

## Guidelines for Reviewing Research Fellowships

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### I. General Information on the Review Process

As a rule, each proposal submitted to the DFG is evaluated by two independent reviewers. On the basis of these reviews, the DFG's Head Office prepares an award recommendation. All documentation is then sent to one or more members of the review boards. The review boards are elected statutory bodies of the DFG. They are responsible for the quality of the review process and, especially in the case of individual grants, for the preparation of the funding decision by the appropriate committee. All reviewers participating in the process will be informed of the final decision.

### II. Formal Aspects of the Review Process

If you do not feel that you have the expertise required to evaluate the subject matter, please return the proposal as quickly as possible. In this case we would be grateful if you would assist us by suggesting other possible reviewers.

Please examine whether circumstances exist that could be interpreted as your having a conflict of interest.

If you have any questions about the proposal, please contact the DFG Head Office exclusively.

When composing the review please consider that the DFG's Head Office will generally forward your comments and thoughts concerning the proposal, anonymously, to the applicant.

### III. Research Fellowships

A research fellowship is granted for a clearly delimited research project lasting up to two years and conducted abroad, either independently or under the supervision of a qualified researcher. Within the framework of this project, the fellowship may be used to prepare for habilitation or an equivalent qualification, to get introduced to a special research institution, or to learn certain methodologies.

#### **IV. Review Criteria for Research Fellowships**

1. What has the applicant accomplished so far in his/her career and area of research?
2. Is the applicant qualified to pursue the project based on his/her track record?
3. How do you assess the scientific originality and feasibility of the project?
4. Are the host institution and the research environment suitable?

If the complexity of the proposal permits, the review should not exceed one to two pages in length.

Please provide a clear recommendation as to whether you believe the project should be funded.

The DFG provides clear instructions on how an applicant's publications list should be structured. In particular, the number of publications that can be listed is limited. This measure has two main objectives: first, to place emphasis on the content of the most important project-relevant publications, without regard to numerical indicators; second, to reduce the pressure for excessive publication.

A research proposal includes

- a list of the applicant's most important publications
- an overview of the applicant's most important project-relevant publications

Please consider this in your assessment.

The project's description as listed in the relevant part of the proposal should serve as the basis of your assessment. You may also refer to the publications cited in the bibliography to gain more information on specific aspects of the proposal. Please note, however, that the bibliography is not considered in the review. A detailed list of rules can be found under item VII.

#### **V. Diversity and Equal Opportunities in German Research**

In all of its funding programmes, the DFG actively encourages equal opportunities and diversity in German science and academia. Funding reviews may not disadvantage applicants due to extra-scientific reasons, such as age, gender or state of health. For example, in assessing proposals from young researchers, considerations should not be based on the applicants' actual age but instead on the individual circumstances relating to the duration of their scientific careers and previous research achievements.

In promoting diversity and equal opportunities in research, it is possible to compensate for certain, extra-scientific disadvantages. For example, in order to evaluate the scientific achievements of applicants appropriately, their individual situations need to be taken into account. Equal opportunity therefore includes taking into consideration unavoidable delays in the scientific careers of applicants (for example longer periods of qualification, gaps in publications, or less time spent abroad due to family reasons).

Information on diversity and equal opportunities can be found at: [www.dfg.de/en/research\\_careers/equal\\_opportunities](http://www.dfg.de/en/research_careers/equal_opportunities). You may also contact the relevant person at the DFG's Head Office for more information.

## **VI. Confidentiality**

All proposals submitted to the DFG, the correspondence with reviewers, the reviews and the identity of the reviewers and members of review boards participating in the evaluation must be treated confidentially. They must not be revealed to third parties. Therefore, the responsibilities of a reviewer may only be undertaken personally and may not be delegated to third parties. The scientific content of the proposal may not be exploited for personal and/or other scientific purposes. Furthermore, we ask that you not identify yourself as a reviewer to the applicant or to any third party.

## **VII. Conflicts of Interest**

At each stage of the proposal process, the DFG Head Office examines whether any appearance of bias, favouritism or conflict of interest may exist. However, the DFG is not able to investigate all circumstances that could be interpreted as such. To avoid actual or apparent conflicts of interest, bias or favouritism (hereinafter referred to as "conflicts of interest"), the DFG relies on your assistance.

Please carefully read the DFG's rules for avoiding conflicts of interest presented below. Should circumstances exist that may be interpreted as conflicts of interest, please inform the responsible DFG division before submitting your written review or prior to participating in a meeting. This will enable us to contact another person to participate in the review process or to consider with you whether your participation is advisable. If you submit a written review to the DFG or participate in a DFG meeting without first having contacted the DFG about a possible conflict of interest, the DFG assumes that, to the best of your knowledge, no apparent conflict of interest exists. If, after submitting a written review or following a meeting, you realise that there may be – or may have been – an apparent conflict of interest, you should also contact the DFG Head Office immediately.

### **DFG Rules for Avoiding Conflicts of Interest**

Below you will find a list with examples of criteria that may give the appearance of a conflict of interest. The criteria are classified into two categories: "exclusion" and "individual case decisions". This classification applies to both written and oral review procedures and includes committee meetings.

#### **Exclusion**

If any of the exclusion criteria (items 1-7) listed below apply to you, you will be excluded from the review, evaluation and decision-making processes with respect to the proposal in question. During a meeting, you will be asked to leave the room during proceedings related to that project.

