

Guide for BONUS proposal evaluators

Specific to the BONUS call 2015: Blue Baltic

Please note that this document may be subject to changes. Any changes made are announced on the BONUS website at www.bonusportal.org/calls and notified as appropriate.

Disclaimer

This guide is aimed at assisting evaluators in BONUS proposals. Neither the BONUS EEIG nor any person acting on its behalf can be held responsible for the use made of these guidance notes.

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Welcome

You have been contracted as an expert – an evaluation panel member to participate in the evaluation process of the call for proposals submitted to the joint Baltic Sea research and development programme BONUS 2011-2017. The panel consists of 20-30 science and policy experts appointed by the BONUS Steering Committee.

The following chapters introduce BONUS and provide practical guidance for the evaluation process. Other documents providing further support for the evaluation task at hand are:

- **The BONUS strategic research agenda 2011-2017, update 2014** that sets the overall framework of the BONUS programme and describes its strategic objectives, themes and the expected outcomes, including those relevant for this call
- **The BONUS call 2015: Blue Baltic fact sheet** that gives the concise key data about this call for proposals including the themes covered, budget, call timeline and eligibility conditions
- **The BONUS conflict of interest rules** (Annex 1)

The evaluation process includes the following steps:

- 1) The BONUS Secretariat checks the proposals against the eligibility criteria listed in the call fact sheet and the guide for applicants.
- 2) Each proposal is sent to at least three evaluators based on their closest possible competence in relation to the topic of the proposal and expertise necessary to cover the evaluation criteria set. The BONUS Secretariat appoints one of the experts as the ‘rapporteur’ for the group of evaluators working on the same proposal, making him/her responsible for formulating a consensus evaluation report on the proposal.
- 3) Each expert examines the received proposals individually and submits an individual evaluation report on each proposal separately through the BONUS Electronic Proposal Submission System by the deadline set. The proposals are evaluated on the basis of their individual merits applying the criteria presented in this guide, according to the principles of confidentiality and the conflicts of interest rules. The evaluation is done by the experts alone.
- 4) After the deadline of submissions set for the evaluators, the rapporteur goes through all the individual evaluation reports of the proposals under his/her responsibility. Approximately in one week’s time, based on these individual evaluation reports, he/she prepares a draft consensus evaluation report for the panel meeting.
- 5) All experts attend a 2-3 day evaluation panel meeting in Helsinki during the week 21 (23-26 May 2016)¹ to agree about the scores, comments and ranking of the proposals.
- 6) The comments and scores are first agreed in consensus panel meetings among the experts who have evaluated the particular proposal in question. Then the ranking of proposals is agreed upon in a review meeting represented by all of the consensus panels.

The BONUS Secretariat and the representatives of the national funding institutions (i.e. the Call Task Force), as well as an independent observer and an observer from the European Commission will be present during the evaluation panel meeting.

¹ Travel arrangements will be done by the BONUS Secretariat.

1. What is BONUS?

BONUS is a joint Baltic Sea research and development programme of the EU member states surrounding the Baltic Sea (= participating states) and the European Community.

The objective of BONUS is to enhance the Baltic Sea region's research capacity to underpin the development and implementation of 'fit-for-purpose' regulations, policies and management practices, and to respond effectively to the major environmental and key societal challenges that the region faces and will face in the coming years. In order to fulfil these objectives, BONUS aims to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Baltic Sea region's fragmented environmental research by integrating the research activities on the Baltic Sea system into a durable, cooperative, interdisciplinary and focussed multi-national programme. Hence, BONUS contributes to the establishment and structuring of the European Research Area in the Baltic Sea region.

BONUS has established a policy-driven strategic research agenda and appropriate stakeholder consultation platforms with representation from all relevant sectors. BONUS enhances cross-border and cross-sectoral coordination and integration of public research programmes and supports rising of the research capacity of the new Baltic member states of the European Union. Furthermore, BONUS mobilises financial resources from cross-sectoral Baltic Sea system research collaboration and launches cross-thematic and strategically focussed calls for proposals and finance collaborative projects.

The programme has four main management priorities:

- Setting up and implementing a Baltic Sea system programme by opening competitive calls for proposals and funding projects of high excellence and relevance.
- Facilitating the cooperation of Baltic Sea system researchers and integration of research programmes. BONUS will support variety of specific support actions: organisation of conferences and workshops, facilitation of communication and information exchange as well as common use of research infrastructures.
- Strengthening human capacity building in interdisciplinary science and science-based management with particular focus on the young generation.
- Establishing effective links between scientists, policy makers and knowledge users. The aim is that the impact of BONUS is high in ensuring that the Baltic Sea system research is applicable for real-life solutions and that policymaking is based on sound scientific knowledge.

1.1. What is the BONUS vision?

BONUS vision is

Economically and ecologically prosperous Baltic Sea region where resources and goods are used sustainably and where the long-term management of the region is based on sound knowledge derived from multi-disciplinary research.

As outlined in the BONUS strategic research agenda, BONUS brings together the research and innovation communities of marine, maritime, economical and societal research to address the major challenges faced by the Baltic Sea region.

1.2. What is the geographical area of BONUS?

The Baltic Sea system is a term derived from the Earth system science concept. In the context of the BONUS programme, the Baltic Sea system includes the Baltic Sea ecosystem with its living and non-living elements as well as the catchment, the climatic system, and also the societal system depending on and interacting with the natural compartments of the system.

Baltic Sea region is a geopolitical entity including countries neighbouring with the Baltic Sea: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Russian Federation (North-Western part) and Sweden. Eight of the Baltic Sea region countries are EU member states as well as participating states of BONUS.

1.3. What are the strategic objectives of the BONUS research and development programme?

These are defined in the strategic research agenda that has been developed and agreed upon in consultation among the participating states, a broad range of stakeholders and the European Commission. Periodically a new round of consultations will be arranged and the strategic research agenda will be updated (last update in 2014) to better reflect the research and innovation needs arising from policy development.

The strategic objectives of the BONUS research programme are:

- 1) Understanding the Baltic Sea ecosystem structure and functioning.
- 2) Meeting the multifaceted challenges in linking the Baltic Sea with its coast and catchment area.
- 3) Enhancing sustainable use of coastal and marine goods and services of the Baltic Sea.
- 4) Improving the capabilities of the society to respond to the current and future challenges directed to the Baltic Sea region.
- 5) Developing improved and innovative observation and data management systems, tools and methodologies for marine information needs in the Baltic Sea region.

