European Commission

HORIZON 2020
PROPOSAL EVALUATION

Standard briefing

HORIZON 2020

Content

- **Horizon 2020: a new type of EU R&I programme**
  - New type of calls and proposals
  - More emphasis on innovation
  - Cross-cutting issues
  - Impact of time to grant on evaluation

- **Role of independent experts**
  - Confidentiality
  - Conflicts of interest

- **The evaluation procedure in practice**
  - Individual evaluation, including evaluation criteria and proposal scoring
  - Consensus
  - Panel review, including proposals with identical total scores


European
Commission
HORIZON 2020
PROPOSAL EVALUATION
A NEW TYPE OF EU R&I
PROGRAMME

New types of calls and proposals

- **Calls are challenged-based, and therefore more open to innovative proposals**
  - Calls are less prescriptive - they do not outline the expected solutions to the problem, nor the approach to be taken to solve it
  - Calls/topics descriptions allow plenty of scope for applicants to propose innovative solutions of their own choice
- **There is a greater emphasis on impact, in particular through each call / topic impact statements**
  - Applicants are asked to explain how their work will contribute to bringing about the described impacts
  - During the evaluation, you are asked to assess this potential contribution.
- **Proposals may be both inter-disciplinary and cross-sectoral in nature to tackle specific challenges**

More emphasis on innovation*

- **Substantial support to activities** such as prototyping and testing, demonstrating and piloting, first market replication - establishing technical and economic viability in (near) operational environments

- **Significant support to demand side approaches**
  innovation procurement (pre-commercial procurement and public procurement of innovative solutions), standard-setting, inducement prices…

- **Piloting new forms and sources of innovation**
  extending beyond technological and research-based innovation

- **Leveraging and boosting engagement of industry**
  Public Private Partnerships, SME measures, Debt and Equity Instruments…

- **When you evaluate a proposal, you need to take into account innovation activities in the targeted innovation actions as well as in research and innovation actions**

* **The definitions of the terms used are available in the Horizon 2020 Glossary on the Participant Portal**

Cross-cutting issues

- **Cross-cutting issues are fully integrated in the work programme (WP):**
  - **Social Sciences and Humanities** (SSH) is integrated across all Horizon 2020 activities to successfully address European challenges
  - **Gender dimension in the content of R&I** - a standard question on relevance of sex/gender analysis is included in proposal templates
  - **The new strategic approach to international cooperation** consists of a general opening of the WP and targeted activities across all relevant Horizon 2020 parts
    - **The approach to providing 'automatic funding' to third country participants is restricted – see list of countries**
    - **you should check requests for 'exceptional funding'**
  - **Other cross-cutting issues** such as science education, open access to scientific publications, ethics, standardisation … may also be included in the WP
- **When you evaluate a proposal, you need to take into account cross-cutting issues if explicitly mentioned under the scope of the topic**
  - A successful proposal is expected to include these elements, or convincingly explain why not relevant in a particular case

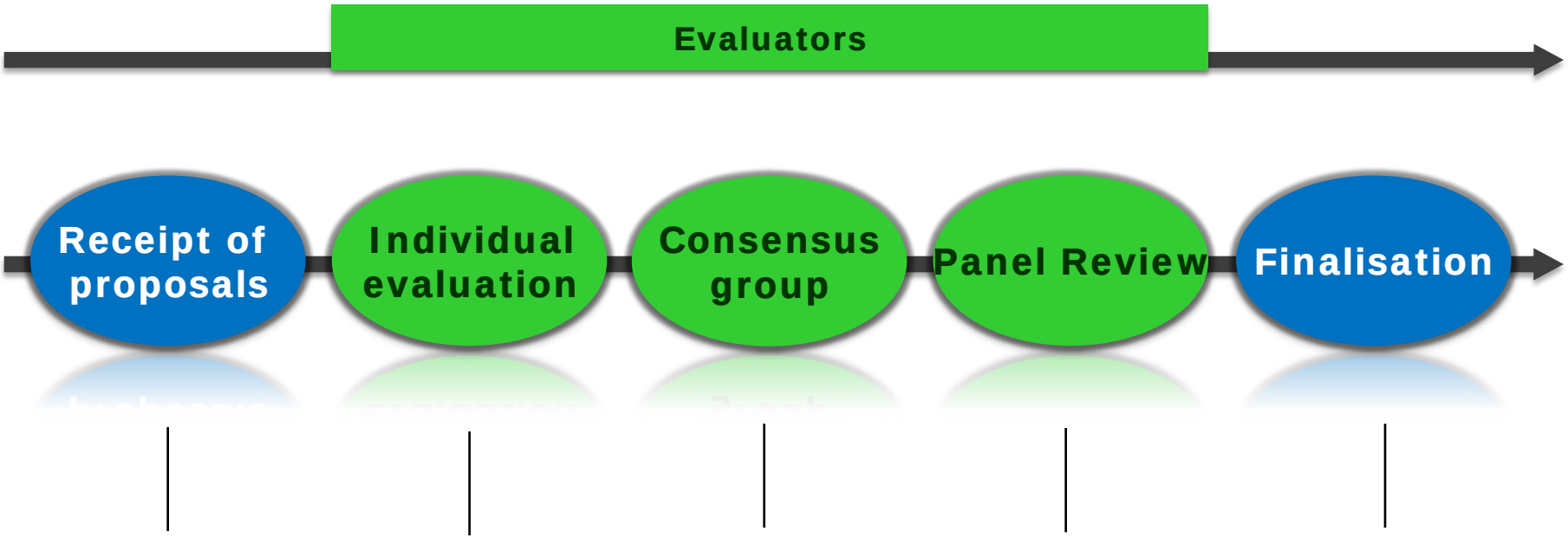
Impact of grant preparation on evaluation

