

ESF Peer Review Services

What does ESF offer?

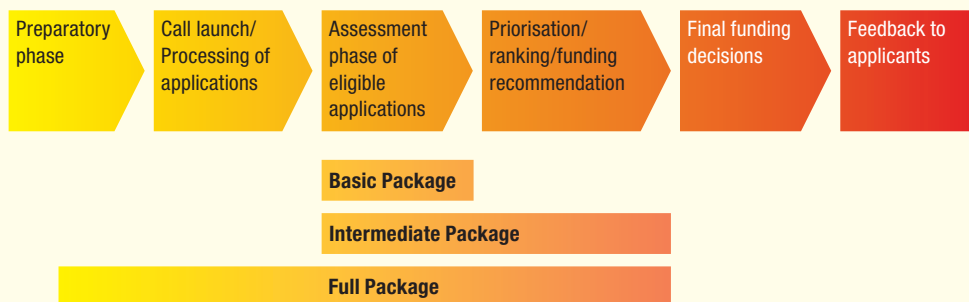
Scope

From call preparation to selection and feedback to applicants, any peer review process involves several sequential steps. In this context, ESF can support such activities by providing a range of services which can be tailored to meet the different needs of its client organisations. The services that ESF offers can be classified into three main types of package:

1. **Basic Package:** provision of written expert reviews in the frame of an already defined call. Under this package, call management, final selection and funding decisions are conducted by the client organisation.
2. **Intermediate Package:** full scale elaboration, management and implementation of the scientific assessment process, resulting in prioritised list(s) and funding recommendations.
3. **Full Package:** end-to-end peer review process elaboration and implementation, from call management (gathering and handling of proposals) to final funding recommendations.

The term 'peer review' can be defined as a process by which something proposed (as for research or publication) is evaluated by a group of experts in the appropriate field. In the ESF context, 'peer review' refers to the integrated process for enabling the identification of research proposals or applications for subsequent support (funding or in-kind).

In addition to these three packages, ESF can also provide tailored *ad hoc* services to meet specific requests from client organisations.



Structure

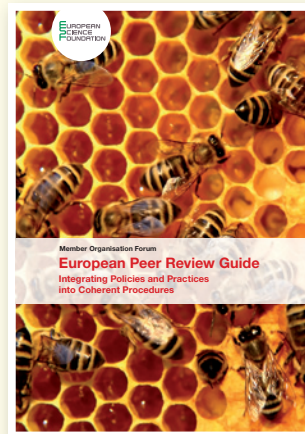
Any competitive call has its own specificities: postdoctoral fellowships are very different from usage time for large infrastructures or major research grants. Accordingly, the peer review process can differ significantly according to the particular call. Depending on the boundary conditions, in implementing its service packages ESF offers a modular and flexible approach to call management and peer review.

Call approach:

- Single submission of full proposals
- Two-stage submission: outline proposals followed by full proposals

Peer review approach and process:

- Peer review based only on remote assessments, without review panels
- Peer review based on assessments performed by experts sitting in (a) review panel(s) (with virtual or physical meetings)
- Peer review based on assessments from external reviewers and consensus from (a) review panel(s)
- Opportunity given to applicants to comment on anonymous assessments through written comments or interviews



ESF has a strong and deep knowledge of peer review processes. In 2011, ESF issued the *European Peer Review Guide – Integrating Policies and Practices into Coherent Procedures*. This guide resulted from an in-depth analysis of peer review processes implemented by the leading European public research funding organisations. This benchmarking and synthesising exercise allowed ESF to refine and improve its approach and internal processes in order to integrate some of the best practices identified during that analysis.

In providing peer review services, ESF draws upon its long experience in the field and its highly competent staff. Having implemented peer review for its own purposes or third parties for more than three decades, ESF has a deep understanding and strong expertise allowing its client organisations to have access to peer review services of the highest international standards. ESF expertise is particularly valuable in the following domains:

Structuring the overall call and peer review process

ESF has developed its capacity to define and design efficient and appropriate call and peer review processes. Therefore ESF can support its client organisations as soon as the early preparatory phase and provide its expertise to:

- Identify, recommend and implement the most appropriate call approach (e.g. one- or two-stage submission process, assessment criteria and scoring system, work plan and timeline)
- Identify, recommend and implement the most appropriate peer review structure (e.g. number and focus of review panels, composition of review panels)
- Identify, recommend and implement the most appropriate peer review approach and process (e.g. with or without physical meeting, with or without external reviewers)

Mobilising the most appropriate expertise

Beside the overall structure of the peer review, the core of any peer review process is the provision of assessments that would best serve the selection process. In this context, and in order to maximise the value of the peer review, it is of utmost importance that proposals are assessed by appropriately qualified experts, in particular:

- External experts having a precise knowledge of the proposals they are asked to assess
- Review panel members who have broad knowledge and experience allowing a good overview of the state of the art

Identifying the right experts and setting up balanced review panels are complex tasks, in particular when considering multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary calls and research proposals. ESF has developed the skills, processes, guidelines, infrastructure (including a flexible online platform) and tools (including a vast international database of reviewers) to perform these tasks in a coherent, ethical and efficient manner.



