



ERA-NETs
SUSFOOD2 and CORE Organic Cofunds

Joint Call 2019
“Towards sustainable and organic food systems”

Evaluation Guidelines

March 2020



These projects have received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and Innovation programme under grant agreement No 727473 and 727495, respectively.

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Definitions

Call Board (CB):	the decision making body consisting of one representative of each funding body participating to the Joint Call
Call Office:	central contact point for all issues around the evaluation procedures of the call (as well as the application procedure)
Expert Panel (EP):	group of experts who will peer-review the submitted proposals in the framework of the Joint Call. The EP will be composed of international experts based on their acknowledged expertise in the research areas covered by the submitted proposals.
Rapporteur:	member of the EP who shall report on a proposal during the evaluation procedure (by writing an evaluation summary and by presenting the evaluation results during the evaluation meeting).
EP Chair:	EP person, nominated by the CB and Call Office among the experts, who will assist the experts, in case of need, all along the evaluation period. S/he will chair the full proposals' evaluation meeting of the EP and could be invited to attend the final CB selection meeting.

1. General information and background of the Joint Call

The ERA-NET SUSFOOD2 and CORE Organic Cofunds (SF/CO) have launched a Joint Call for transnational research project proposals on 2nd September based on the funding from participating countries of both networks and international partner countries. The commitment of the participating 21 funding bodies from 18 countries/regions is 9.585.000 € in total. With this, research should be supported that creates added value for sustainable and organic food systems in line with the objectives of both ERA-NETs and the scope of the Joint Call.

The Evaluation Guidelines provide information regarding the evaluation process, tasks and conditions within the framework of the Joint Call, which is following a two-step procedure with a first step for pre-proposal submission and evaluation and a second step for full proposal submission and evaluation.

Applications have been submitted under the four Call topics

Topic 1: Resource-efficient, circular and zero-waste food systems

Topic 2: Diversity in food from field to plate

Topic 3: Mild food processing

Topic 4: Sustainable and smart packaging

Cross-cutting issues (multi-actor-/ multi-disciplinary-/ system approach) had to be taken into account by the applicants across all topics and be individually adapted to each project.

For information on the Joint Call the *Call Announcement and Guidelines* (<https://www.submission-susfood-era.net/sf-co-jointcall>) should be consulted with special emphasis on the sections 1. “Background of the Joint Call”, 2. “Joint Call topics and cross-cutting issues” and Annex A “Call Topics”.

2. Time schedule

The envisaged time schedule for the evaluation process of the Joint Call is indicated in the table below:

Action	Schedule
Step 1	
Submission of pre-proposals	2 September - 4 November 2019
Nomination of experts for the EP	2 September – 4 November 2019
Assignment of proposals to experts and submission of Confidentiality non-disclosure agreement/ Code of conduct agreement as well as Conflict of Interest	4 November – 18 November 2019
Evaluation of pre-proposals (remote)	18 November – 13 January 2020
Preparation of evaluation summaries by rapporteurs	Until 15 January 2020
Selection of pre-proposals by CB	End of January 2020
Step 2	
Submission of full proposals	3 February - 27 March 2020
Evaluation of full-proposals (remote)	30 March – 22 May 2020
Preparation of evaluation summaries by rapporteurs	Until 27 May 2020
Evaluation meeting of EP	First week of June 2020
Revision of evaluation summaries by rapporteurs	Asap after the evaluation meeting
Selection of full-proposals by CB	Mid June 2020

3. Call Office

The Call Office will provide administrative and technical (online tool) support to the experts during the evaluation process. It is the primary point of contact between the Expert Panel (EP) members and the Joint Call funding bodies (Call Board) for all general matters in relation to the peer-review evaluation.

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4. The Evaluation procedure after submission of research proposals

The assessment of the submitted proposals (eligibility checks, evaluation by the EP members) will be carried out using the Call submission tool <https://www.submission-susfood-era.net/sf-co-jointcall>.

4.1 Pre-proposals

Submitted research proposals must be written in English and need to provide information mainly about: topic addressed, partners of the project consortium (coordinator and co-applicants), project budget (with explanations about the envisaged costs), description of planned work (relevance, approach, impact), ethical issues (see the Call Announcement at section 7.1 *Pre-proposal submission*). They consist of approx. 10 pages with 5 pages of project description.

