

Guidelines

for Reviewing Proposals in the Collaborative Research Centres Programme

Introduction

When conducting an **on-site review** of a proposal to establish or renew a Collaborative Research Centre, we ask you to consider the following questions. Please note that a written assessment is not required in conjunction with the on-site review. Questions that pertain to renewal proposals or CRC/Transregio proposals are identified as such.

If you have been asked explicitly to provide a written assessment on an individual project without participation in the on-site review, only sections [1.2](#). (Research Projects), [1.4](#) (Information Infrastructure Service Project), [1.5](#) (Public Relations Project) or [1.6](#) (Transfer Project) are relevant.

Please note the formal aspects of the review as stated in section [II](#). Information on the on-site review and the decision process can be found in section [III](#). If you have any questions, please contact the DFG Head Office.

I. Key questions for the Review

I.1. General Strategy

What is your assessment of the research topic?

- Is the topic original, timely and relevant?
- Does the topic have a fundamental character and a long term perspective?
- Are there prospects for applications, e.g. in terms of social, economic, medical, ecological or cultural developments?
- What relationships exist to thematically related institutions or larger projects, including those at other locations?

- For renewal proposals: What is the relationship between the consortium's scientific development and the scientific progress that has been made elsewhere in the collaborative research centre's general area of activity?

What is your assessment of the scientific quality?

- How do you rate the qualifications of the participating researchers?
- Is the research programme coherent? Is the division into project areas and individual projects convincing?
- How is the centre positioned internationally? What are its prospects in international competition? Is the centre internationally visible?
- For renewal proposals: What scientific progress has been made? What is its significance?
- For a CRC/Transregio: Are the leading researchers from the relevant subject areas networked?

How do you rate the coherence and organisation of the consortium?

- Is the research programme well focused and structured? Do the individual projects clearly fit in with the overall goals?
- How do you assess the potential for cooperation between the individual projects? Are productive collaborations in place? Are synergies to be expected?
- Is multi- or interdisciplinary collaboration in place or planned? Is there a general strategy for such collaborations?
- What is your impression of the consortium's self-monitoring and control based on the proposal? Are management and administration handled appropriately?
- Is there a successful approach to knowledge transfer and public relations? How is research data handled?
- Do collaborations exist with other research consortia in Germany or abroad?
- For renewal proposals: To what extent was collaboration within the consortium necessary to produce the results that have been accomplished? Have the centrally administered funds been used effectively and transparently?
- For a CRC/Transregio: Is there effective communication across locations?

What is your assessment of the consortium in terms of structural criteria?

- What is the infrastructural environment at the location?
- Are enough researchers involved? Do you see possibilities for advancement and expansion through the inclusion of other subject areas, professorial appointments, etc.? If so, where?
- Does the consortium receive consideration in the university's structural plans, as well as appropriate staff and financial support?
- Can sustainable profile building be expected or observed?
- What is the situation and outlook for early-career researchers? Do they receive appropriate and structured support?
- What is the situation and outlook for women researchers in the consortium? Are there appropriate policies to ensure equal opportunities?
- For renewal proposals: Has progress been made in the areas of early-career support and gender equality? How do you rate the interaction between the consortium and the university's plan for structure and development?
- For a CRC/Transregio: Is the choice of locations convincing? Are the locations interconnected? How is this networking expected to develop in the future? Can a structural impact be observed or expected at every location?

I.2. Research Projects

How do you rate the scientific quality considering the following criteria?

- Originality, innovation and risk
- Coherence, feasibility and long-term prospects
- Awareness of the current state of research
- For renewal proposals: Results, handling of unexpected developments
- Qualifications, preliminary work and publications of the project leader(s)
- Differentiation from other projects by the project leader(s)

How do you rate the integration of the project within the consortium?

- Does the project relate closely to the consortium's research programme?
- To what other projects in the consortium are there close relationships? How does the collaboration work?

If the project deserves funding:

- Is the requested funding amount appropriate considering the available core support?
- How would you rate the project based on the following grade definitions?
 - Excellent: The project is convincing because of its scientific quality which is outstanding by international standards. Its integration into the Collaborative Research Centre is excellent.
 - Very good: The project is internationally competitive. Its integration into the Collaborative Research Centre is convincing.
 - Good: The project is convincing on a national scale. Its integration into the Collaborative Research Centre is satisfactory.

I.3. Integrated Research Training Group (if proposed)

How do you rate the qualification strategy with regard to

- the quantity and quality of the qualification programme and other qualification options?

How do you rate the plans for organisation and supervision with regard to

- the announcement and selection process?
- structured, transparent and speedy doctoral qualification?
- the scope and the intensity of progress checks?
- the definition of rights and obligations?

