



SLOVAK RESEARCH
AND DEVELOPMENT
AGENCY



Reviewer's Handbook

A detailed guide for reviewers of SRDA basic research and development projects, including assessment criteria and methods



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SRDA Peer Review Process

To evaluate the project proposals, the Slovak Research and Development Agency (SRDA) uses a two-round evaluation process. Received applications first go through an administrative check. If they do not comply in this step, the applicant is asked to complete the application.

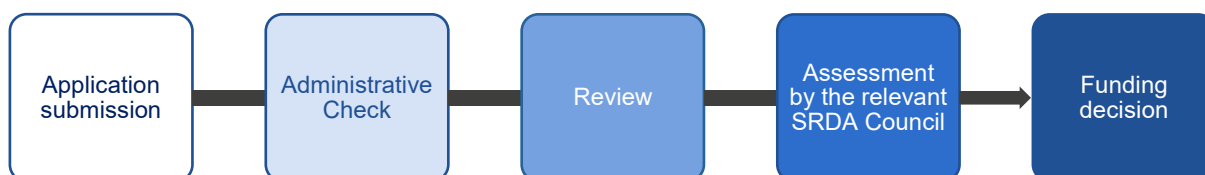
Complete applications are further assessed by **three independent experts** who prepare their reviews based on the assessment criteria, while the number of international and domestic reviews is determined for each public call separately. Finished reviews are subject to administrative check. The reviewers are asked to remedy any shortcomings found in the submitted reviews.

Completed reviews are submitted to the relevant SRDA councils for the final assessment. Based on the submitted reviews, the members of the SRDA councils prepare the final assessment reports so that two reviewers--members of the respective SRDA council--shall review one application. In the next step, the individual SRDA councils vote on these assessments and prepare the final order of project proposals.

In the case of bilateral, research bilateral and multilateral calls, the final order of project proposals is made by a mixed-member committee, which consists of representatives of the Slovak Republic and the partner country/countries.

Based on these documents, the SRDA Director issues decision on whether the application is/is not receiving the SRDA funding.

Diagram 1 Scheme of the SRDA Peer Review Process



Principles of the Assessment Process

Integrity

With the intention to ensure as much objectivity as possible, the reviewers are assigned to individual applications through an electronic system.

This procedure enables us to ensure impartial reviewers who are not in a conflict of interest in relation to the submitted applications.

A conflict of interest arises especially when a reviewer:

- is directly or indirectly involved (participates) in the activities of the project that should be assessed
- is a relative of the principal investigator or a member of the research team of the project that should be assessed
- is an employee of the same part of the same organization as the principal investigator of the project that should be assessed (e.g. a faculty in the case of universities, an institute in the case of the Slovak Academy of Sciences)



- in the last 5 years, the reviewer was the research team member of a joint project or a co-author of a joint research output with the principal investigator or with a member of the research team of the project that should be assessed
- was a supervisor or a PhD student of the principal investigator or a member of the research team of the project that should be assessed
- is otherwise biased towards the applicant

If you suspect any conflict of interest in relation to the project assigned to you, please do not continue in the assessment and decline the invitation to evaluate such an application.

Confidentiality

Reviewers, like all other persons involved in any part of the assessment process, are bound by confidentiality. We do our best to prevent any leak of new ideas and solutions contained in project proposals, and the misuse of personal data.

Do not share the content of the project and personal data disclosed to you during the assessment process with anyone. This information is confidential. This implies that the use of AI tools in project evaluation (ChatGPT, etc.) is not allowed. This is because AI tools store all the data entered in the cloud where it can be further used without the authors' consent.

Anonymity

Preserving the anonymity of reviewers is one of the key elements of ensuring the objectivity of the assessment process.

Please make sure that your anonymity in relation to the applicant of the project under your assessment preserved throughout the entire process. Once the assessment is completed, your reviews will be made available to the applicants who must not be able to identify you from the review.

Independence

As the project reviewer, you bear full responsibility for the project review. It is not possible to delegate the preparation of the review to another person.

Your assessment must be impartial, and the project only may be assessed as submitted.

Your review must be based solely on the official assessment criteria outlined in this Handbook.

Duties of the Reviewer

As a reviewer, you undertake to prepare your review in accordance with the principles of the assessment process and within the given deadline.

If you do not have time to prepare the review, you can request an extension of the deadline. If you do not have enough capacity to prepare the review even in the extended deadline, please let us know in advance so that we manage to require another reviewer for the assessment within the given deadline.

The reviews with formal deficiencies are returned back for their revision/completion.



If any formal deficiencies are left unremoved repeatedly, such a review may be rejected without any entitlement to the fee and the evaluation of the given project assigned to another reviewer.

Scoring Scale

The assessment consists of two parts: numerical and verbal.

In the numerical part, points are awarded on a scale of 20 (excellent) to 0 (not satisfactory). The scoring is done in 1-point increments.

One project may earn maximum up to 100 points.

The minimum threshold for meeting the relevant criterion is not set.

In the verbal part, please justify your assessment by evaluating the level of the project in the relevant criterion.

Please make sure that your verbal assessment corresponds to the number of points awarded and vice versa.

Inconsistency between individual parts of the review is considered a formal error of the review.

Table 1 Scoring Scale

Score	Interpretation of scores ¹
20-17	Excellent. The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.
16-13	Very good. The proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present.
12-9	Good. The proposal addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present.
8-5	Fair. The proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.
4-1	Poor. The criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses
0	The proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing of incomplete information.

Basic Research Projects Assessment Criteria

All submitted projects are evaluated based on 5 criteria.

This assessment method applies to all calls.