The **Call Office** will firstly perform an eligibility check of the pre-proposals against general criteria listed at section 7.2 of the Call Announcement (maximum duration of the project, max budget request, minimum number of countries participating in the proposal, etc.).

Each **Funding Body (CB members)** will check the eligibility of the national applicants against the national/ regional criteria published in Annex D of the Call Announcement (project partners who will be selected for funding will receive the grant directly from their national funding bodies according to their terms and conditions, following the principles of the ERA-Net scheme¹).

Eligible pre-proposals in terms of general and national/regional eligibility criteria will be peer-reviewed by 3 experts selected from the **Expert Panel**. The outcome of the experts' evaluation will be a ranking list of projects per topic with scores and a written evaluation reports which will enable the CB to shortlist the applying research consortia.

4.2 Full proposals

Research consortia selected by the Call Board based on the EP evaluation results and recommendations, and the available funding, will be invited to submit full proposals (approx. 25 pages with 20 pages of project description). These will be checked again by the Call Office and the Call Board (general and national/regional eligibility) and reviewed by the EP members (3 experts per proposal), who will provide scores and a written evaluation. Experts could also be asked to assess the fulfilment of conditions and recommendations indicated by the CB at the stage of pre-proposals' selection and outlined in the invitations to submit a full proposal (if any, the letters will be made available). EP members will meet face-to-face in order to share and discuss their reports and to find a common agreement on a ranking list (one per each of the four Call topics). The EP panel chair will facilitate the discussion. The evaluation outputs, finalized after the meeting, will be used by the CB for the final funding decision.

5. Expert Panel

¹ ERA-Nets are Public-Public Partnerships (P2Ps) in research and innovation. The networks gather public organisations (Ministries, funding agencies, programme managers) from interested EU countries and beyond, that join forces to support research activities under an agreed vision or research and innovation agenda. In this way, these partnerships align national strategies, helping to overcome fragmentation of public research effort. ERA-Nets are supported by the European Commission.

5.1 Constitution of the EP

The Expert Panel (EP) for evaluation is constituted of internationally recognised Experts chosen for their scientific / technical expertise and knowledge of the sectors covered in the Call.

The members of the EP have been proposed and nominated by the CB members and the Call Office, thereby, existing contacts of both networks have been taken into account. The European Commission database of experts has also been consulted. Potential Experts have been invited to become members of the EP and have sent their application to the Call Office. The selection of Expert Panel members is made by the Call Office and the complete EP list is then sent to the CB for final approval.

Experts are contacted by the Call Office for confirmation of availability and the assignment of proposals. An expert can only become a member of the EP if s/he has no conflict of interest and is available during the evaluation process. The final number of experts to build the EP depends on the number of pre-proposals submitted, the topics addressed and the expertise of the evaluators. Experts are asked to contact the Call Office in case they do not feel their area of expertise matches the assigned proposals.

The names of EP members will be kept anonymous for the applicants through the whole procedure.

6. Performing the evaluation

6.1 The online evaluation tool

The evaluation at both steps of the call (pre- and full proposals) can only be done using the online evaluation tool, accessible under <https://www.submission-susfood-era.net/sf-co-jointcall>. All assigned experts will receive an e-mail invitation with log-in details and instructions how to access the tool. At the stage of pre-proposal evaluation, experts will only be able to read the assigned applications, while at the 2nd stage there will be no restriction regarding the download of all submitted full proposals (when there is no conflict of interest).

6.2 Conflict of Interest, confidentiality and code of conduct

Before performing an evaluation, the confidentiality NON-disclosure agreement and Code of Conduct (Annex A) need to be downloaded, printed, signed and uploaded once. For each proposal, the assigned expert will then need to decide on possible Conflict of Interest (Annex B), based on a visible summary and research consortium information of the proposal. Full access to a proposal will only be granted when no conflict of interest exists.

6.3 Tasks of the EP

The EP shall peer review pre-proposals (step 1) and full proposals (step 2) and provide consolidated evaluation feedback for both evaluation steps considering the given timeframes (see table at chapter 2). Thereby, each proposal is evaluated by three experts. In case of highly contradictory evaluations an additional expert or the EP chair could be invited to a further evaluation.

If possible, the experts assigned for the evaluation of full proposals will be the same as in the pre-proposals. At the stage of full proposal evaluation, it is suggested (but not required) that experts read all proposals in order to have a complete overview of all applications.

