

IMI2 JU INDEPENDENT OBSERVER'S REPORT

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IMI2 8th Call for Proposals 4th cut-off date

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[Signed]

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1. Introduction and approach taken by the observer

1.1. Introduction

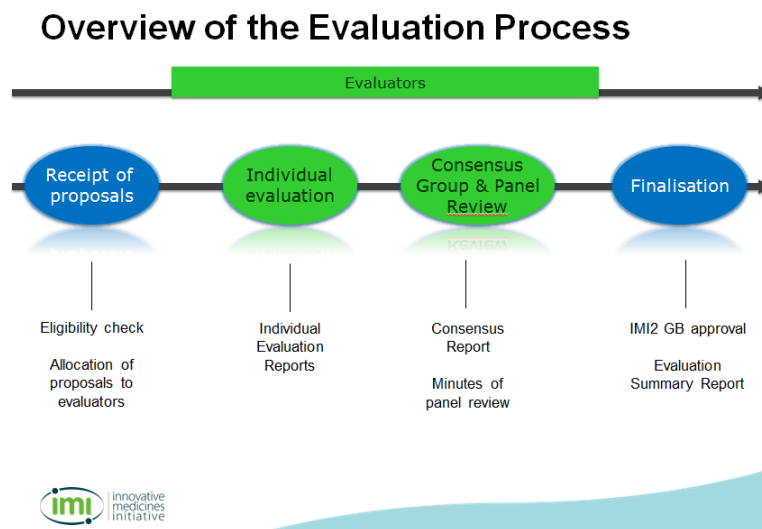
This report provides the findings of the Independent Observer following completion of the Consensus Panel meeting of the IMI2 Call 8 (4th cut-off date Evaluation) held in Brussels Friday 6 October 2017.

The 8th Call for proposals is the second Call under the Ebola+ programme. This call for proposals is continuously open for a period of two years with 5 cut-off dates for submission of proposals. Proposals submitted at each cut-off date are evaluated and ranked in one single list (one stage evaluation).

The proposals are evaluated against the specific IMI2 evaluation criteria (Excellence, Impact and Quality and efficiency of the implementation)¹. Best-ranked proposals, in the framework of the available budget, will be invited to prepare a Grant Agreement.

Guidelines to submit proposals included the scope, expected key deliverables and expected impact.

The overview of the evaluation process is illustrated in the next graph:



Only one proposal was submitted and remotely evaluated over a two week period prior to the 2 October 2017, by Independent Experts (IE). Independent Observer (IO) had also remote access to the submitted proposal.

The consensus group met for the panel meeting at IMI premises. The meeting started at 8:30 with registration, followed by a briefing by IMI Executive Director from 9:00 to 9:30. The meeting lasted up to 18:00. All the rules for submission, evaluation, selection and evaluation criteria were clearly described during the Briefing.

The eligible proposal was discussed to assess its merit with respect to the pre-defined evaluation criteria relevant to the Call.

General discussion on the merit of the application, consensus scores and drafting of the Final Consensus Report were moderated by an IMI scientific officer.

¹http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/other/guides_for_applicants/itis/h2020-guide-pse-imi-ju-call8_en.pdf

The detailed evaluation criteria (scoring, thresholds and weighting) are also fully described in the publicly available document².

To fulfil the IMI2 evaluation rules based on transparency, one independent observer was invited to follow all the evaluation process. As the IMI2 Call 8 was a single-stage Call process and only one consensus group panel meeting was taking place, only one IO was a part of the meeting.

1.2. Methodology

As stated in the IMI's "Rules for submission, evaluation and selection of Expressions of Interest and Full Project Proposals 3.4", the role of the IOs is as follows:

"The role of observers is to give independent advice to the IMI JU on the conduct and fairness of all phases of the evaluation sessions, on ways in which the experts apply the evaluation criteria, and on ways in which the procedures could be improved. As such, they shall verify that the procedures set out or referred to in these Rules are adhered to, and report their findings and recommendations to the IMI JU. They are also encouraged to enter into informal discussions with the IMI JU staff involved in the evaluation sessions and to suggest to the IMI JU any possible improvements that could be put into practice immediately. However, in the framework of their work, they should not express views on the expressions of interest and full project proposals under evaluation or the experts' opinions on the proposals."