1.4. Who can participate in a BONUS project?

The BONUS programme is implemented via multi-partner, transnational projects involving at least three legal entities eligible for funding that are independent of each other, referred to as project participants². The participants must be from three different EU member states or associated countries³, of which at least two are BONUS participating states (see below). The legal entity acting as the project coordinator has to be established in one of the BONUS participating states. The project participants can also include legal entities from third countries, the European Commission Joint Research Centre and international organisations⁴. The project participants form a consortium.

² Participant is legal entity (research institute, university, company or other entity) that is part of a consortium and implements part of the work described in the description of work.

³ Associated country means a third country which is party to an international agreement with the European Community, under the terms of or on the basis of which it makes a financial contribution to all or part of the 7th Framework Programme (BONUS is funded from the EU Research Framework Programme (FP7) and all respective legal documents will be valid until the end of the BONUS programme despite the Horizon 2020 rules being operative since the start of 2014.)

⁴ BONUS EEIG has an obligation to communicate to the European Commission information on the applicants which are in one of the situations referred to in Article 93(l)(e) of the EU Financial Regulation, where the conduct of the operator concerned was detrimental to the financial interests of the EU.

BONUS participating states: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden

Non-BONUS EU member states: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, United Kingdom

Associated countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Faroe Islands, FYR Macedonia, Iceland, Israel, Liechtenstein, Republic of Moldova, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland and Turkey

Third countries: any other country not mentioned above

International organisations: intergovernmental organisations, other than the European Community, that has a legal personality under international public law as well as any specialised agency set up by such an international organisation.

1.5. How the BONUS projects and their participants are funded?

The BONUS projects are funded through two sources of funding streams:

- National funding institutions to the respective national participants
- The BONUS EEIG to project coordinators, who distribute the EU funding to the participants involved in the particular project

After the decision has been made of which projects are recommended to be funded by BONUS, national funding institutions may request the respective national participants to submit the project proposal following the national application procedure. In such cases, the applicants concerned are contacted by the respective national funding institution separately.

The BONUS funding differs for different types of legal entities established in different groups of countries (see Chapter 3 in the Guide for applicants, BONUS call 2015, downloadable at www.bonusportal.org/calls, for more details).

1.6. How have the themes of the calls been defined?

The themes of the BONUS calls for proposals are derived from the strategic research agenda 2011-2017, update 2014⁵. These have been developed and agreed upon in consultation among the participating states, a broad range of stakeholders and the European Commission.

The themes open in this call are listed in the call-specific fact sheet and described in more detail within the BONUS strategic research agenda 2011-2017, update 2014.

The call fact sheet is published when the call opens on the BONUS website (www.bonusportal.org/calls) and in relevant national and European media and it contains key information about the following topics: the themes that are open, their expected impacts, eligibility and ranking criteria as well as available budget for support in total per project or an array of themes, maximum funding and duration of the projects and other specific criteria and related eligibility criteria.

⁵ BONUS Publication No. 14, 2014

1.7. What are the principles of the evaluation procedure?

In selecting the experts and setting up the evaluation procedure, the BONUS Steering Committee has paid particular attention to the broad based expertise and qualifications that are needed in order to cover the themes of the call, including scientific, technological and policy expertise. Moreover, that no conflict of interest arises and that the evaluation procedure follows the principles of:

- **Excellence.** Projects selected for funding must demonstrate a high quality in the context of the topics and criteria set out in the call.
- **Transparency.** Funding decisions are based on clearly described rules and procedures and applicants receive adequate feedback on the outcome of the evaluation of their proposals.
- **Fairness and impartiality.** All proposals submitted to the call are treated equally. They are evaluated impartially on their merits, irrespective of their origin or the identity of the applicants.
- **Confidentiality.** All proposals and related data, knowledge and documents communicated to BONUS are treated in confidence.
- **Efficiency and speed.** Evaluation and grant preparation are as rapid as possible and commensurate with maintaining the quality of the evaluation.
- **Ethical considerations.** Any proposal that contravenes fundamental ethical principles may be excluded at any time from the process of evaluation, selection and award.

All material handled by the experts during the evaluation process shall be destroyed after the completion of the evaluation. The identity of the experts participating in the evaluation process is made public after the funding decisions are confirmed on general, non-proposal specific level.

2. Expert's work before the panel meeting

Each proposal is to be evaluated remotely via internet by at least three experts. The remote evaluation is done between 24 March and 2 May. Each contracted expert receives a unique pass to the BONUS Electronic Proposal Submission System accessible via the BONUS website at www.bonusportal.org/calls granting access to the relevant documents. All information in the BONUS Electronic Proposal Submission System shall be treated as confidential.

During the contract negotiation, each expert needs to confirm that there is no conflict of interest related to the proposals appointed to her/him. The criteria for conflict of interest are presented in Annex 1. If a conflict of interest appears, the expert should immediately inform the BONUS Secretariat about this. Before starting to submit the individual evaluation reports to the BONUS Electronic Proposal Submission System, the expert has to agree with confidentiality agreement and reconfirm that there is no conflict of interest related to the proposal that is to be evaluated. If in any doubt, experts are advised to consult the BONUS Secretariat (tel. +358 40 0404011, email: helpdesk@bonusportal.org)

2.1. What are the evaluation criteria?

The experts are invited to review the quality of the submitted proposals based on three core evaluation criteria.