One of the 3 experts evaluating a proposal will be appointed as rapporteur, which means s/he will prepare an evaluation summary report based on the single evaluations. All experts will be required to act as rapporteur in 2-4 proposals, prepare and submit a consolidated and mutually agreed evaluation summary report and, at full proposal stage, present the proposal and evaluation results during the step 2 evaluation meeting. In case of strong disagreement on the evaluation, the rapporteur should inform the Call Office to seek a solution (e.g. involving an additional expert or the EP chair).

An overall EP chair person will be nominated among the experts (by the CB and Call Office). Tasks of the chair include assistance in case of disagreements among experts, chairing of the evaluation meeting of the EP (only for step 2) and to attend the CB selection meeting (step 2) to explain the evaluation results if needed.

6.4 Evaluation criteria (pre-proposals and full proposals)

All eligible pre-proposals will be evaluated by 3 experts according to the following three criteria:

- **Relevance:** coherence and pertinence of the objectives, contribution to the scope of the Joint Call and the selected topic,
- **Quality of the research approach:** appropriateness and soundness of the research approach and methodology, feasibility, complementarity of partners, adequacy of the budget,
- **Potential Impact:** potential to reach expected impact and innovate/ implement, embracing of cross-cutting issues², added value of transnational cooperation and geographical coverage.

Full proposals will be evaluated by 3 experts against the following three criteria:

- **Excellence of the research proposal:** scientific quality of objectives, ambition in relation to the call scope and topic addressed and innovative progress beyond the state-of-the-art
- **Quality and efficiency of the implementation:** appropriateness and soundness of the research approach and methodology, feasibility, effectiveness of the work plan, complementarity/competences/ diversity of partners and disciplines, adequacy of the budget and balance between partners in terms of activities, risk management, capacity building activities, communication and dissemination
- **Potential Impact:** contribution towards sustainable and organic food systems, potential to innovate/ implement, embracing of cross-cutting issues², transnational added value

The result of the evaluation will be one ranking list per topic based on the final scores, resulting from the sum of the mean scores for each criterion.

² The cross-cutting issues should be taken into account across all topics and be individually adapted to each project in order to increase projects' value and impact:

- **Multi-actor-approach:** Involve different actors and stakeholders in your research project from the outset (by means of participation as well as transparent communication),
- **Multi-disciplinary approach:** Take account of different viewpoints and involve actors from the disciplines beyond your existing network,
- **System approach:** Consider interconnections, synergies or trade-offs between different aspects or actors that directly or indirectly affect your field of research on a systems level (e.g. economic, environmental, social, legislative, geographical, behavioural, business environment, etc.)

6.5 Evaluation scores

For each evaluation criterion, scores from 0 to 5 (half points allowed) are awarded. A threshold of 3/5 will be applied for each criterion, i.e. proposals with a mean score < 3 in any criterion will not be recommended for funding. The overall score will be the sum of the mean scores of the 3 evaluation criteria and will include one decimal behind the comma (min 0.0, max 15.0).

The following scoring scheme should be applied:

0	Weak	The proposal shows severe flaws that are intrinsic to the proposed project. The criterion under examination is not addressed or cannot be judged due to missing or incomplete information.
1	Poor	The proposal addresses the criterion unsatisfactorily or in an inadequate manner. It shows serious inherent weaknesses resulting in the need of substantial modification or improvement.
2	Fair	The proposal broadly addresses the criterion; however, it contains some weaknesses and elements that can be improved.
3	Good	The proposal addresses the criterion well; however, it contains few elements that could be improved.
4	Very Good	The proposal is really good in international comparison and contains no significant elements to be improved. It addresses the criterion very well, although certain improvements are still possible.
5	Excellent	The proposal stands out with exceptional novelty, innovation and progress of science at global level. It successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion in question. Any shortcomings are minor

Besides the scores, the written statements (evaluation reports) should reflect the score, be sufficiently detailed and comprehensible.

6.6 Ethics assessment

Experts' evaluation will include the check of Ethical issues using the information provided by the applicants, as explained at section 9 of the Call Announcement.

The assessment has to refer to the criteria published by the Commission in its guidelines for the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme, also listed in the self-assessment applicants are invited to perform (see http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/grants_manual/hi/ethics/h2020_hi_ethics-self-assess_en.pdf).