#### **Individual Case Decisions**

If any of the criteria listed under 8-15 apply to you, the DFG's Head Office will examine your case individually. Upon disclosure of the circumstances relating to the potential conflict of interest, the DFG's Head Office will decide whether or not you may participate in the written review process or upcoming meeting. Should such a circumstance become apparent during a meeting, the meeting leadership will decide according to the applicable administrative practice.

During meetings, the following also applies:

If, within the scope of the review and decision-making processes, discussions on the project as a whole or comparative discussions regarding all projects being reviewed in a meeting take

place, you may participate, even if you were required to leave the room during the discussion of individual projects. However, during the discussion you may not comment on projects that were addressed in your absence.

During a vote on individual projects, you may not be present if you were excluded from participating during the discussion of these projects. During en bloc voting, on the other hand, you may vote, even if you were required to leave the room during the discussion of one or more of the projects that are being voted on.

### **Conflict of Interest Criteria**

As a rule, the following circumstances result in **exclusion**:

1. First-degree relationship, marriage, life partnership, domestic partnership
2. Personal financial interest in the proposal's success or financial interest by persons listed under no. 1
3. Current or planned close scientific cooperation
4. For proposals from universities: Spokespersons from research associations are excluded from participating in the peer review panel for proposals that are decided upon in the same meeting as their own proposal.
5. Dependent employment relationship or supervisory relationship (e.g. teacher-student relationship up to and including the postdoctoral phase) extending six years beyond the conclusion of the relationship
6. a) For proposals from legal persons: The affiliation or pending transfer to this or to a participating institution  
b) For proposals from natural persons: The affiliation or pending transfer to the same department or to the same non-university research institute
7. For proposals from universities: Researchers who are active in a university council or similar supervisory board of the applying university are excluded from participating in the review and decision-making process for proposals from this university.

As a rule, the following circumstances must be handled on an **individual case basis**:

8. Relationships that do not fall under no. 1, other personal ties or conflicts
9. Financial interests of persons listed under no. 8
10. For proposals from natural persons: The affiliation with or pending transfer to the same university or to the same non-university research institution
11. Participation in university bodies other than those listed under no. 7, e.g. in scientific advisory committees in the greater research environment
12. Research cooperation within the last three years, e.g. joint publications
13. Preparation of a proposal or implementation of a project with a closely related research topic (competition)
14. Participation in an ongoing appointment process or one that has been completed within the past 12 months as an applicant or internal member of the appointment committee
15. Participation in mutual review processes within the past 12 months

## **VIII. Overview of Applicant Requirements for Compiling Publication Lists**

Applicants are asked to cite all publications referenced in their research fellowship proposals. This information serves various purposes and is requested in up to three different areas:

1. as part of the description of the state of the art and the applicants' own preliminary work or, in the case of renewal proposals, as part of the progress report to enhance or supplement explanations. All cited publications, whether the applicants' own or those of others, must be listed in a bibliography. This reference list is not considered the list of publications. Any unpublished work must be included with the proposal. However, reviewers are not required to read any of the works cited. Reviews should only be based on the actual proposal text.
2. as part of the applicants' project-related lists of publications, which enables reviewers to assess a project's publication output
3. as part of the applicant's list of most important publications, regardless of relevance to the proposed project.

For items 2 and 3, applicants are requested to structure their publication lists (which you have received as one document) as follows:

- a) Articles which at the time of proposal submission have been published or officially accepted by publication outlets with scientific quality assurance, listed in standard format; book publications. For works that have been accepted for publication but not yet published, the manuscript must be submitted along with the publisher's acknowledgement of acceptance.
- b) Other publications
- c) Patents, subdivided into pending and issued

Please note that the maximum number of works applicants may list under a) and b) combined is limited. For research fellowship proposals, the following maximum numbers apply:

- for project-related publication lists:  
two publications per year of the funding duration. Please note that these rules refer to the proposed funding duration for new proposals and the completed duration for renewal proposals.
- for the listing of an applicant's most important publications:  
up to five

Researchers who are at an early stage of their careers may not yet have extensive publishing experience. Please consider this in your assessment.

## **IX. Obligation to Follow Rules of Good Scientific Practice**

The rules of good scientific practice also apply to reviewers. A violation of these rules can result in a charge of scientific misconduct. Scientific misconduct is defined as the intentional and grossly negligent statement of falsehoods in a scientific context, the violation of intellectual property rights or impeding another person's research work. Violations may also occur in cases of noncompliance with section V (Confidentiality) above. The circumstances of the individual case are decisive.

Depending on the type and severity of the determined misconduct, the DFG may impose one or more sanctions, as specified in the DFG Rules of Procedure in Cases of Scientific Misconduct.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The DFG Rules of Procedure in Cases of Scientific Misconduct provide for the following measures in cases of scientific misconduct:

- issuing a written reprimand to those involved;
- exclusion from the right to apply for DFG funds for a period of one to eight years, depending on the severity of the scientific misconduct;
- revoking funding decisions (complete or partial cancellation of the grant, recalling granted funds, demanding repayment of funds spent);
- demanding that those concerned either retract the discredited publications or correct the falsified data (in particular by publishing an erratum), or appropriately indicate the DFG's retraction of funding in the discredited publications;
- exclusion from acting as a reviewer or from membership in DFG committees;
- denying voting rights and eligibility in elections for DFG statutory bodies and committees.