The core evaluation criteria and respective sub-criteria are:

Scientific and/or technological excellence (score 0-5, threshold 4):

- soundness of concept and quality of objectives
- progress beyond the state-of-the-art, interdisciplinarity⁶, new approaches
- quality and effectiveness of the scientific and/or technological methodology, associated description of work and planned deliverables

Quality and efficiency of the implementation and the management (score 0-5, threshold 3):

- appropriateness of the management structure and procedures
- quality and relevant experience of the individual applicants
- quality of the consortium as a whole (including complementarity and representation of different disciplines, balance of workload among applicants, research environments, involvement of end users)
- appropriate allocation and justification of the resources to be committed (personnel, equipment, travel, subcontracting and other costs) including use of significant research infrastructures, if applicable
- rationality of the researcher training and/or involvement of SMEs and other industrial partners in the project implementation, level of interaction among the innovation stakeholders (especially for proposals addressing the call themes with mandatory enterprise participation)

The potential impact through the development, dissemination and use of project results (score 0-5, threshold 4):

- relevance of the proposal in relation to the themes and expected outcomes of the call described in the call fact sheet and detailed in the BONUS strategic research agenda 2011-2017, update 2014

⁶ **interdisciplinarity** is a process in which researchers work jointly, but from each of their respective disciplinary perspectives, to address a common problem (Pohl, C., P.Perrig-Chiello, Butz B., G.Hirsch Hadorn, D.Joye, R.Lawrence, M.Nentwich, T.Paulsen, M.Rossini, B.Truffer, D.Wastl-Walter, U.Wiesmann, J.Zinsstag (2010). Questions to evaluate inter- and transdisciplinary research proposals. Working paper. Swiss Academies of Arts and Sciences).

- impact from the project on the assessment, modification, improvement and/or enhancing the effectiveness of the relevant policies and ultimately to the improvement of the Baltic Sea environment
- take up and use of the project results' by end-users including the clarity, appropriateness and efficiency of the planned knowledge transfer measures
- appropriateness of measures for the dissemination and/or exploitation of project results

Total: 0-15, threshold 12.

2.2. How to assess interdisciplinarity?

BONUS aims at fostering problem solving oriented research in order to develop 'fit-for-purpose' regulations, policies and management practices and decision support tools, to respond effectively to the major environmental and key societal challenges of the region. Therefore, projects to be supported by BONUS need to have strong, interdisciplinary approach with a balanced representation of natural and socioeconomic disciplines and technological approaches. Such an approach is considered as a particularly important merit for a proposal.

When evaluating interdisciplinarity, experts are asked to pay special attention on the following aspects:

- Is the choice of disciplines and technological approaches brought together the best possible solution to fulfill the objectives and enabling delivering the outcomes described for the addressed theme in the BONUS strategic research agenda?
- What is the level of integration among disciplines and technological approaches? For example
 - the proposal integrates concepts from different disciplines and technological approaches resulting in a coherent outcome that could not be achieved by a mono-disciplinary team: high merit
 - the proposal represents more a mechanic mixture of disciplines and technological approaches without a concept-level integration or mutual enriching within the multidisciplinary relationship among the disciplines: low merit
- Does the proposal indicate the expected synergistic outcomes from the combination of disciplines/approaches in line with the BONUS goals and for the benefit of the Baltic Sea region?

2.3. How is the level of interaction among the innovation stakeholders assessed?

Innovation is the outcome of a complex system that relies on the individual capacity of a multitude of actors, ranging from governments, universities, research institutes to businesses, consumers, financial institutions and non-profit organisations. These actors play a unique and crucial role in mobilising and transferring the knowledge, skills and resources which are needed in the innovation process, for the creation of new products, services and technologies and bringing new solutions to the market.

When evaluating the overall potential of the innovation including the quality and interplay between stakeholders, experts are asked to pay special attention on the following aspects:

- What is the level of interaction among the stakeholders?
 - To what extent does the proposal present a strategic idea for innovation with a strong joint commitment from different and necessary stakeholders to bring it from an idea to solutions on the market?
- To what extent does the proposal indicate the expected impact on business (participating enterprises) and the potential impact on the business sector in general?

- Concrete innovation and added value for participating enterprises
- Contribution and commitment to dissemination of knowledge to a broader business community
- Contribution to business sector renewal, change and potential growth in line with the BONUS goals and for the benefit of the Baltic Sea region
- Is there a focus on cross sector innovation bringing new value creation as well as contributing to “smart specialisation processes”⁷ in the Baltic Sea region?

2.4. What is the scoring scale?

Numerical evaluation of the proposals is made with scores ranging from 0 to 5 as described below. The use of the whole scale is recommended, i.e. experts should not hesitate to score below “3 –good” when appropriate. Both full and half numbers can be used. If proposal is addressing the theme and expected outcomes only partially, the score could be lowered accordingly and relevant comment included.

- 0 – **The proposal fails to address the criterion** under examination or cannot be judged due to missing or incomplete information.
- 1 – **Poor.** The criterion is addressed in an inadequate manner, 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 improvements would be necessary.
- 4 – **Very good.** The proposal addresses the criterion very well, although certain improvements are still possible.
- 5 – **Excellent.** The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion in question. Any shortcomings are minor.

The experts should also provide their comments on each of the three criteria as well as an overall impression of the proposal.

After individual evaluation and scoring, experts are invited to the panel meeting and agree within the consensus evaluation report, the consensus comments, the scores on each criterion and the total score.

After all consensus meetings have been completed nominated representatives of all consensus panels convene for a review meeting. The meeting is chaired by a chairperson appointed by the BONUS Steering Committee. The task is to decide about the final ranking order of the proposals on the basis of the consensus scores given during the consensus meetings.

An independent observer will be employed to oversee the fairness and transparency of the evaluation process. The observer will report to the BONUS Steering Committee. In addition the European Commission will be invited to observe the evaluation process.

⁷ The **concept of smart specialisation** can be defined as "an entrepreneurial process of discovery, identifying where a region can benefit from specialising in a particular area of science and technology". The European Commission suggests that the development of smart specialisation strategies should aim at concentrating resources on the most promising areas of regional comparative advantage, e.g. on clusters, existing sectors and cross-sectoral activities, eco-innovation, high value-added markets or specific research areas. Thus, the concept calls for focusing resources, singling out competitive advantages and aligning regional stakeholders and resources around a sound vision for the future.

2.5. How to view the proposals?

After the expert has logged into the BONUS Electronic Proposal Submission System, the evaluation report form and proposals to be evaluated are displayed on the main page. By clicking the proposal title line, the entire content of the proposal can be viewed:

- Description of work as a PDF-file
- Administrative information: Form A (general administrative information), and Form B (information about the applicants)

Easy navigation to different sections is done by clicking on the titles: description of work, administrative information, and evaluation report form. On the main page, also the status of the proposal evaluation reports assigned to him/her can be viewed.