Additional ethical assessment on the national level can be performed by the funding bodies on optional basis.

Any proposal, which seems to contravene fundamental ethical principles, may be excluded from selection.

6.7 Evaluation reports

All experts will provide a written evaluation report on strengths and weaknesses of each proposal. The report has to be sufficiently detailed and in line with the given score. In case of a proposal failing to reach the threshold, a clear and consistent justification should be given.

Rapporteurs will write a summary evaluation report (ca. half a page) for the proposals assigned. The rapporteurs should contact the other two evaluators (pre-proposal phase only) in order to achieve a consensus regarding the evaluation summaries: these discussions have to be organized by the experts themselves, by e-mail, web or telephone meetings (the Call Office will provide email addresses, if experts agree, but will not be involved in the discussion). In case of strongly contradictory reviews among the 3 evaluators, the rapporteur should contact the Call Office and an additional expert might be involved.

Pre-proposal summary evaluation reports will be directly communicated to the applicants.

Full proposal summary evaluation reports will be discussed during the step 2 evaluation meeting, and finalized in a very short delay after the meeting. They will be communicated to the applicants as part of the notification letter.

7. Evaluation meeting

A physical Expert Panel meeting covering all topics will take place during the first week of June 2020 (further details will be communicated in due time). All experts will receive the draft evaluation reports before the meeting.

All Expert Panel members are welcome to take part in the discussions during the Panel meeting, if they do not have conflict of interest.

The Expert Panel a) will discuss projects where scores between experts are still diverging, b) will align the scoring between proposals and c) will agree on a ranking list per thematic research area.

The Expert Panel will be chaired by the EP chair, who will moderate the discussion but will not influence the evaluation.

The meeting will start by taking one Call topic at a time, and will be followed by a general discussion:

1. Each project will be introduced and commented on by the assigned rapporteur (one expert per proposal). In case a proposal fails the threshold, the draft evaluation report will have to be agreed upon and will be shortly discussed, unless there are strong objections against the presented overall score.
2. The Panel Experts will discuss each project and agree on an overall score and the evaluation report. The overall score shall have one decimal behind the comma (min 0.0, max 15.0).
3. The proposals will be ranked in one list for each research topic. A discussion among all the experts will ensure that the ranking list reflects a linear progression of quality among all proposals. Scores may be modified in this process with due justification and in case of unanimous decision.
4. In addition, evaluators will be asked to give a clear recommendation for funding (green/yellow/red or A/B/C). The direct outcome of the meeting will thus be four ranking lists with proposals grouped in categories of comparable quality.

After the meeting the Expert Panel members will finalize the evaluation reports as soon as possible. The EP's ranking and recommendations will form the basis for the CB final funding decision.

8. Compensation

Expert Panel members will be entitled to a general compensation of 50 euros per pre-proposal evaluation, 100 per full proposal evaluation, and 250 euros for the participation in the 1 1/2-days Expert Panel meeting. Travel and subsistence will be reimbursed. The EP Chair needs to be available during the whole time of evaluation process and will be reimbursed with 1.000 €. Each expert will be asked to evaluate between 1 and 8 applications, and act as rapporteurs of 1 to 4 applications.

ANNEX A

EVALUATOR:

EVALUATOR'S DATA

CALL OFFICE

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ERA-NETS SUSFOOD2 AND CORE ORGANIC COFUND- JOINT CALL FOR PROPOSALS 2019

CONFIDENTIALITY NON-DISCLOSURE AGREEMENT

DATE (set placeholder, position must not be changed)

I hereby undertake to treat as confidential all and any information that I receive while participating in the work of the joint call Expert Panel (EP) and evaluating project proposals, to use this information solely for the purpose of evaluation of the proposals, not to disclose it to any third party and not to make it publicly available or accessible in any way, except with the prior written consent of the joint call consortium.

I understand that this confidentiality non-disclosure agreement is binding towards the joint call network, who has appointed me as an evaluator and towards (and for the benefit of) any applicant submitting the project proposal to the SUSFOOD2-CORE Organic call for proposals. Furthermore, I understand that this confidentiality non-disclosure agreement concerns all and any information in any form that comes to my knowledge during my participation in the work of the joint call Expert Panel and evaluating respective project proposals.

I understand that I shall be bound by this confidentiality non-disclosure agreement as on the date of receipt of this signed letter by the Call Office, and that this confidentiality should be maintained even after the Expert Panel has performed its duties or after my participation in the work of the Expert Panel has ended.

