

The project selection process

Use of external expertise in quality assessment



Assessment in our documents

- **HU-HR Programme Document**, approved in 2008
- **HU-HR Implementation Manual**, approved in 2009
- **HU-HR Assessment Manual**, approved in 2009
- **Guidelines for Applicants** of the first Call for Proposals, published 26 March 2009
- **Application package** of the first Call, namely the approved evaluation grids



HU-HR Assessment Manual

- Approved by the HU-HR **JMC**
- 40-page long document, regulating **every aspect of project assessment** (from actors and principles to phases and their technicalities)
- Regulates **one-step and two-step procedure** – only the previous has been used in the HU-HR Programme
- Contains the following phases: **formal, eligibility and quality** assessment, plus JMC decision-making



Quality assessment – our way

- Basic approach: **use of external assessors** for the quality assessment of project proposals
- Main reason: continuation of **best practice**
- The two preceding programmes in this cross-border area (Interreg PHARE Small Projects Fund and INTERREG IIIA Neighbourhood Programme) **have used the same approach**
- Gradual **improvement** of technical details



Who is an external assessor?

- **An expert** of a given field
- **Independent** from the programme management structures of the given Programme
- **Contracted by the JTS** and entrusted with the task of assessing the project proposals assigned to him/her
- **Paired** by the JTS with at least another assessor to ensure the **4-eyes-principle** for every application
- Coming from either **HU or HR**, as opposed to their pair



Advantages of external assessors

- Have the necessary **professional background**
- Possess **specialised** knowledge
- Have a general overview of the topic
- Are **independent** from both the applicants and the JMC/MA/JTS
- Remain **anonymous** to the applicants



Disadvantages of external assessors

- **Tend to focus in on their field**, leaving some aspects of the quality assessment aside
- **Do not necessarily have insight** into the mechanisms of cross-border projects
- **They have to be briefed** on a lot of details, in a short time, they have basic understanding of the programme
- **Are eventually not as committed** to a properly detailed assessment as the JTS is



Disadvantages of external assessors

- **Their independence** has to be carefully evaluated
- **Their scoring is not as standardised** as that of JTS members who have, due to their long work in the programme and due to continuous consultations, a balanced understanding of the programme



How to select them?

- First step: compile a **Pool of Experts**, not only for the actual Call but also beyond
- HU-HR method: publication of a **Call for Experts on the web pages** (Programme – MA – NA)
- **Open call**, assessors apply with **CV and application form** plus copies of diplomas, certifications etc.
- List of expected minimum **requirements**
- List of **professional areas** to choose from



How to assign them?

- From the applications sent until the deadline, **the MA, the NA and the JTS jointly select** the Pool of Experts, i.e. a list of suitable quality assessors
- From the Pool of Experts, **the JTS chooses assessors for the concrete assessment tasks**, based on their professional background and according to the number of project proposals per areas of intervention / actions – 2 assessors per application

Step 1: Briefing

- The chosen assessors are, in groups, **called by the JTS to a one-day session**
- Here they receive **training**: about the Programme, about the Call, about the previous steps of assessment, about the application form and the annexes and, most important, **about the quality evaluation grid to be used**
- Additionally, they sign their **service contract** and they receive **copies of applications** to be assessed



Step 2: Individual work

- Assessors take the applications (copies) assigned to them and evaluate the project proposals with the help of the **individual quality evaluation grid**
- The grid is in our case **an Excel file**, automatically adding up points given to the different criteria)
- There is ample space to **add reasoning in connection to every criterion**
- Final versions of the grids are **printed and signed**



Step 3: Co-operation exercise I.

- **Basic idea:** JMC should for its decision-making not merely receive for every project two scores and two individual evaluation grids
- **Instead,** the assessors (through meetings and with JTS quality assurance) prepare an **Assessment Summary**, it contains the **scores, comments and conditions** of both assessors, the remarks of the JTS regarding eventual **budget cuts** and the opinion of the MA concerning eventual **State aid issues**



Step 3: Co-operation exercise II.

- **JTS organises sessions** where assessors assigned to the same application meet and share their views, eventually bring closer their standpoints
- Copies of applications are returned, individual evaluation grids are finalised and signed, **joint recommendations, conditions** are formulated
- **Output: Assessment Summary** document containing all relevant pieces of information from the quality assessors, the JTS and the MA



Decision-making

- Documents at the disposal of the JMC members (on the **back office** of the Programme web site):
 - Application Forms
 - Assessment Summaries
 - **detailed list of projects** with basic data, total average scores, requested and recommended amounts of Community funding, eventual recommendations and conditions, eventual State aid issues



Points of special concern I.

Selecting the Pool of Experts:

- proper identification of **suitable** assessor candidates
- reliable **language skills** and knowledge of the eligible programme area are essential
- if there is more than one MA or JTS in the same institution, other programmes can easily be consulted whether certain assessors have already worked for them, this way their quality of work **can be checked**



Points of special concern II.

Assigning assessors to individual projects:

- proper identification of the **professional areas where the future assessor is best** (some of them indicate several fields)
- **avoiding of conflicts of interests** is essential
- careful **pairing** of assessors for the same application
- if there is need for it, **constant communication flow** between the JTS and the assessors



Points of special concern III.

Impartiality and confidentiality:

- especially important in the quality assessment phase, due to the **involvement of ‘outsiders’**
- related **declarations** are to be signed by every assessor and are to be administered by the JTS
- **assessors are to be thoroughly checked** as to their potential links to applicants of project proposals to be assigned to them



Points of special concern IV.

Preparing the assessors for their task:

- assessors **should know the basic things** about the Programme, the Call and the Application Form (e.g. where can which information be found)
- since they tend to not read lengthy documents, it is useful to **prepare a guide for them**, copying all relevant information into one single document
- assessors have to be **encouraged to ask first**



Points of special concern V.

Supervision of the individual work:

- a **responsible JTS member** has to be assigned to every pair of assessors and has to continuously support them
- it is useful to **request back evaluation grids also electronically** and as they get finalised, in order to check their quality, the level of details etc.
- the two assessors **should not communicate** just yet



Points of special concern VI.

Co-operation session:

- to be led by the responsible JTS member who is also encouraged to **channel (focus) the discussion**
- important to stress that **assessors do not have to agree**
- if there are **substantial differences** between the two scores, a third assessor is to be involved
- it is not a requirement to force scores to be closer



Points of special concern VII.

Finalising the Assessment Summary:

- the document has to be **properly detailed** yet it has to contain a **digestible** amount of information (most JMC members have limited capacity to go into details)
- **pros and contras** for the application should be listed exhaustively and their balance should be **in line with the recommendation** on support or non-support
- the list of projects has to be **comprehensible** as well



Conclusions of our assessment I.

- In general, the assessment procedure has to be and **can be shortened** (applicant-friendly)
- **Formal and eligibility assessment can eventually be merged**, potentially resulting in only one round of requests for missing documents / clarifications
- **Deadlines** prescribed in the Assessment Manual for certain evaluation steps can eventually be **shortened**, in certain cases faxes could replace postal deliveries



Conclusions of our assessment II.

- For the quality assessment phase the **introduction of a 'hybrid' system** is to be thought through
- **First version:** one of the two assessors is replaced by a member of JTS, resulting in the better representation of programme- and cross-border aspects during evaluation
- **Second version:** the quality criteria are divided between points of external expertise and JTS domains



Thank you for your attention!

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