- **No grant negotiation phase!**
  - **The time from submission of a proposal, evaluation and signature of the grant has been reduced to a maximum of 8 months**
    (max. 5 months for evaluation + max. 3 months for grant signature)
- **What does this mean for the evaluation of proposal?**
  - **You evaluate each proposal as submitted**
    not on its potential if certain changes were to be made
  - **You do not recommend substantial modifications**
    such as change of partners, additional work packages, significant budget or resources cut, additional scientific activities to strengthen the concept, trans-disciplinary aspects not appropriately covered…
  - **If you identify significant shortcomings, you must reflect those in a lower score for the relevant criterion**
    Proposals requiring substantial modifications are not expected to pass the relevant thresholds
- **Is there a margin for making some recommendations?**
  - Minor and specific corrections to be implemented without negotiation, e.g. timing of work package…
  - Obvious clerical errors

HORIZON 2020
PROPOSAL EVALUATION

EVALUATION PROCESS

Overview of the Evaluation Process



Role of independent experts

- **As independent expert, you evaluate proposals submitted in response to a given call**

- **You are responsible for carrying out the evaluation of the proposals yourself**
  You are not allowed to delegate the work to another person!

- **Significant funding decisions will be made on the basis of your advice**

Guiding principles

- ***Independence***
  - **You are evaluating in a personal capacity**
  - **You represent neither your employer, nor your country!**
- ***Impartiality***
  - **You must treat equally all proposals and evaluate them impartially on their merits, irrespective of their origin or the identity of the applicants**
- ***Objectivity***
  - **You evaluate each proposal as submitted; meaning on its own merit, not its potential if certain changes were to be made**
- ***Accuracy***
  - **You make your judgment against the official evaluation criteria and the [call/topic] the proposal addresses, and nothing else**
- ***Consistency***
  - **You apply the same standard of judgment to all proposals**

Confidentiality

You must:

- **not discuss evaluation matters**, such as the content of proposals, the evaluation results or the opinions of fellow experts, with anyone, including:
  - other experts or Commission/Agencies staff or any other person (e.g. colleagues, students…) not directly involved in the evaluation of the proposal
  - *The sole exception*: your fellow experts who are evaluating the same proposal in a consensus group or Panel review
- **not contact partners in the consortium, sub-contractors or any third parties**
- **not disclose the names of your fellow experts**
  - The Commission publishes the names of the experts annually, but as a group, no link can be made between an expert and a proposal
- **maintain the confidentiality of documents**, paper or electronic, at all times and wherever you do your evaluation work (on-site or remotely)
  - Please take nothing away from the evaluation building (be it paper or electronic)
  - Return, destroy or delete all confidential documents, paper or electronic, upon completing your work, as instructed

Conflicts of interest (COI) (1)

You have a COI if you:

- were involved in the preparation of the proposal
- stand to benefit directly / indirectly if the proposal is successful
- have a close family / personal relationship with someone involved in the proposal
- are a director / trustee / partner of an applicant or involved in the management of an applicant's organisation
- are employed or contracted by an applicant or a named subcontractor
- are a member of a Horizon 2020 Advisory Group or Programme Committee
- are a National Contact Point or are directly working for the Enterprise Europe Network

Conflicts of interest (COI) (2)