I will not identify myself as a reviewer to the applicant(s) or to any third party, while the Call Office will ensure confidentiality concerning my role as reviewer as well.

I will only address any questions concerning a proposal to the Call Office and not to the applicant(s).

CODE OF CONDUCT AGREEMENT

Fundamental principles of good research practice and peer-review are essential for research integrity. All parties involved directly or indirectly in the evaluation must ensure the transparency and fairness of the process, the evaluation criteria published are respected equally for all proposals, and public funds are well used:

1. Experts as members of the EP are chosen for their technical or scientific or industrial expertise to cover the topics addressed by the submitted proposals. They should perform their work to the best of their abilities, professional skills, knowledge and applying the highest ethical and moral standards.
2. All parties involved directly or indirectly in the evaluation must act objectively, with no self-interested motives. They do not represent their company, organisation or establishment.

- 3. The reviewers shall evaluate the proposals based solely upon the information contained in the proposals and in accordance with the Evaluation Guidelines.
- 4. The experts must immediately inform the Call Office if they cannot fulfill their obligations.
- 5. The reviewers shall finish the individual written assessment for pre-proposals by 13.01.2020, at the latest and by 22.05.2020 for full-proposals; shall be available for discussions with other evaluators for the consolidation of the consensus report and agree to provide contact details to other evaluators.
- 6. The rapporteurs shall finish the consensus pre-proposals evaluation reports by 15.01.2020, at the latest and by 27.05.2020 for draft consensus full-proposals evaluation reports; they shall be available to moderate the discussions; they shall finish the final consensus evaluation reports after the EP meeting.
- 7. At the EP meeting, decisions must be taken collectively by the EP members after all arguments have been heard. Furthermore, decisions must be substantiated.
- 8. Opinions expressed during EP meetings as well as information which parties are the first to obtain have to be kept confidential. The substance of the EP debates must remain secret and the individual positions must not be divulged.
- 9. Minutes will be kept for those meetings during which decisions are reached. These minutes will be circulated to EP members and observers for verification and approval.
- 10. EP members should refrain in all cases from identifying external experts to third parties, and from divulging any other information which could compromise their anonymity. Likewise, reviewers cannot contact the applicants nor the other reviewers during the individual evaluation of proposals.
- 11. If any reviewer is subject to any pressure whatsoever from a project partner, she or he must immediately notify the Call Office.
- 12. If there is a conflict of interest, the concerned person must inform the Call Office as soon as finding that a conflict exists. The necessary measures will be taken to ensure that the related decision and discussion will not be biased, or suspected to be so (e.g. in requesting the concerned person to leave the room when the project in question is being discussed during the EP meeting).
- 13. The chairperson may, on his or her own initiative, consult the Call Office in respect to a real or possible conflict of interests, which has been brought to his or her attention by any means whatsoever.
- 14. Compensations will be paid only if tasks were accomplished in accordance with the provisions of the Evaluation guidelines, within the given deadlines and in high quality after approval by the Call Board. Compensations may not be paid in case of breach of obligations relating to this Code of Conduct.

I agree to the rules of the confidentiality NON-disclosure agreement,

I undertake to abide by the Code of Conduct for Reviewers of the SUSFOOD2-CORE Organic Cofund joint Call:

No Yes

Signature	
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This agreement enters into force on the date of receipt of this signed letter by the Call Office.

ANNEX B

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

I declare that I will independent, impartial and objective in the evaluation of the assigned proposals.

I will refrain from reviewing the proposal if a conflict of interest exists or could be perceived to exist. I understand that there is a conflict of interest if I stand to profit professionally, financially or personally from approval or rejection of the proposal; if in the past three years I have published with, cooperated with or worked at the same company or research unit as the applicant or any of the project workers; if I have fundamental differences of scientific opinion with any applicant; or if I'm a friend or relative of the applicant or any of the co-workers.

If any such conflict of interest exists or arises, I will inform the Call Office as soon as possible. The Call Office takes the last decision about conflicts of interest and disqualifications.

During the Expert Panel meeting, even if I have not evaluated a specific proposal, in case of a possible conflict of interest with it, I will leave the room during the discussion of this proposal. I will follow the indications given by the Call Office aiming at reaching an impartial evaluation of the proposals.