2.6. How to use the BONUS Electronic Proposal Submission System for preparing the individual evaluation reports?

In order to complete the evaluation through the BONUS Electronic Proposal Submission System, one has to register into the system. The BONUS helpdesk provides the expert his/her individual login details required. In case of queries related, contact the helpdesk by emailing helpdesk@bonusportal.org

Box 1. Steps of preparing the individual evaluation report in the BONUS Electronic Proposal Submission System

1. You will receive an invitation by e-mail from the helpdesk with username and password details to log in to the BONUS Electronic Proposal Submission System.
2. Access the BONUS Electronic Proposal Submission System from the link provided at www.bonusportal.org/calls using your username and password details obtained. On this call specific webpage, you can also browse other useful background documents and information.
3. When in the BONUS Electronic Proposal Submission System, confirm that you agree with the confidentiality agreement.
4. Open the proposal with the proposal evaluation report form at the very bottom of the page.
5. Fill in your Absence of Conflict of Interest declaration.
6. Edit your proposal evaluation report. Please use the 0-5 scale, and give your assessment on each of the three criteria and the overall assessment, supported by explanatory remarks, comments and recommendations.
7. Submit your evaluation report.
8. Start to edit another proposal evaluation report form, and repeat steps 4-7.
9. Log out from the BONUS Electronic Proposal Submission System.

The evaluation session can be interrupted and resumed later at any stage between 4 and 8. In case of any technical problem when filling in or submitting the proposal evaluation report form, contact the BONUS Electronic Proposal Submission System helpdesk by email: epss@bonusportal.org.

Editing and modifying of the individual evaluation reports is possible in the BONUS Electronic Proposal Submission System until the deadline set for the evaluators.

The deadline for submitting all the individual evaluation reports is 2 May 2016.

Each section in the BONUS Electronic Proposal Submission System has guidelines that can be found from the dropdown list: it is recommended to review these guidelines before starting to work on individual evaluation report.

2.7. How to prepare the draft consensus evaluation report?

After the deadline above, the expert assigned as the rapporteur receives access to all individual evaluation reports assigned to him/her for the preparation of the consensus evaluation report. It is advised to focus on strengths and weaknesses of the proposal under each criterion and to avoid general narrative part, to identify and list points of agreement for each criterion on which no or little discussion is needed, and points of divergence on which the discussion should focus on when experts come together during the consensus meeting.

The deadline for submitting all the draft consensus evaluation reports is 16 May 2016.

Same steps in the BONUS Electronic Proposal Submission System described for the individual evaluation reports (Box 1) should be followed when preparing the consensus evaluation reports.

3. The panel meetings

After the individual evaluation phase has been completed, all experts attend a consensus panel meeting for 2-3 days. The panel meeting consists of several consensus meetings among those experts who evaluated the same proposal to mutually agree about the scores and comments of the proposal concerned and complete and approve by signing the consensus evaluation report.

The ultimate ranking and priority order within the groups of proposals having equal scores is agreed in a review meeting after all consensus meetings have been completed.

3.1. Consensus meetings

In the consensus meeting the expert appointed as the rapporteur briefly presents the proposal and the comments given to it. The proposal is discussed. The discussion is moderated by a member of the Call Task Force – a body consisting of experts in science management appointed by the BONUS Steering Committee. The rapporteur makes notes, and afterwards modifies the draft consensus evaluation report accordingly. Thereafter the consensus score is agreed. Evaluators must also arrive to the consensus regarding the budget justification and if needed recommend budget modification.

The rapporteur finalises the consensus evaluation report. It is important that the numerical scoring and written statements correspond with each other. Wordings should be precise and appropriate, avoiding emotional expressions and personal tone (such as *I think...*, *according to this expert's experience*). After the consensus evaluation report has been checked by the BONUS Secretariat, each of the experts involved with preparation of the individual evaluation reports of the proposal in question, approve the consensus evaluation report in the BONUS Electronic Proposal Submission System. In order to make this step as fluent as possible, the experts are advised to bring their own laptop computers to the meeting. Also, it is important to have the personal password for the BONUS Electronic Proposal Submission System available during the meeting.

3.2. The review meeting

After all consensus meetings have been completed, nominated experts representing all consensus panels convene to the review meeting. This meeting is chaired by a chairperson appointed by the BONUS Steering Committee. The main task of the review meeting is to examine and compare the consensus evaluation reports and to confirm consistency of the scores and explanatory statements applied during the consensus meetings. Also, as and when necessary, a new set of scores, or a revision of explanatory statements (but not both!), are proposed. In this process the review meeting produces an evaluation summary report for each proposal. Ultimately the task of the review meeting is to decide about the final ranking order of the proposals on the basis of the total consensus scores assigned to the projects. Within the groups of equally scored proposals, the criteria for ranking are applied in the following order:

- (i) Proposals will be prioritised according to the scores they have been awarded for the criterion *scientific and/or technological excellence*.
- (ii) If necessary, any further prioritisation will be based on other appropriate characteristics, to be decided by the panel (e.g. presence of SMEs, international co-operation, public engagement).

Thus, the outcome of the review meeting is a report entailing:

- an evaluation summary report for each proposal, including explanatory statements and scores. Where relevant, any ethical issues and any security considerations are also reported. The evaluation report for each proposal shall also include a recommended amount of grant following the evaluation. If the recommended grant is different from the grant requested by the applicants, an explanation shall be included.

- ranked lists of proposals passing all thresholds, along with a final score for each proposal passing the thresholds and the panel recommendations for priority order
- a list of evaluated proposals having failed one or more thresholds
- a list of any proposals having been found ineligible during the evaluation
- a summary of any other recommendations of the panel

In case of voting, single majority rule is followed.

