

Action A: Assessment criteria

The evaluation procedure will depend on the number of pre-proposals received:

- If less than 110 pre-proposals are received, only an eligibility check of pre-proposals will be performed. Eligible pre-proposals will be invited to submit full proposals.
- If more than 110 pre-proposals are received, an eligibility check and a first step evaluation (peer-review) of pre-proposals will be performed. In that case, proposals will be evaluated by the Evaluation Committee against the following criteria: fit to the scope of the call, novelty of the research and the transnational added value. Only successful pre-proposals will be invited to submit full proposals.

The Evaluation Committee will apply the criteria below to assess the quality of full proposals.

I. CRITERIA FOR STEP 1

1. Fit to the scope of the call (1-5; threshold: 4)

Evaluation Committee members will assess the relevance of the proposed research against the thematic priorities set forth in the scientific text of the call. Any project that does not fit within the thematic priorities described will not be recommended for funding, regardless of its scientific quality.

2. Novelty of the research performed (1-5; threshold: 3)

Evaluation Committee members will assess the novelty / originality and innovation of the research goals and objectives: to what extent does the proposed activity suggest and explore creative, original concepts?

3. Transnational added value (1-5; threshold: 3)

Evaluation Committee members will assess the transnational added value to be expected from the collaboration (cf. below for more information)

II. CRITERIA FOR STEP 2

Proposals will be evaluated by the Evaluation Committee and external reviewers according to the three criteria detailed below.

No additional criteria will be used for evaluation and selection.

1. Scientific excellence (1-5; threshold: 3.5)

A- Fit to thematic priorities: Evaluation Committee members will assess the relevance of the proposed research against the thematic priorities set forth in the scientific text of the call. Any project that does not fit within the thematic priorities described will not be recommended for funding, regardless of its scientific quality.

B- Scientific excellence aspects, including transnational added value, will be assessed by means of the following criteria:

- a) Scientific quality of the proposed research goals and objectives: how well does the activity advance knowledge and understanding within its own field and across different fields? Does

the proposal contribute to scientific excellence and significant progress toward the state of the art?

- b) Novelty / Originality and innovation of the research goals and objectives: to what extent does the proposed activity suggest and explore creative, original concepts?
- c) Clarity of the hypothesis, theories and/or research questions
- d) Level of inter/multi/trans-disciplinarity
- e) Transnational added value to be expected from the collaboration (cf. below for more information)
- f) Relation to other projects (does the project plan to link-up with other relevant existing projects ?)

Considering that a given project fits within the thematic priorities of the call, its scientific quality is considered before all other criteria and is a prerequisite for funding.

2. Quality and efficiency of the implementation (1-5; threshold: 3)

- a) Quality and efficiency of the management structure and procedures, its organisation and coordination: how well conceived and organised is the proposed activity? Is there an operational plan with well-defined milestones in place?
- b) Competence and expertise of the consortium (including complementarity, balance): how well qualified are the applicants in terms of science knowledge, expertise and experience to conduct the project? What is the quality of previous work in terms of past or potential contributions to, and impact on the proposed and other areas of research? Is the Leading Principal Investigator team (including any identified Co-Principal Investigators) able to lead the project, e.g. having strong management and leadership skills, or having complementarity of expertise and synergy of the members of the team?
- c) Level of integration and collaboration
- d) Appropriateness of resources and funding requested, with justification (budget, staff, equipment): are the requested investments well justified and relevant?
- e) Project feasibility and risk management
- f) Data management plan overview and data sharing

3. Expected impact and stakeholder engagement (1-5; threshold: 3)

The Impact of the proposed research to stakeholders, including policy makers, and engagement with stakeholders will be assessed by means of the 3 following criteria:

A- Approach to stakeholder engagement:

The criteria used to evaluate stakeholder engagement - which applicants and members of the Evaluation Committee are invited to consider – are the following:

- a) Reasons for undertaking stakeholder engagement
- b) Identification of appropriate stakeholders and why they are relevant to the project (what role they could play), and the desired outcomes of engaging with specific stakeholders
- c) Evidence of support from appropriate stakeholders towards the research, and commitment to engage
- d) Methods/activities proposed for engagement and collaborative learning, planning and resources
- e) Evidence that the necessary skills to engage are available in the project team or will be obtained (e.g. through relevant training, or the use of external sources)
- f) Knowledge transfer methods and plans

BiodivERsA produced a stakeholder engagement handbook for researchers to help them to engage with stakeholders all along their research projects.

This handbook is accessible online (<http://biodiversa.org/stakeholderengagement>) and we recommend you to use it when designing your project and preparing your proposal.

