



SLOVAK RESEARCH
AND DEVELOPMENT
AGENCY



Reviewer's Handbook

A detailed guide for reviewers of SRDA bilateral 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.

Completed 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

An evaluator is obliged to observe the following principles when preparing the review:

- Independence
- Impartiality
- Objectivity
- Non-discrimination and equal treatment
- Confidentiality
- Avoidance of conflicts of interest



Independence, impartiality, objectivity, non-discrimination and equal treatment

The reviewers act as independent experts in the field and do not represent third party interests in the expert assessment process. Projects are assessed on the basis of the information provided in the proposal. The reviewers are obliged to assess the project according to the defined assessment criteria and the terms of the call and do not communicate with the applicants.

Confidentiality

The reviewers are obliged to maintain the confidentiality of all facts relating to the assessment process and will use all information solely in accordance with the purpose of the assessment process. At the same time, the evaluators shall refrain from publishing, forwarding or otherwise disclosing to any third party such information, even after the completion of the assessment process.

The SRDA does not disclose the names of the reviewers of individual projects.

Conflict of interests

A conflict of interest is a situation where an evaluator has a direct or indirect financial, economic or other personal interest that may be considered as compromising their impartiality and independence in relation to the expert review process.

An evaluator has a conflict of interest in particular if they:

- participated directly or indirectly in the preparation of the project or in the preparation of another project proposal under the same Call (e.g. proposal preparation, procurement process, etc.)
- are involved in the project under review as a research team member, partner or contractor
- have direct or indirect benefit in the event of (non-)approval of the application assigned to them for assessment
- are in a family relationship (e.g. parent, spouse, partner, child, person living in the same household, etc.) with the applicant/partner of the applicant (in case of a natural person-entrepreneur), principal investigator, statutory representative/holder of procurement, member of the supervisory or administrative boards of the applicant or their partner
- are or have been an employee of the applicant or the applicant's partner for the last 3 years
- has, or has had in the last 3 years, a commercial interest in the management bodies (statutory representative/holder of procurement, membership of supervisory and administrative boards, etc.) of the applicant or the applicant's partner
- is or has been in the last 3 years a business partner of the applicant or their partner (e.g. property relations in a third company, co-owners of a third company, etc.)



- any other reason or relationship or attitude towards the applicant prevents them from making an impartial professional assessment of the proposal (e.g. personal, professional or other conflict or competitive position vis-à-vis the applicant, etc.)

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.

General Guidelines for the Reviewers

The basic principle of the evaluation is to assess the overall quality of the project in the following three criteria:

1. Excellence
2. Impact
3. Implementation

Please respect the following principles in your assessment:

- Provide substantial, explanatory comments; avoid comments that merely give a description or a summary of the proposal.
- Use dispassionate, analytical, and unambiguous language.
- Use grammatically correct, complete, clear sentences with no jargon.
- Ensure that critical comments are constructive.
- Make sure that comments are in line with the marks/funding recommendation given and avoid referring to them in the comment's narrative.

The inconsistency between the individual parts of the assessment is considered a formal deficiency of the review.

- Avoid self-declaration of insufficient expertise in the proposal.
- Avoid dismissive statements about the applicant, the proposed science, or the scientific field concerned.



- Avoid reference to the applicant's age, nationality, gender, or personal matters.
- Be aware of unconscious bias in aspects such as gender and diversity.
- When assessing the research achievements of the applicants, focus on the scientific content and refrain from using surrogate measures of the quality of research outputs, such as Journal Impact Factors.
- Avoid copy-paste from the proposal

Scoring Scale

The assessment consists of two parts: scores and comments.

One project may earn maximum up to 30 points.

The scoring is done in 1-point increments.

Please make sure that your comments correspond to awarded scores 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
10	Excellent. The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.
9	Very Good. The proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present.
8	Good. The proposal addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present.
7	Fair. The proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.
6	Poor. The criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
5-0	The proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.



Definitions for Score Descriptors

- A '**minor shortcoming**' is an issue that relates only to a marginal aspect of the proposal with respect to the criterion and/or can easily be rectified (it will not impact the scoring).
- A '**shortcoming**' is a problem that relates to an important aspect of the proposal. It impacts the scoring but does not render the proposal inappropriate for funding, i.e. the proposal is still expected to lead to useful results with positive impact.
- A '**significant weakness**' means that the proposal addresses the criterion in a limited and/or not sufficiently effective way (will lower the score below threshold). This can also be the case when the proposal includes a large number of shortcomings, each one of them not rendering the proposal inappropriate for funding, though all together make the proposal not addressing the criterion sufficiently in an effective way.

Thresholds

Projects that, due to lack of quality, do not meet any of the following thresholds will not proceed to the next stage of assessment:

- a) the individual threshold is 6 points in each criterion
- b) the total threshold is 22 points

Projects that do not meet any of the above thresholds will not be funded due to insufficient quality.



Bilateral Projects Assessment Criteria

All submitted projects are evaluated based on 3 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 element assessed within the given criterion. It must be clear from your review what motivated you to award such score.

1. Excellence (0-10 points)

- Evaluate the relevance of the project and the contribution of its implementation to the objective of the call (max. 2 points)
- Assess the thematic focus of the project that is the subject of the application (max. 2 points)
- Evaluate the degree of topicality of the project in the given field of science and technology and the degree of originality of the research objective (max. 2 points)
- Assess the justification for bilateral cooperation and the need for specific foreign partners to participate in the research objective (max. 2 points)
- Evaluate the quality of the scientific outputs and the professional quality of the Principal Investigator and the individual members of the research team (max. 2 points)

2. Impact (0-10 points)

- Evaluate the degree of social or economic benefit of bilateral cooperation for the Slovak Republic, or for the Slovak institution and the research team (max. 2 points)
- Evaluate the expected joint outputs of the bilateral cooperation and the way in which the international partner will be involved (joint project, joint publications, joint participation in conferences and other scientific and professional events, organisation of workshops, etc.) (max. 2 points)
- Assess measures for dissemination and exploitation of the results with regard to the involvement of an international partner (max. 2 points)
- Evaluate the extent to which PhD students and/or young R&D personnel are involved in the project and their potential for professional development resulting from their participation in the project (max. 2 points)
- Assess the extent to which international cooperation creates opportunities for sustaining and developing further cooperation (max. 2 points)

3. Implementation (0-10 points)

- Assess the objectives and timeline of the project with regard to the logical continuity of the solution procedures and the fulfilment of the stated objectives (max. 2 points)



- Evaluate the type, purpose and timing of the mobility activities for each stage of the project and the involvement of the research team in the mobility activities (max. 2 points)
- Assess the type and purpose of foreign partners' stay at the Slovak institution (max. 2 points)
- Evaluate the adequacy of the requested funding in the context of the planned mobility activities (max. 2 points)
- Assess other sources (project, institutional support, private sector, etc.) supporting the research part of the project (max. 2 points)

In the relevant criteria, the reviewers and the Agency Council take into account the time of the active professional life of the Principal Investigator the research team members, especially with regard to the maternity and parental leave.

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/inedokumenty/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.