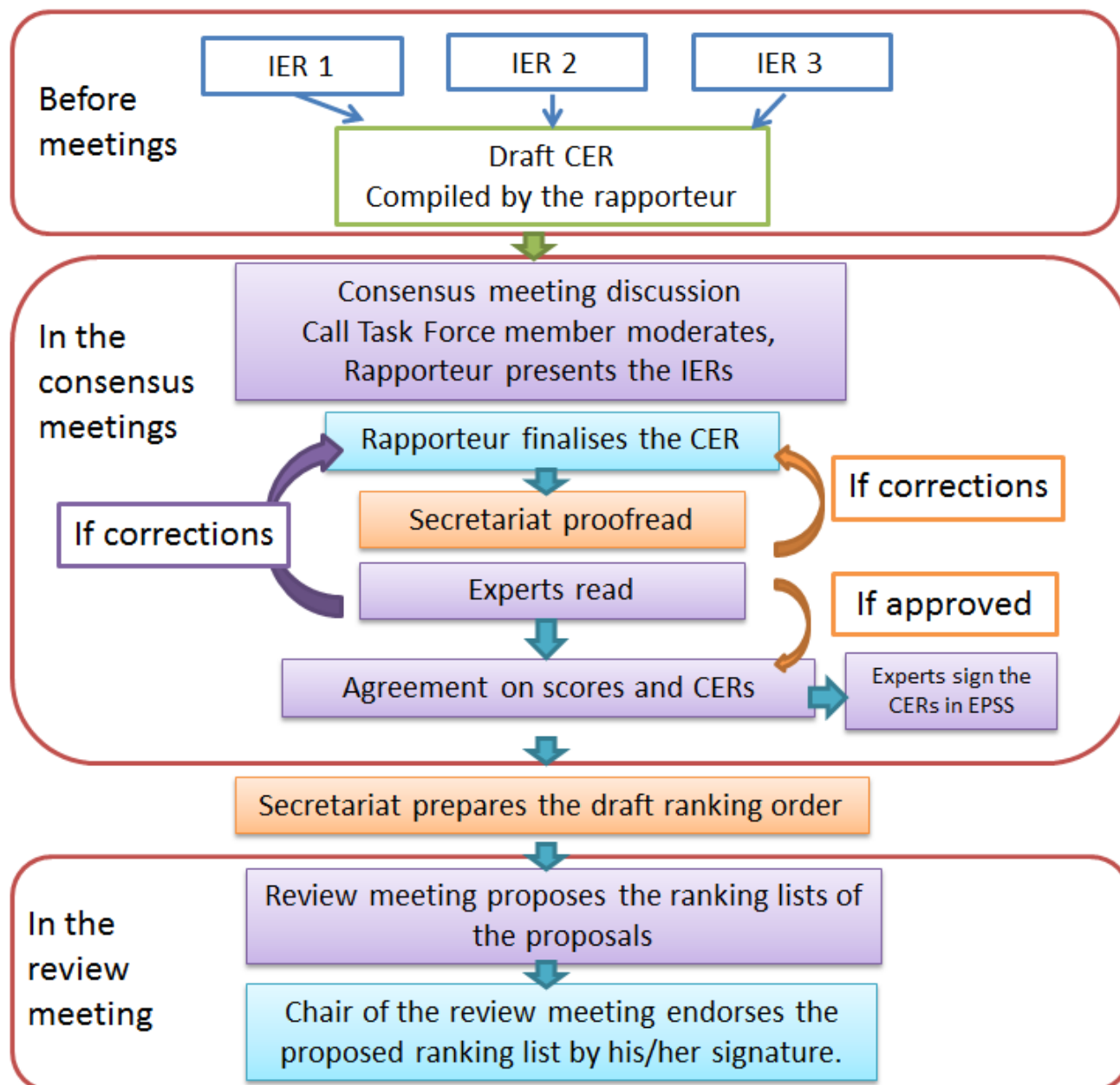


Figure 1. A schematic presentation of the panel's work frame. Purple: actions by the expert panel during the meeting; Beige: support by the BONUS Secretariat. IER – individual evaluation report, CER – consensus evaluation report, EPSS – Electronic Proposal Submission System.

The review meeting report is signed by its chair and the experts.

4. Independent observer

The whole evaluation and decision making process is monitored by an independent expert appointed by the BONUS Steering Committee. The observer participates in the meetings of the Committee as well as in the panel's consensus and review meetings. The observer may interview individual experts, as well as contact the experts afterwards in order to get feedback on their opinions concerning the evaluation procedure. Observations and recommendations are summarised in an independent observer's report. The observer will have no conflict of interest and will be experienced with proposals evaluation within the context of EU's 7th framework programme.

A representative from the European Commission will be invited to observe the evaluation, ranking and selection meetings in the same way as the independent observer.

5. How is the decision about projects to be funded made?

The final decision about which projects are recommended to be funded is made by the BONUS Steering Committee. In its decision, the Steering Committee follows the two ranking lists given by the evaluation panel. It will support the selection of projects strictly in priority order following the ranked lists based on the total scores. The available parts of the call budget will be applied to the respective ranking lists and the cut-off points of projects to be funded on both ranking lists determined.

Each project, funded or not, will receive a written evaluation summary report after the decision. Coordinators of the successful proposals will be invited to enter the negotiation phase with the BONUS EEIG and the relevant national funding institutions. The negotiations may include modifications of the project's description of work and/or budget. Thereafter the national funding institutions will make the decisions which are necessary for mobilising the national funding. Finally, the exact budget of each project will be decided by the BONUS Steering Committee in consultation with representatives of all national funding institutions.

6. Glossary of all used terms and definitions

A

Acknowledgement of receipt

Applicants are informed by email shortly after the submission about the proposal having been successfully submitted (but not that it is necessarily eligible). Contact the BONUS Electronic Proposal Submission System (EPSS) *help desk* (helpdesk@bonusportal.org) urgently if you do not receive such an acknowledgement

Applicant

Each entity, including coordinator, listed in the proposal preregistration form, who fills in the form B of the project proposal

Applicant's declaration

A document stating that all information given in the proposal and in its annexes concerning the applicant is full and correct. The declaration is signed by the applicant's authorised representative

Associated countries

Non-EU countries that are party to an international agreement with the EU, under the terms or on the basis of which it makes a financial contribution to all or part of the 7th framework programme. In the context of the BONUS proposal consortia, legal entities from these countries are treated on the same footing as those in the non-Baltic EU Member States. The list of associated countries is given in chapter 1.4 of this guide

B

Baltic Sea system

The geographical area of BONUS. It covers the Baltic Sea waters and all sub-seas including the Kattegat Sea. On the coasts it includes also open land directly influenced by the sea or by proximity to the sea, in particular those habitats that are covered by national or international environment and nature protection programmes

Beneficiary

Legal entity participating within the consortium that has signed the BONUS grant agreement who may or not receive a financial contribution from BONUS. Entering into a consortium agreement is a prerequisite of becoming a BONUS beneficiary. BONUS beneficiaries receiving funding should – on case by case basis – sign a grant agreement also with the respective national funding institution. Note that in the case of a non-funded beneficiaries the grant agreement will include a clause providing exemption to certain reporting obligations in particular relating to the use of resources.