You have a COI if you:

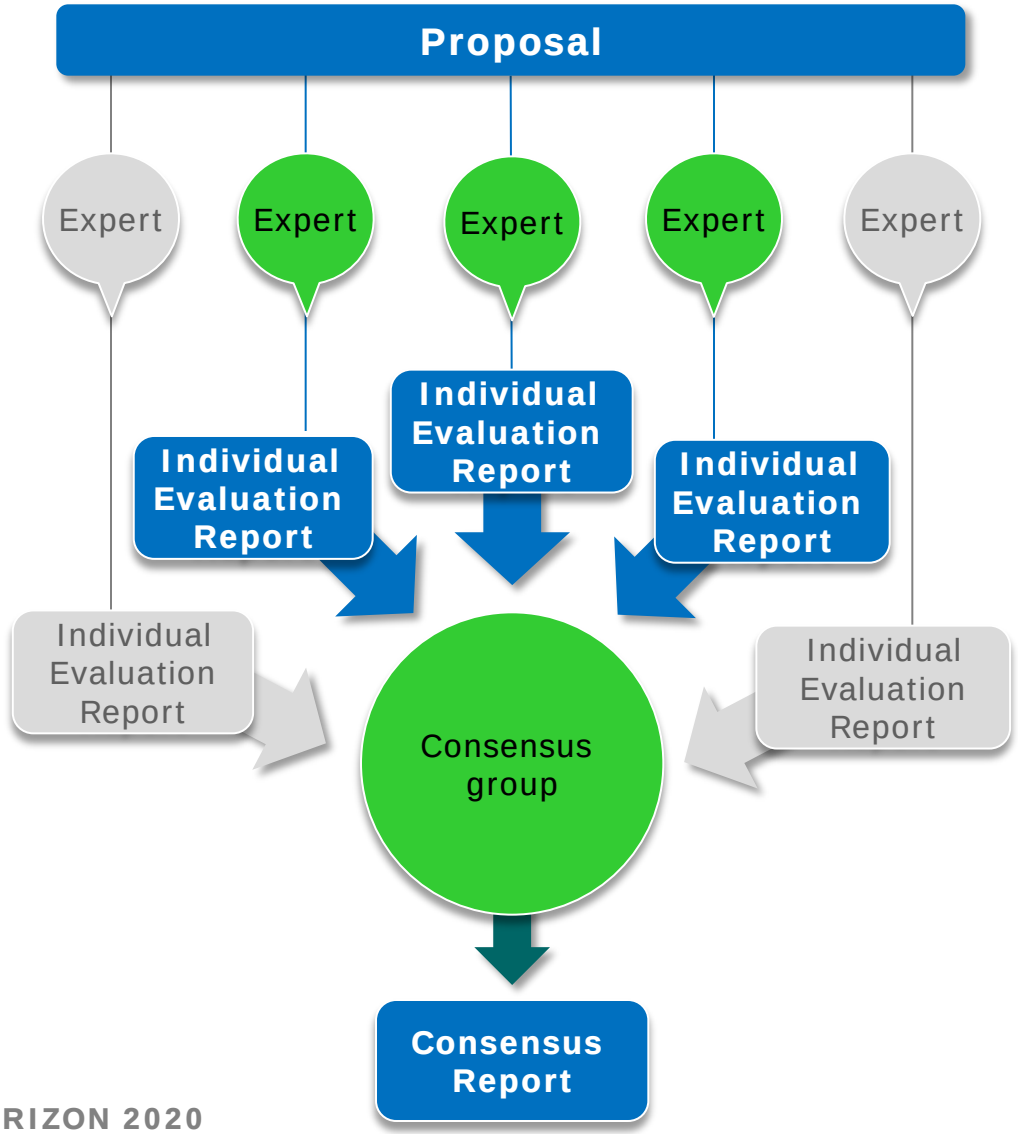
- **act as a referee in the case of Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions evaluators**
- **are in any other situation that compromises your impartiality such as:**
  - were employed by an applicant or sub-contractor in the last 3 years
  - were involved in a grant agreement/decision, the membership of management structures or a research collaboration with an applicant in the last 3 years
  - are in any other situation that casts doubt on your impartiality or that could reasonably appear to do so

COI conditions are spelled out in your contract and in the Code of Conduct (Annex 1)

Conflicts of interest (COI)