Each project is evaluated as submitted; the potential of the project shall not be considered. **In the written part of the assessment, the reviewers are strongly requested to comment explicitly on each quality assessed within the given criterion. It must be clear from your review what motivated you to award such score.**

¹ The interpretation of scores has been adapted based on the one used by the Horizon Europe programme.



1. Timeliness of aims and objectives, the scientific level and the quality of the project (0-20 points)

- Assess the timeliness of the issue solved in the respective field of science and technology
- Assess to what extent the project aims and objectives are clearly defined and feasible
- Assess suitability and justification of the suggested methodology for the project implementation and specify its ability to meet the set aims and objectives

Recommendations for the Reviewers:

This criterion focuses on the assessment of the main research objective and targets of the project in relation to the presented research questions and hypotheses.

Please pay particular attention to how the project orientation links to the related topics currently researched in the scientific and professional literature, or within other grant schemes. This is considered also an important aspect for the subsequent assessment of the project originality (Assessment Criterion 2).

The methodology introduced by the applicant must be thoroughly evaluated so that the review makes it clear to what extent the project topic is connected to the objectives and research procedures.

Assess the achievability of the objectives in relation to the proposed project timeline and financial budget.

2. Original character of the project and conceptions of the project implementation (0-20 points)

- Assess the originality of the project
- Assess the suggested conceptions of the project implementation and the clarity of the formulation of the scientific hypothesis
- Assess the importance of preliminary results, relation of the suggested solution and own published results
- Assess the potential benefits and usability of the project for the development of knowledge and society

Recommendations for the Reviewers:

Please, shortly define the core of the project's originality and comment on the consistency of the scientific hypothesis and its connection to the project's topic. Formulation of the scientific hypothesis as submitted must be clear and comprehensive with the research procedures adequately justified.

When considering the preliminary results of the project, please also take into account the fact how real is to achieve them, e.g. in the case of publication outputs. Assess whether the structure and quality of the planned outputs are achievable in line with the project schedule.



3. The structure of the project, the quality of preparation, the logical interconnection of the project procedures (0-20 points)

- Assess the quality of the project preparation, the clarity and logical interconnection of the procedures and the declared aims and procedures
- Assess the project implementation from the time schedule point of view and from the point of view of the set objectives
- Assess the project's financial aspect

Recommendations for the Reviewers:

This part deals with a comprehensive assessment of three aspects of the submitted proposal: objective, methodology and outputs. When evaluating them, please focus primarily on the applicant's argumentation used throughout the project documentation.

Evaluate the financial budget of the project: the total volume of required financial resources with regard to the planned activities, outputs, personnel and research capacities of the project expressed in hours.

4. Professional qualifications of the principal investigator (0-20 points)

- Assess the quality of scientific outputs of the principal investigator
- Assess the quality of outputs of the projects implemented by the principal investigator
- Assess the personality of the principal investigator in the respective field of research at the worldwide level and/or in the European Research Area, as the case may be

Recommendations for the Reviewers:

When evaluating the professional qualifications of the principal investigator, please focus primarily on the following indicators:

- a) quality and frequency of the most significant publication outputs, the creative contribution of the researcher to the consistency of the subject matter of the publications with the professional focus of the project proposal;*
- b) participation in research projects*
- c) experience in managing a project or a research team*
- d) general impact of the work of the principal investigator expressed by scientometric indicators*

If you are aware of any relevant information about the professional qualifications of the principal investigator beyond the scope of the submitted documentation, please indicate them.

5. Professional qualifications of the research team (0-20 points)

- Assess the level of competence of both the research team and the participating research organisations with regard to the submitted project
- Assess the level of competence of individual members of the research team with regard to the submitted project



- Assess the ability of the members of the research team to co-operate, their mutual complementarity and substitutability during the project implementation
- Assess the existing infrastructure of the workplace(s) and whether it ensures (they ensure) the quality of the project implementation
- Assess to what extent young researchers are involved in the project implementation

Recommendations for the Reviewers:

This is a complex evaluation of the research team and the involved research organizations. Please, take into account the viability of the project and the justification of the amount of requested funding.

If several organizations participate in the project, their contribution to the project results shall be assessed with regard to the assigned tasks, financial budget, research capacities and publications.

When evaluating the individual members of the research team, please consider how the structure of the listed publications is relevant to the tasks that the individual researchers are expected to fulfil within the project. An inconsistency occurs frequently between the qualification of the research team member and the expected project tasks, or this information is completely missing in the project documentation.

The involvement of young researchers in the project should be assessed not only based on their number, but also their research capacity with which they contribute to the implementation of the project.

In criteria 4 and 5, the reviewers and the Council shall consider the age and length of the professional career of the principal investigator and the project team members, as well as their maternity/paternity and parental leave.



Table 2 Overview of the maximum score for each of the criteria in the given areas

Criterion	Quality to be assessed	Total
OBJECTIVES	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Topicality• Clarity• Feasibility• Suitability of the proposed methodology	20
ORIGINALITY AND BENEFITS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Originality of the project• Clarity of the hypothesis• Importance of preliminary results• Potential benefit	20
PROJECT DESIGN	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quality of the proposal• Complementarity of procedures and goals• Timetable• Budget	20
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quality of scientific outputs• Management of project outputs• International reputation	20
RESEARCH TEAM	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Qualification of the involved research organizations and the research team as a whole• Qualification of individual research team members• Research infrastructure• Ability to cooperate and complementarity• Involvement of young researchers	20
		100

How to Submit your Review?

Project reviews are submitted only electronically.

Complete instructions on how to prepare and upload your review in the electronic system are available here: https://www.apvv.sk/buxus/docs/agentura/ine-dokumenty/manual_review_20181130_en.pdf

This Handbook is automatically sent to the e-mail address of the allotted reviewers indicated in their profile.

If you have any question, uncertainty, or you are facing technical issues, do not hesitate, and contact us at: info@apvv.sk.