BONUS EEIG

Dedicated implementation structure established in Helsinki for the implementation of BONUS. Its legal form is an European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG) and the BONUS Secretariat implements it.

BONUS grant agreement

The legal instrument that forms a contract between the beneficiaries and the BONUS EEIG and enables the funding of successful proposals

BONUS Law

Decision no 862/2010/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 September 2010 on the participation of the Union in a Joint Baltic Sea Research and Development Programme (BONUS) undertaken by several Member States. Official Journal 30.9.2010, L 256/1

Budget (of project)

A sum of all the eligible costs under the respective types of activity. Compare to the “requested BONUS funding”.

C

Call fact sheet

A concise and brief document that provides all the key data related to a BONUS call, to be issued separately for each call at the time when the call is announced. It includes information on topics it covers, budget, deadline, expected impact etc. The BONUS call fact sheet can be found on BONUS website at www.bonusportal.org/calls

Call Task Force

A group of national programme managers appointed by the BONUS EEIG members and other participating funding agencies. It assists the BONUS Secretariat with technical matters concerning processing of the proposals as well as takes care of all local matters in each country/organisation. In particular, the Call Task Force members assist the call help desk on questions relevant to their national funding institutions, take part in the applicant eligibility check during the proposal preregistration phase, support the Secretariat in proposal eligibility check, moderate the consensus meetings of the evaluation experts, observe the review panel meeting, if necessary mediate the grant negotiations with beneficiaries, facilitate the agreement negotiations between the BONUS EEIG and the providers of research infrastructure. The Call Task Force is chaired by the Executive Director of the BONUS EEIG

Consensus meeting

The stage in the proposal evaluation process when experts come together to establish a common view and agree about scores on a particular proposal

Consortium

A totality of applicants which prepared the application, and if the project is selected, signed the consortium agreement

Consortium agreement

An agreement compiled and signed by the BONUS participants to show how various issues that may arise during the project are handled. The consortium agreement has to be signed by all participants before the grant agreements can be concluded and funds can be transferred to the project beneficiaries

Coordinator

The coordinator is the organisation coordinating the preparations and execution of a BONUS. The coordinator is responsible for all communications with the BONUS EEIG, he will submit the proposal, negotiate the grant agreement, and inform the BONUS EEIG about the progress of the project through reports. Although the coordinator has many additional responsibilities, he is, legally, equal among the other partners

D

Deliverable

A deliverable represents a verifiable output of the project. Normally, each work package produces one or more deliverables during its lifetime. Deliverables are often written reports but can also take another form, for example the completion of a prototype etc.

Direct costs

Direct costs are all eligible costs that can be attributed directly to the project and are identified by the applicant as such, in accordance with its accounting principles and in accordance to the rules of the Seventh Framework Programme

E

Electronic Proposal Submission System (EPSS)

A web-based service which must be used to submit proposals to BONUS, accessible from the BONUS website at www.bonusportal.org/calls and helpdesk service at epss@bonusportal.org to assist consortium applicants, participants and evaluators with queries related to submissions.

Eligibility review

The first step in proposal evaluation process that determines whether the proposals submitted meet the eligibility criteria set for inclusion in the following steps of the evaluation process

Eligibility criteria

The minimum conditions that a proposal must fulfill for it is to be retained for evaluation. The eligibility criteria are related to submission before the *deadline, minimum participation, completeness, scope, commitments and coordinator*

European research area (ERA)

A process launched at the Lisbon European Council in March 2000, aiming at making Europe a place where scientific research, technological development and innovation thrive and address the major challenges of our times. BONUS has developed within the ERA framework

Experimental development

The acquiring, combining, shaping and using of existing scientific, technological, business and other relevant knowledge and skills for the purpose of producing plans and arrangements or designs for new, altered or improved products, processes or services (including the creation of a commercially usable prototype or pilot projects under certain conditions)

F

Fundamental research

Experimental or theoretical work undertaken primarily to acquire new knowledge of the underlying foundations of phenomena and observable facts, without any direct practical application or use in view

G

Grant agreement - See the BONUS grant agreement

I

Indirect costs

Indirect costs, (sometimes called overheads), are all those eligible costs which cannot be identified by the applicant as being directly attributed to the project, but which can be identified and justified by its accounting system as being incurred in direct relationship with the eligible direct costs attributed to the project

Industrial research

Planned research or critical investigation aimed at the acquisition of new knowledge or skills for developing new products, processes or services or bringing about a significant improvement in existing products, processes or services

Innovation

Innovation generally refers to the creation of better or more effective products, processes, technologies, or ideas that are accepted by markets, governments, and society. Innovation includes effective innovation systems and an entrepreneurial culture and is realised in collaborations with different actors: researchers, enterprises with specialist competence, consultants, financiers etc. Driving the partnership is a common vision of what can be achieved

International European interest organisation

International European interest organisation is an international organisation, the majority of whose members are EU Member States or associated countries, and whose principal objective is to promote scientific and technological cooperation in Europe

International organisation

Intergovernmental organisations, other than the European Community, that has a legal personality under international public law as well as any specialised agency set up by such an international organisation

J

Joint Research Centre (JRC)

The European Commission's Joint Research Centre is a department of the European Commission providing independent scientific and technological support for EU policy-making. It works closely on the development of EU legislation with the relevant Commission services. Knowledge comes from specific application- and issue-oriented research within the seven JRC Institutes

L

Large enterprise

A large enterprise is an enterprise which cannot be qualified as a micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) according to the criteria established in the EU recommendation <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2003:124:0036:0041:EN:PDF>

M

Medium-sized enterprise

An enterprise which employs fewer than 250 persons and which have either an annual turnover not exceeding EUR 50 million, or an annual balance sheet total not exceeding EUR 43 million. MEs are medium sized enterprises within the meaning of Recommendation 2003/361/EC in the version of 6 May 2003. The full definition and a guidance booklet can be found at http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/facts-figures-analysis/sme-definition/index_en.htm

Milestones

Control points where decisions are needed with regard to the next stage of the project