- **You must inform the Commission / Agency as soon as you become aware of a COI**
  - before the signature of the contract
  - upon receipt of proposals, or
  - during the course of your work
- **If there is a COI for a certain proposal you cannot evaluate it**
  - Neither individually
  - Nor in the consensus group
  - nor in the panel review
  - The Commission will determine if there is a COI on a case-by-case basis and decide the course of action to follow
- **If you knowingly hide a COI, you will be excluded from the evaluation and your work declared null and void**
  - The allowance/expenses you claimed may be reduced, rejected or recovered
  - Your contract may be terminated

Evaluation Process



Eligible proposal

Minimum 3 experts

Individual evaluation

Consensus

Admissibility and eligibility checks

- **Admissibility is checked by the Commission / Agency:**
  - Readable, accessible and printable
  - Completeness of proposal
    presence of all requested forms
  - Plan for exploitation and dissemination of results (unless otherwise specified in the WP)

new

Page limits: Clearly set out in electronic system; excess page marked with a watermark

- **Eligibility should already have been checked by the Commission / Agency:**
  - Minimum number of partners as set out in the call conditions
  - "Out of scope" - a proposal will only be deemed ineligible in clear-cut cases
  - Other criteria may apply on a call-by-call basis as set out in the call conditions
- **However, if you spot an issue relating to eligibility when evaluating a proposal, please inform the Commission / Agency**

Evaluation criteria

- **There are three evaluation criteria:**
  - Excellence (relevant to the topic of the call)
  - Impact
  - Quality and efficiency of the implementation
    - Applicants are not required to provide detailed breakdown of costs
    - This criterion is not evaluated in the first stage of a two-stage procedure

- **The criteria are adapted to each type of action, as specified in the WP**

Evaluation criteria

Instructions: Keep slide if it refers to the type of action of your call/topic. Otherwise, delete it.

Research and Innovation / Innovation / SME instrument

- For the first stage of a two-stage procedure, only the aspects of the criteria in yellow are evaluated

Excellence

Clarity and pertinence of the objectives

Soundness of the concept, including trans-disciplinary considerations, where relevant

Extent that proposed work is ambitious, has innovation potential, and is beyond the state of the art (e.g. ground-breaking objectives, novel concepts and approaches)

Credibility of the proposed approach

Impact

The expected impacts listed in the work programme under the relevant topic

Enhancing innovation capacity and integration of new knowledge

Strengthening the competitiveness and growth of companies by developing innovations meeting the needs of European and global markets; and, where relevant, by delivering such innovations to the markets

Any other environmental and socially important impacts (not already covered above)

Effectiveness of the proposed measures to exploit and disseminate the project results (including management of IPR), to communicate the project, and to manage research data where relevant

Implementation

Coherence and effectiveness of the work plan, including appropriateness of the allocation of tasks and resources

Complementarity of the participants within the consortium (when relevant)

Appropriateness of the management structures and procedures, including risk and innovation management

Evaluation criteria

Coordination & Support Actions

Instructions: Keep slide if it refers to the type of action of your call/topic. Otherwise, delete it.

- For the first stage of a two-stage procedure, only the aspects of the criteria in yellow are evaluated

Excellence

Clarity and pertinence of the objectives

Soundness of the concept

Quality of the proposed coordination and/or support measures

Credibility of the proposed approach

Impact

The expected impacts listed in the work programme under the relevant topic

Effectiveness of the proposed measures to exploit and disseminate the project results (including management of IPR), to communicate the project, and to manage research data where relevant

Implementation

Coherence and effectiveness of the work plan, including appropriateness of the allocation of tasks and resources

Complementarity of the participants within the consortium (when relevant)

Appropriateness of the management structures and procedures, including risk and innovation management

Evaluation criteria

ERA-NET Cofund

Instructions: Keep slide if it refers to the type of action of your call/topic. Otherwise, delete it.

- For the first stage of a two-stage procedure, only the aspects of the criteria in yellow are evaluated

Excellence

Clarity and pertinence of the objectives

Level of ambition in the collaboration and commitment of the participants in the proposed ERA-NET action to pool national resources and coordinate their national/regional research programmes

Credibility of the proposed approach

Impact

The expected impacts listed in the work programme under the relevant topic

Achievement of critical mass for the funding of trans-national projects by pooling of national/regional resources and contribution to establishing and strengthening a durable cooperation between the partners and their national/regional research programmes

Effectiveness of the proposed measures to exploit and disseminate the project results and to communicate the project

Implementation

Coherence and effectiveness of the work plan, including appropriateness of the allocation of tasks and resources

Complementarity of the participants within the consortium (when relevant)

Appropriateness of the management structures and procedures, including risk and innovation management

Evaluation criteria

Instructions: Keep slide if it refers to the type of action of your call/topic. Otherwise, delete it.