B- Policy relevance and importance of the research for solving pressing issues

The criteria used to evaluate policy relevance - which applicants and members of the Evaluation Committee are invited to consider – are the following:

- a) Clear statement of the policy application. Any proposal must contain details which cite the relevance of the research to policy instruments and current legislation. It should also highlight the importance of this work for solving pressing societal issues related to the details of the joint call.
- b) Clearly identified policy makers who are end users of the research results and ways to engage them. The proposal will be expected to identify specific end-user organisations, and, if possible, to name individuals within these organisations.
- c) Arrangements for knowledge transfer.

The **criteria of policy relevance** are explained and detailed in the paper from Gardner, Stott and Vindimian (2013)¹⁸ available on the BiodivERsA website (<http://www.biodiversa.org/254>).

C- Transnational added value

What is meant by Transnational added value?

Transnational added value is the value resulting from the transnational research project, which is additional to the value that would have resulted from research projects funded at national level. The added value may vary, depending on the type of project, and there can be various answers to this question.

However, there should be clear evidence of added value either directly within the countries involved in the research, or indirect value accrued as a result of, e.g. learning from models applied to countries outside of the countries involved.

Transnational added value may include: relevance to international policy statements including IPBES, legislative framework or management plans; clear added value to national research projects across the world by linking expertise and efforts across national teams and across studied areas and research models; bringing about comparisons at the local level between researchers and stakeholders who are not used to work together; standardization of methods, general increase of common knowledge in biodiversity relative to the themes of the call, etc.

III. SCORING SYSTEM

Scoring system at step 1

The scientific experts of the EvC will assess the three criteria while the policy/management experts of the EvC will assess the two following criteria (fit to the scope of the call and transnational added value).

¹⁸ Gardner S., Stott A. & Vindimian E. 2013. How to assess policy relevance in research projects. BiodivERsA report, available at <http://www.biodiversa.org/254/download>.

For each criterion, a score out of a scale of five will be assigned to each proposal. The Evaluation Committee has the possibility to use half scores.

Threshold:

There is no shared interest for proposals with a score lower than 4 for fit to the scope of the call and lower than 3 novelty of the research and transnational added value. These proposals will not be ranked, and not be considered for invitation to step 2.

Aggregation of scores

During the evaluation meeting, the EvC has to agree on a score for all pre-proposals in order to rank the pre-proposals and recommend the ones to be invited to step 2.

For the two criteria evaluated by both scientific and policy/management experts (i.e. fit to the scope of the call and transnational added value), the different rapporteurs (both scientific and policy/management) have to agree as much as possible by consensus on the grade to be given to the proposals for these criteria. In case a consensus cannot be reached, the score given for the criteria will correspond to the average of the scores given by policy/management rapporteurs and scientific rapporteurs.

Final score:

The final score given to a proposal will correspond to an aggregation of the scores given to the three criteria (equal weight for the 3 criteria). The overall score will correspond to a score out of a scale of fifteen points.

The EvC ranks the pre-proposals according to their final score. The EvC can define groups of ex-aequo for pre-proposals with a same final score that it considers of equal quality.

Scoring system at step 2

The overall aim of the ranking system is to allow a transparent ranking that still allow for some flexibility, and to fund as many high-level projects as possible.

The two first criteria (scientific excellence and quality and efficiency of the implementation) will be assessed by the scientific experts of the EvC and scientific external reviewers, while the expected impact and stakeholder engagement criteria will be assessed by the policy/management experts of the EvC and external reviewers.

For each criterion, a score out of a scale of five will be assigned to each proposal. The Evaluation Committee has the possibility to use half scores.

Threshold:

There is no shared interest for proposals with a score lower than 3.5 for scientific excellence and lower than 3 for quality and efficiency of the implementation and expected impact and stakeholder engagement. These proposals will not be ranked, and not be considered for funding.

Weighting system:

The following weighting system will apply for the different criteria:

Criteria	Weight
Scientific excellence	7
Quality/efficiency of the implementation	3
Expected impact and stakeholder engagement	6

The final score given to a proposal will correspond to an aggregation of the scores given to the three criteria, taking into account their respective weights. The overall mark will be transformed into a score out of 15 points.

The EvC ranks as many projects as possible. However, around the threshold, the EvC can use ex-aequo for proposals with a same final score that it considers of equal quality.

Example:

If a proposal receives a score of 4 for scientific excellence, 4 for quality and efficiency of the implementation and 5 for expected impact and stakeholder engagement, the aggregation of the scores taking into account their respective weight will give a score of 70. This score will be transformed into a score out of 15 points, i.e. 13.