N

National contact persons

Representatives nominated by the national funding institutions to provide information and advice on BONUS calls, in the national language

Non-BONUS EU member state

EU member state that does not participate in BONUS

P

Participating country

EU member state that participates in BONUS: Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden

Person in charge

Scientist or team leader in each research institute, university, enterprise or other entity and who has the responsibility over his/her task in relation to the applicant and the national funding agency

Preregistration

Consortium planning to submit a proposal to BONUS has to preregister to the BONUS Electronic Proposal Submission System one month before the closing of the call. Preregistration information includes the title and acronym of the project, short preliminary abstract and a list of the applicants

Project participants

Project participants are referred to as beneficiaries within the BONUS grant agreements. Refer to the definition of beneficiary

R

Research organisation

A legal entity established as a non-profit organisation that carries out research or technological development as one of its main objectives

Requested BONUS funding

The requested BONUS contribution determined by applying the relevant funding limits per activity, per participant to the respective project budget entries

RTD

Research and technological development

S

Small enterprise

An enterprise which employs fewer than 50 persons and whose annual turnover or annual balance sheet total does not exceed EUR 10 million. SEs are micro and small and enterprises within the meaning of Recommendation 2003/361/EC in the version of 6 May 2003. The full definition and a guidance booklet can be found at http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/sme/facts-figures-analysis/sme-definition/index_en.htm

SME

'SMEs' are small and medium-sized enterprises. SMEs are defined in Recommendation 2003/361/EC of 6 May 2003 <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2003:124:0036:0041:EN:PDF>

State aid rules

EU's framework rules that aim at ensuring efficient use of state aid subsidies in order to strengthen the competitiveness of the member states and regions. State aid rules have to be taken into account when a consortium involves enterprises and a project may produce commercially exploitable products. In practice, the rules define the level of BONUS funding for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) and large enterprises (LEs)

Strategic research agenda (SRA)

The document defining the thematic content of BONUS, i.e. strategic objectives and themes, focusing on calls for proposals. The BONUS strategic research agenda 2011-2017, update 2014 has been

developed through a broad consultation with key stakeholders, policy-makers, scientific community and end-users of the programme results. It is updated regularly in order to take into account recent scientific and/or technological development and emerging needs arising from the policy development

T

Third country

The term is used in the EU treaties, where it means a country that is not a member of the Union. In the BONUS context, these countries are neither members of the union nor associated countries which make a financial contribution to all or part of the Seventh Framework Programme

Thresholds

For a proposal to be considered for funding, the evaluation scores for individual criteria must exceed certain thresholds. There is also an overall threshold for the sum of the scores

7. Annexes

Annex 1

BONUS EEIG Steering Committee
17-18.01.2012

Rules for handling the conflict of interest in the calls launched by BONUS

for the members of the BONUS Call Steering Committee, BONUS Call Task Force, remote evaluators and evaluation panels, hereinafter 'members'.

1. Preamble

The BONUS EEIG Steering Committee is composed of one representative from each member organisation of the BONUS EEIG.

The Call Steering Committee is composed of the BONUS EEIG Steering Committee and one representative from each additional agency funding the Call. It supervises the Call and makes recommendations concerning the projects to be funded by the national funding bodies. It also steers the scientific coordination and monitoring of the funded projects.

The Call Task Force is composed of national programme managers appointed by the BONUS EEIG members and other participating funding agencies. It assists the BONUS Secretariat with technical matters concerning processing of the proposals as well as takes care of all local matters in each country/organisation. The Call Task Force is chaired by the Executive Director of the BONUS EEIG.

The Call Evaluation Panels consist of scientific experts, appointed by the Call Steering Committee. The composition of the panel should cover all relevant fields of expertise related to the themes of the call. It/they should also be unbiased geographically, nationally and in respect to gender and conflict of interest. The chair(s) of the Call Evaluation Panel is/are appointed by the Call Steering Committee. The duty of the panels is to evaluate the project proposals submitted to the Call against their scientific excellence and relevance to the call themes.

The general principles of handling the conflict of interest have been agreed by the BONUS EEIG members and associated members in Article 14 of the Statutes and Article 1(9) of the internal regulations. The members of Call Evaluation Panels and possible observers guarantee the impartiality and confidentiality according to these rules in a separate signed declaration.

These rules set out the principles and procedures of the common action of the members participating in the proposals application, evaluation and decision making process, hereinafter 'call process'.

For each member, these rules will come into force on the date of their approval by the BONUS EEIG Steering Committee. These rules may be amended or modified by the decision of the BONUS EEIG Steering Committee.

These rules are a mutual statement of intent among the members, who agree to make every reasonable effort to fulfill the intents expressed herein.

2. The purpose of the rules

The purpose of these rules is to ensure the objectivity and transparency of the call process and to guarantee an equal and fair treatment of the applicants.

3. Participation in the call process

Members are allowed to participate in the call process, if they do not have any conflict of interest and keep the confidentiality as follows. If the member is disqualified according to the criteria set out in Chapter 4, he/she cannot participate or otherwise assist in the call process as regards handling his/her own or intimate's applications or competitors' applications. It has to be ensured that none of the applicants shall get access to the others' competing proposals.

4. Disqualifying and potential conflict of interest

The call process is based on the fundamental principles of transparency, objectivity and equality of treatment. The Call Steering Committee may appoint an independent expert to monitor, and report on the call process.

A member shall be **disqualified** if he/she in any way benefits or will be disfavoured from the approval or rejection of a proposal in the call process. A member shall also be disqualified in the following circumstances:

The member:

- is participating or has been involved in preparation of any proposal being evaluated or submitted under the call
- stands to benefit directly should the proposal be accepted
- has close research collaboration with the applicant (e.g. has been involved in the preparation of the application, or is involved in the publication or application of the results)
- has been a superior, subordinate or instructor of the applicant during the past three years
- is currently applying for the same post as the applicant
- is a director, or is a member of the board, council or corresponding governing body of an organisation, which has submitted an application to the call
- is in close family relationship with any person representing the applicant organisation in the proposal.

