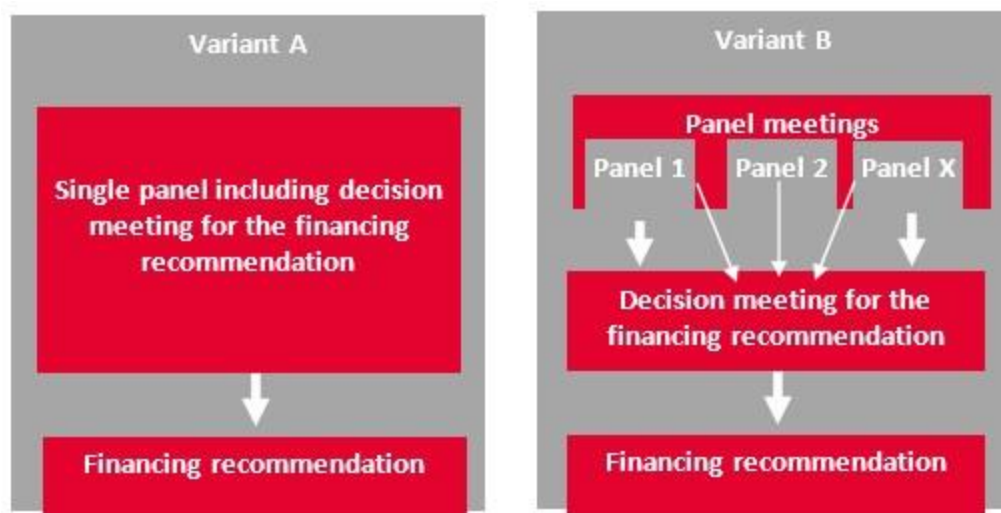
² In the event of deviations from the process (e.g. one member of the evaluation committee pulls out at short notice) the person in charge of call management suggests a solution to the relevant head of division, who will decide on how to proceed. This will be indicated on the cover sheet of the minutes.

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

3.5 Meeting of the evaluation committee

All tenders submitted will be given a final assessment at the meeting of the evaluation committee, which will provide the basis for the ranking of the tenders. The financing recommendation may be formulated in a single panel (variant A) or in a decision meeting with preceding parallel panels (variant B).³

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



Variant A: ONE budget for EACH topic

The meeting takes place in one or several parallel single panels, which also determine the ranking for the financing recommendation. All members of the evaluation committee participate in the meeting. A financing recommendation (including rejections and waiting list, if applicable) is made for each topic separately.

Variant B: ONE budget for ALL topics

The tenders are distributed among parallel panels, where each tender 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 financing recommendation.

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

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.

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

3.5.1 Goal and procedure of evaluation committee meetings

Goal of the meeting:

- A recommendation of eligibility for financing has been made for each tender:
 - Conditions and recommendations have been formulated, if necessary.
 - Rejections have been justified consistently.
- Overall costs have been confirmed for each tender.
- **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 financing recommendation. The purpose of this meeting is to ensure the consistency of the results and comparability of the evaluations and to establish an overall ranking of all tenders (see Figure 1).

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

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

Procedure	Details
Short presentation of key points of the project by the moderator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Key data of tender – Information on affidavit and Declaration of Commitment – Result of compliance checks carried out by FFG – Results of additional peer reviews, if applicable
Discussion of project	<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 tenders based on the specified criteria and the initial assessments
Awarding of points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Final points are awarded consistent with the justifications provided by the members of the evaluation committee
Eligibility for financing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Best tenders eligible for financing in accordance with the ranking; conditions and requirements possible only to a minor extent
Financing conditions or reasons for rejection	<p>Financing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Acceptance of the tender – Justification for slight cost adaptations, if applicable – Determination of contribution provided by tenderers – Formulation of recommendations, if applicable – Formulation of conditions and requirements, if applicable <p>Rejection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Formulation of reasons for rejection

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), 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, and the contracting authority (unless they are members of the evaluation committee) are **not eligible to vote**.

The chairperson of the evaluation committee, and the panel chairpersons 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 tenders 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 financing recommendation or rejection in the overall assessment.

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

- Financing without conditions
- Financing subject to conditions:
 - The conditions must be clearly formulated such that they can be communicated to the tenderers, 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 content should be imposed, otherwise the tender is to be questioned in its entirety.
 - Conditions and requirements involving a substantial change to the tender are not permissible.
 - Conditions and requirements intervening in the consortium structure are not permissible.
- Rejection:
 - Rejections must be formulated clearly, in accordance with the relevant selection criteria and in a form that can be communicated to the tenderers.

The members of the evaluation committee shall examine the submitted costs for plausibility and may cut costs (if this is provided for in the call guideline) 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.

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

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 panel results with the members of the evaluation committee.
- Ranks the tenders based on the discussions in the decision meeting for the financing recommendation.
- Ensures consistency between the oral discussions in the panels, written assessments and points awarded.
- Ensures that the overall result is of high quality and in accordance with the call objectives.
- Ensures that the financing recommendation is properly and clearly formulated and recorded.

3.5.2.3 Duties of the panel spokespersons

If panel spokespersons have been appointed, their duties are defined as follows:

- Ensure consistency between the oral discussions in the panels, written assessments and points awarded.
- Present and represent the panel results in the decision meeting for the financing recommendation and support the chairperson of the evaluation committee in compiling the panel results and establishing an overall ranking.
- The panel spokespersons are 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 financing 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 tenderers, 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 Results of the meeting of the evaluation committee

3.5.3.1 Financing recommendation

The result of the meeting of the evaluation committee is an overall list ranking the tenders by points. Where several tenders 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 **financing recommendation**.

The financing 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.

3.5.3.2 Creditworthiness check

Once the financing recommendation has been made, the FFG will check the financial capability of the companies involved in the tenders recommended for financing (see 3.2).

3.6 From financing decision to contract

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

Following formal approval (=financing decision), all tenderers will be notified of the result in writing by the FFG.

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

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The tenders are assessed according to the following 4 main criteria:

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

The main criteria and the defined sub-criteria (including the 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 evaluation committee must pay special attention to the work schedule in terms of clearly defined milestones, deliverables, work packages and a detailed time schedule so as to enable the FFG to monitor the progress of the project, since a defined lump sum amount (including value added tax) is agreed as remuneration for all activities performed by the individual contractors under a Contract for Research and Development Services.

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 tenderers (e.g. formulation of reasons for rejection if the tender has been assessed as not eligible for financing).

The tenders are assessed by formulating their strengths and weaknesses with regard to each of the sub-criteria specified in the evaluation scheme. The electronic evaluation form also contains a box which can be ticked if there are no strengths or weaknesses.

These strengths and weaknesses of the tender 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 financing of the tender 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 tender form the basis for written communications to the tenderers.

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