Pre-Commercial Procurement
Public Procurement of Innovative Solutions Cofund

- For the first stage of a two-stage procedure, only the aspects of the criteria in yellow are evaluated

Excellence

Clarity and pertinence of the objectives

Progress beyond the state of the art in terms of the degree of innovation needed to satisfy the procurement need

Credibility of the proposed approach

Impact

The expected impacts listed in the work programme under the relevant topic

Strengthening the competitiveness and growth of companies by developing innovations meeting the needs of European and global procurement markets

Effectiveness of the proposed measures to exploit and disseminate the project results (including management of IPR), to communicate the project

More forward-looking concerted procurement approaches that reduce fragmentation of demand for innovative solutions

Implementation

Coherence and effectiveness of the work plan, including appropriateness of the allocation of tasks and resources

Complementarity of the participants within the consortium (when relevant)

Appropriateness of the management structures and procedures, including risk and innovation management

Individual evaluation

- **You read the proposal and evaluate it against the evaluation criteria**
  - without discussing it with anybody else
  - as submitted - not on its potential if certain changes were to be made new
  - look at the substance – some proposals might be handicapped by language difficulties, other deceptively well written
- **You disregard excess pages which are marked with a watermark** new
- **You check to what degree the proposal is 'in scope' of the call / topic**
  - If marginally relevant to the [call/topic], you must reflect this in a lower score for the Excellence criterion
- **You complete an Individual Evaluation Report (IER)**
  - give your view on whether each applicant has the necessary basic operational capacity to carry out the activity(ies) for which they are responsible new
    - **based on the information provided (i.e. CV; relevant publications or achievements; relevant previous projects…)**
  - give comments and scores for all evaluation criteria (scores must match comments)
  - do not recommend substantial modifications new
- **you then sign and submit the form in the electronic system**

Elements to be reflected in the evaluation

If a proposal

- **is only marginally relevant in terms of its scientific, technological or innovation content relating to the [call/topic] addressed, you must reflect this in a lower score for the Excellence criterion**
  - No matter how excellent the science!

- **does not significantly contribute to the expected impacts as specified in the WP for that [call/topic], you must reflect this in a lower score for the Impact criterion**

- **would require substantial modifications in terms of implementation (i.e. change of partners, additional work packages, significant budget or resources cut…), you must reflect this in a lower score for the "Quality and efficiency of the implementation" criterion**

- **If cross-cutting issues are explicitly mentioned in the scope of the [call/topic], and not properly addressed (or their non-relevance justified), you must reflect this in a lower score for the relevant criterion**
  - Proposals addressing cross-cutting issues which are not explicitly mentioned in the scope of the [call/topic] can also be evaluated positively

Proposal scoring

Instructions
Remove bullet points that do not apply to the type of action and procedure (single or two stage) of your call/topic

- **You give a score of between 0 and 5 to each criterion based on your comments**
  - Half-marks can be used
  - The whole range of scores should be used
  - Scores must pass *thresholds* if a proposal is to be considered for funding
- **Thresholds apply to individual criteria…**
  The default threshold is 3 (unless specified otherwise in the WP)
- **…and to the total score**
  The default overall threshold is 10 (unless specified otherwise in the WP)

- **For Innovation actions and the SME instrument, the criterion Impact is given a weight of 1.5 to determine the ranking**

- **For first stage of a two-stage procedure, you only evaluate the criteria *Excellence* and (part of) *Impact***
  - In that case, only the aspects of the criteria in bold are considered
  - Default threshold for individual criteria is 4 (unless specified otherwise in the WP)
  - Default overall threshold is 8 (unless specified otherwise in the WP)

Interpretation of the scores

0	**The proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be judged due to missing or incomplete information**
1	**Poor.** The criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
2	**Fair.** While the proposal broadly addresses the criterion, there are significant weaknesses.
3	**Good.** The proposal addresses the criterion well, although a number of shortcomings are present.
4	**Very Good.** The proposal addresses the criterion very well, although a small number of shortcomings are present.
5	**Excellent.** The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

Consensus

- **It usually involves a discussion on the basis of the individual evaluations**
  - It is not just a simple averaging exercise
- **The aim is to find agreement on comments and scores**
  - Agree comments before scores!
- **If an applicant lacks basic operational capacity, you make comments and score the proposal without taking into account this partner and its associated activity(ies)**
- **“Outlying” opinions need to be explored**
  - They might be as valid as others – be open-minded
  - It is normal for individual views to change