Providing an efficient and smooth operational structure

Any single step of a peer review process is highly demanding in terms of resource, in particular staff. With the experience of thousands of research proposals assessed, ESF has developed skills, competences and procedures that allow an efficient and reliable management of research proposals. This capacity is also supported by an optimised IT infrastructure that allows fast and trustworthy interactions and exchange of information for all the actors involved, from the applicants to the experts and the ESF office.

ESF procedures and infrastructures allow:

- Production of documentation and guidelines appropriate to each phase (e.g. application form and guidelines for applicants; assessment form and guidelines for assessment, terms of reference and guidelines for panels)
- Tailored web platform for online submission of applications, of remote reviews and/or panel review as appropriate
- Processing eligibility check of proposals
- Identification and contact of appropriate expert remote reviewers
- Identification and contact of appropriate review panel members
- Logistical and administrative support to panel
- Production of the agreed deliverables

Quality control and integrity

Implementing peer review activities involves accountability not only towards the client organisation but also towards the applicants. ESF is committed to provide peer review services of the highest quality. In doing so ESF pays special attention to the following issues:

• Conflicts of interest

A conflict of interest may be defined as a situation where a person may benefit either financially, professionally or personally by the success or failure of a proposal. ESF has developed and is implementing robust and well-defined guidelines to identify and manage potential conflicts of interest throughout the whole peer review process.

• Transparency

ESF is committed to ensure full transparency throughout the whole peer review process. This involves:

- Regular interaction with and feedback to the client organisation
- Ensuring the client organisation can have access to all the relevant documentation and information produced throughout the process
- Providing full access to the dedicated online platform to enable the client organisation to monitor the contents and progress of the call and assessment process
- Inviting representatives from the client organisation to the meetings held in the frame of a given peer review

- **Equality of treatment**

Development and writing of research proposals require significant effort and sometimes coordination with potential partners. It is crucial that the peer review process implemented recognises and values this effort. In implementing its peer review services, ESF is committed to ensure that all applications or proposals are assessed and processed in a coherent and consistent way in order to produce a fair competition in which the same level of consideration is given to all applicants.

Furthermore, ESF not only provides equal treatment among research proposals, it also ensures consistency among the various peer review processes it implements for its client organisations; this allows continuity and comparability across time and borders.

- **Confidentiality of information provided**

All participants in the peer review process are required to note that the information provided in the frame of a process should be used only for that purpose. They are also required to treat all information provided as strictly confidential and are requested to sign non-disclosure agreements.

Reporting and feedback to applicants

Depending on the structure of the activity implemented, the number and type of deliverables to the client organisation may vary and have to be agreed at the planning phase. In all cases, ESF considers that the feedback to applicants has to be respectful, sound, clear, well argued and well written. This is particularly relevant for those proposals that are not successful, as assessment reports should provide some support to improve these proposals for future submissions. In this context, ESF staff monitor and follow the production of assessment reports and ensure that these respect the requirements expressed and follow guidelines provided.

Some of our latest references

- **European Polar Consortium**
Call management and peer review of the PolarCLIMATE Programme, 2008–2009
- **European Space Agency**
Peer review of the International Life Science Research announcement (with NASA, JAXA and CSA), 2009–2010
- **HERA – Humanities in the European Research Area**
Call management and peer review of the HERA programme, 2008–2012
- **University of Torino and University of Piemonte Orientale**
Peer review of the Compagnia di San Paolo 2012 grant campaign
- **University of Bologna**
Provision of expert review in the frame of the national call for funding PRIN and FIRB, 2012
- **AXA Research Fund**
Peer review of the ‘socio-economic’ fellowship programme, 2013
Peer Review of Postdoctoral fellowships programme, 2014
- **University of Naples**
Peer review of the Compagnia di San Paolo 2013 grant campaign
- **FP7 Graphene Flagship**
Call management and peer review of Graphene Flagship call for consortium extension, 2013–2014
- **Portuguese Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT)**
Peer Review of FCT’s R&D Units call, 2014

► www.esf.org/peer-review

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