A close family relationship is:

- 1) the spouse or ex-spouse (also de facto), child, grandchild, sibling, parent, grandparent or a person otherwise especially close to the member (e.g. fiancé/e or a close friend), as well as their spouses (also de facto)
- 2) a sibling of the member's parent or his/her spouse (also de facto), a child of a sibling, or previous spouse (also de facto)
- 3) a child, grandchild, sibling, parent or grandparent of the member's spouse as well as their spouses (also de facto), a child of a sibling of the member's spouse
- 4) or a half-relative comparable to the above mentioned.

The member is also disqualified if his/her impartiality may otherwise be endangered, or if he/she feels that there is a conflict of interest and therefore is disqualified to participate in the call process.

The Member has a **potential conflict of interest** if he/she:

- is employed by one of the applicant organisations in a proposal or has been so within the previous three years
- has been involved in a contract or research collaboration with an applicant organisation (e.g. joint publications) in the previous three years

In these cases, as well as in any other situation that casts doubt or that could reasonably appear to do so, the disqualification is decided by the Call Steering Committee.

5. Duty to inform

All cases of conflict of interest must be notified to the BONUS Secretariat and the Call Steering Committee as soon as they are detected.

Members are required to declare any personal interests according to the criteria listed above. Such information shall be disclosed before the relevant meeting is held.

If a hitherto unsuspected conflict of interest becomes apparent during the call process, the member must announce this immediately to the BONUS Secretariat and the Call Steering Committee. If the conflict is found to be a disqualifying one, the Member must abstain from further activities within the call process. Any comments and scores made earlier within the call process by that member expert for the proposal concerned will be discounted.

6. Confidentiality

All material related to the call process, such as descriptions of work, abstracts, summary reports and evaluation statements, are confidential documents. The documents should therefore be handled and stored with due care and confidentiality.

The members are not allowed to disclose any information concerning the documents, evaluations, or discussions to outsiders, nor are they allowed to use this confidential information to their own benefit or anyone else's benefit or disadvantage. In addition, they may not reveal to outsiders that they are assessing the description of work of a particular researcher. Any specific questions about the call process, documents or evaluation statements addressed by persons with no authorisation to be involved in the call process, should be forwarded to the BONUS Secretariat.

Once the entire call process has been completed, the member is required to destroy all the application documents and any copies made of them, or return them, unless regulated otherwise according to e.g. archiving rules of the funding organisation. Confidentiality must also be maintained after the call process has been completed.

7. Decisions concerning members disqualifications

It is preferred that the members individually by themselves will consider their conflict of interest to avoid possible conflicts during the call process. If needed the Call Steering Committee decides on the presence or absence of conflict of interest and the further procedure as stated above.

8. Substitutes

In order to guarantee the quorum of the decision making and a sufficient national expertise in the call management, the BONUS EEIG member or associated member may in the case of the conflict of interest mentioned earlier (see disqualification of the members), appoint a substitute to represent the member in the Call Steering Committee or in the Call Task Force.

Annex 2

BONUS call 2015: Blue Baltic evaluation report form⁸

IMPORTANT

I (we) believe this proposal is relevant ("in scope") because it addresses, fully or partially, a key theme that is open in the call. It conforms to special conditions set out for this theme in the BONUS strategic research agenda and in the call fact sheet, and it corresponds to an eligible funding scheme:

- YES.** Please complete the IER, entering your scores and comments for all criteria
- NO.** Please enter your reasons below and notify the BONUS Secretariat.

Comments by evaluator(s) will be inserted here. Sufficient space will be provided in the electronic system.

SCORING

Scores must be in the range 0-5. Half marks may be given.

Interpretation of the scores:

0 – *The proposal fails to address the criterion under examination or cannot be judged due to missing or incomplete information*

1 – *Poor.* The criterion is addressed in an inadequate manner 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 improvements would be necessary.

4 – *Very Good.* The proposal addresses the criterion very well, although certain improvements are still possible.

5 – *Excellent.* The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion in question. Any shortcomings are minor.

1. Scientific and/or technological excellence (relevant to the topics addressed by the call)

Note: when a proposal only partially addresses the topics, this condition will be reflected in the scoring of this criterion.

- Soundness of concept and quality of objectives
- progress beyond the state-of-the-art, interdisciplinarity, new approaches
- quality and effectiveness of the scientific and/or technological methodology, associated description of work and planned deliverables

[Comments by evaluator(s) will be inserted here. Sufficient space will be provided in the electronic system]

Score 1:
Threshold 4/5

⁸ Forms of individual evaluation report (IER) and consensus evaluation report (CER) are identical. These forms are imbedded in the BONUS EPSS evaluation module

<p>2. Quality and efficiency of the implementation and the management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • appropriateness of the management structure and procedures • quality and relevant experience of the individual applicants • quality of the consortium as a whole (including complementarity and representation of different disciplines, balance of workload among applicants, research environments, involvement of end users) • appropriate allocation and justification of the resources to be committed (personnel, equipment, travel, subcontracting and other costs) including use of significant research infrastructures, if applicable • rationality of researcher training and/or involvement of SMEs and other industrial partners in the project implementation, level of interaction among the innovation stakeholders (especially for proposals addressing the call themes with mandatory enterprise participation) <p><i>[Comments by evaluator(s) will be inserted here. Sufficient space will be provided in the electronic system]</i></p>	<p>Score 2: <i>Threshold 3/5</i></p>
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<p>3. The potential impact through the development, dissemination and use of project results</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • relevance of the proposal in relation to the themes and expected outcomes of the call described in the call fact sheet and detailed in the BONUS strategic research agenda • impact from the project on the assessment, modification, improvement and/or enhancing the effectiveness of the relevant policies and ultimately to the improvement of the Baltic Sea environment • take up and use of the project results' by end-users including the clarity, appropriateness and efficiency of the planned knowledge transfer measures • appropriateness of measures for the dissemination and/or exploitation of project results <p><i>[Comments by evaluator(s) will be inserted here. Sufficient space will be provided in the electronic system]</i></p>	<p>Score 3: <i>Threshold 4/5</i></p>
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<p>Total score (1+2+3) <i>Threshold 12/15</i></p>
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<p>Does this proposal raise ethical issues?</p>	<p>YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/></p>
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I (we) declare that, to the best of my (our) knowledge, I (we) have no conflict of interest in the evaluation of this proposal

<p>Name(s) of evaluator(s) and moderator (for CER)</p>	<p>Signature(s)</p>	<p>Date</p>
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