Consensus report

- **The *rapporteur* is responsible for drafting the consensus report (CR)**
  - including consensus comments and scores
  - In some cases, the rapporteur does not take part in the discussion
- **The quality of the CR is paramount**
  - It often remains unchanged at the panel stage
- **The aim of the CR is to give:**
  - a clear assessment of the proposal based on its merit, with justification
  - clear feedback on the proposal's weaknesses and strengths
- **Avoid:**
  - comments not related to the criterion in question
  - comments that are too short or too long or use inappropriate language
    you should explain what you mean in an adequate length and clear manner
  - categorical statements that have not been properly verified
    eg. "The proposal doesn't mention user requirements" – when there is a short reference…
  - scores that don't match the comments
  - marking down a proposal for the same critical aspect under two different criteria

Consensus group

- **It is moderated by Commission / Agency staff (or an expert in some cases) who**
  - manages the evaluation, protects its confidentiality and ensures its fairness
  - ensures objectivity and accuracy, makes all voices heard and points discussed, helps you keep time
  - helps the group reach a consensual conclusion
  - provides information if necessary
  - does not give an opinion
- **Observer(s), appointed by the Commission / Agency may attend any meetings, to ensure a high quality evaluation. They:**
  - check the functioning and running of the overall process
  - Advise, in their report, on the conduct and fairness of the evaluation sessions and, if necessary, suggest possible improvements
  - do not evaluate proposals and, therefore, do not express any opinion on their quality
  - may raise any questions - please give them your full support

The panel review

- **Consists of experts from the consensus groups and/or new experts**
- **Ensure the consistency of comments and scores given at the consensus stage**
- **Resolves any cases where a minority view is recorded in the CR**
- **Endorses the final scores and comments for each proposal**
  - Any new comments and scores (if necessary) should be carefully justified
- **Prioritises proposals with identical total scores, after any adjustments for consistency**
- **Recommend a list of proposals in priority order**
- **May also hold hearings at which applicants are invited to present their proposal**

Proposals with identical total scores

- **For each group of proposals with identical total scores, the panel considers first proposals that address topics that are not already covered by more highly-ranked proposals**
- **The panel then orders them according to:**
  - first, their score for Excellence,
  - and second, their score for Impact

  [for Innovation actions and SME instrument, first their score for Impact and second for Excellence]
- **If there are ties, the panel takes into account the following factors:**
  - First, the size of the budget allocated to SMEs
  - Second, the gender balance of personnel carrying out the research and/or innovation activities
- **If there are still ties, the panel agrees further factors to consider:**
  - e.g. synergies between projects or contribution to the objectives of the call or of Horizon 2020
- **The same method is then applied to proposals that address topics that are already covered by more highly-ranked proposals**

Instructions
Adapt the second bullet point to the type of action of your call/topic

Ethics review

- **Only proposals that comply with the ethical principles and legislation may receive funding**
- **For proposals above threshold and considered for funding, an ethics screening and, if necessary, an ethics assessment is carried out by independent ethics experts in parallel with the scientific evaluation or soon after**
  - Proposals involving the use of human embryonic stems cells automatically undergo an ethics assessment
- **For those proposals in which one or more ethical issues have been identified, the experts will assess whether the ethics issues are adequately addressed**
- **The ethics experts will produce an ethics report and give an opinion on the proposal, including:**
  - granting ethics clearance (or not)
  - recommending the inclusion of 'ethics requirements' in the grant agreement, or
- **recommending a further Ethics Assessment and/or an Ethics Check or Audit**

Logistics

- **A new electronic system for the evaluation of proposals is available and accessible via your ECAS password**
- **Please bring your own device**
  - You are invited to bring your own laptop/tablet/notebook for the on-site evaluation in Brussels
  - There are no fixed computers available in the open space/reading rooms of the evaluation building in Brussels
    - Laptops are available upon request
    - Fixed computers are available in the meeting rooms
- **Reduction of paper copies**
  - A few printers are available in the evaluation building in Brussels
  - Copies of proposals will be still made available for the on-site evaluation
- **Electronic workflow**
  - The processing of your payment requests is done electronically (no more queues for reimbursement)
  - Please make sure you know your ECAS login and password

Feedback

- When you get home, you will receive an on-line questionnaire on your experience in this evaluation session
- It is important that you complete it as carefully and as promptly as possible
- Your feedback helps us maintain and improve the quality of our evaluation process
- Thank you!