During the on-site briefing the IO was introduced to the Evaluators and its role defined.

The IO spoke individually with all the IEs and several IMI employees. These included the Scientific Officers who acted as moderators, the supporting Secretariat and IMI lawyers.

2. Overall impression

In the following the independent Observer has summarized the general observations and detailed specific aspects of the evaluation process assessed.

For IEs, the online submission and evaluation system, SEP system worked perfectly well. In the view of the IO the tool functioned well during the remote evaluation and the writing of the Consensus Report of the panel review.

An on-site briefing for IEs took place before the panel sessions, with an overview of the process and the obligations of both the IE and the IMI Team as a whole.

The on-site evaluation and review process was conducted in accordance with the plan set out during the briefing, and the meeting ran smoothly in line with the pre-defined Agenda.

The IO observed that IMI is following a set of core principles for good practice in peer review that are Gold Standards as stated by the European Science Foundation in the European Peer Review guide published in March 2013 :

Excellence: the excellence of the proposal was based on the assessment performed by high quality experts.

Impartiality: the proposal was evaluated on its merit, irrespective of their origin or the identity of the applicants.

² http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/other/guides_for_applicants/jtis/h2020-guide-pse-imi-ju-call8_en.pdf

³ European Peer Review Guide – Integrating Policies and Practices into Coherent Procedures :

http://archives.esf.org/fileadmin/Public_documents/Publications/European_Peer_Review_Guide_01.pdf

Transparency: decisions and scoring were based on clearly described rules and procedures that were published in the public applicants and evaluators guides

Confidentiality: the proposal and related data or documents have been treated in confidence by experts and IMI personal involved in the process. Particular attention was taken not to leave documents (proposals or evaluation reports) unattended in an empty office.

Ethical and integrity considerations were taken into account as part of the assessment of the proposals by ethical experts.

Conflict of interest: the prevention and management of conflicts of interest are the most important ingredients for ensuring equity and integrity in peer review, and to preserve the credibility of the process. IMI distinguish conditions that would automatically disqualify an expert, and those that are potential conflicts where the IMI legal team is involved.

In IO opinion:

- The well-defined evaluation procedures, the high scientific level of IEs and the skilled Scientific Officer supported by a very competent staff allowed the proposal to benefit of an outstanding quality assessment;
- There were no violations against the rules of the published evaluation guidelines;
- The choice of IEs from different fields was of high value and IEs were of a high quality and possessed all the relevant expertise for the evaluation of the proposal. All participants approached their tasks with commitment and professionalism. Panel discussions were fair and transparent. A consensus was reached by the IEs on the scoring of the proposal;
- The Final Consensus Evaluation Report was drafted with active participation of all Panel members and reviewed collectively, under the guidance of the IMI scientific officers. They faithfully represent the consensus opinion of the Panel. Comments were well aligned with the scores;
- The IMI Scientific Officer guidance was also very important to ensure that the comments are in the correct section according to IMI rules;
- The presence of 3 IMI Scientific Officers, one acting as moderator, ensured the efficacy and the quality of the in-house evaluation panel meeting throughout the review session.

3. Overall Conclusions

There were no apparent violations of the published Guidelines and the evaluations, and discussions were fair and transparent.

All evaluation IMI procedures have been fully respected.

The evaluation was conducted by the IMI staff in a very professional way. The evaluation involved important logistics preparation of the meeting (travels, hotel booking, printing evaluation reports, call documents, applicant proposal, IT system etc.). Experts did not express any complaint regarding any aspect of the evaluation process.

It should be emphasized that the IMI assessment procedures have reached a very high level of quality directly connected to the expertise, professionalism and competence of its employees.

4. Acknowledgements

The IO thanks the IEs and IMI staff for being amenable to being “observed” and for the formal and informal conversations that helped formulate this report.

The IO particularly thanks the IMI staff for their help, competence and hospitality.

Dr. Nicole Haeffner-Cavaillon