How do you rate the integration into the structural and scientific environment?

- How do you rate the integration into the university (and non-university) environment, especially the existing study structure at the location and established forms of doctoral training?
- How will the university contribute to the success of the Integrated Research Training Group?
- For a CRC/Transregio: Does the strategy for qualification, supervision and organisation take into account the multiple locations?

If the project deserves funding:

- Is the requested funding amount appropriate considering the available core support?

I.4. Information Infrastructure Service Project (if proposed)

How do you rate the quality of the project and its integration within the consortium?

- Is the work programme convincing?

- Are there unique, novel ideas for handling data? Do plans justify the expectation that prototypical developments will occur?
- What is the relationship of the project to the relevant information infrastructure that exists outside of the host university? Are persuasive explanations given on how the project is designed either to link up with other developments, or to set itself apart and develop independent solutions?
- Is it ensured that data from the research projects will be treated appropriately by the information infrastructure project in terms of their scientific content? How will these data be processed using information technology?
- Do the project leaders have the necessary scientific and IT expertise?

How successful is the integration into the local environment?

- Is the project networked with relevant local information infrastructure facilities?
- Is the long-term availability of the information infrastructure to be developed by the project secured in a scientifically and technologically convincing fashion?

If the project deserves funding:

- Is the requested funding amount appropriate considering the available core support?

I.5. Public Relations Project (if proposed)

How do you rate the quality of the project and its integration within the consortium?

- Is the definition of the project's objectives and target groups successful? Are the planned activities suited to reach the target groups?
- Is there a clear relationship to the consortium's research topic?
- Are the consortium's researchers involved in the planned activities? Can the project leader(s) demonstrate experience and prior work in science communication?
- If applicable: Does the collaboration with non-university partners (e.g. museums, schools, businesses) appear beneficial, and is it convincingly governed by a cooperation agreement (where necessary)?
- Is the time schedule plausible? Are evaluations and quality controls planned?
- How does the project relate to other PR activities at this location and elsewhere?

How successful is the integration into the local environment?

- Is collaboration with relevant entities, such as the host university's press office, convincing?
- What is the project's added value compared to the host university's general PR activities?
- How will the proposed PR activities be integrated within the consortium and the university over the long term? What structural impacts can be expected at the university?

If the project deserves funding:

- Is the requested funding amount appropriate considering the available core support?

I.6. Transfer Project (if proposed)

How do you rate the quality of the project and its integration within the consortium?

- What is the scientific quality of research results to be transferred? In what way does conducting the project require scientific expertise?
- What is the significance of the project from a technical, economic, cultural, and/or societal point of view (also in relation to its cost)?
- To what extent is the implementation innovative?

- What impact will the project have on its scientific field in general and the work of the collaborative research centre in particular?

How do you rate the objectives and work programme?

- Does the project have clear objectives and well-defined criteria to judge the success of the project?
- In what way is the work programme suited to achieve the stated objectives? Is it adequately supported by all partners?

How do you rate cooperation partner?

- How far is the partner suitable for conducting the project?
- For projects involving commercial partners: Is the transfer project in the pre-competitive range?
- How far is the partner's contribution of staff, material and scientific resources adequate?

How do you rate the prerequisites and environment?

- To what extent are the necessary staff, institutional, spatial and instrumental resources available to the project?
- How does the project enable participating research staff to further their academic and/or professional qualifications?

If the project deserves funding:

- Is the requested funding amount appropriate considering the available core support?

II. Formal Aspects of the Review

II.1. Confidentiality

Please note that all proposals sent to the DFG are to be treated confidentially. The responsibilities of a reviewer may only be undertaken personally and may not be delegated to third parties. You may not use the scientific content of the proposal for your own or other's research. If you have been asked to provide a written assessment, we request that you not identify yourself as a reviewer to the applicants or to any third party. The opinions and identities of those providing written reviews are treated confidentially by the DFG Head Office. For enquiries regarding the proposal or the review process, please contact the DFG Head Office only.

II.2. Conflicts of Interest

Please consider whether there are circumstances that may create an appearance of partiality. For more information on avoiding conflicts of interest, see DFG form 10.201e.

II.3. Diversity and Equal Opportunities

In all of its funding programmes, the DFG actively encourages equal opportunities and diversity in German science and academia. Reviews of grant proposals may not disadvantage project leaders due to extra-scientific reasons, such as age, gender or disability. For example, considerations should not be based on the applicants' actual ages but on their research achievements relative to the duration of their scientific careers. To promote diversity and equal opportunities in research, it is possible to compensate for certain extra-scientific disadvantages. For example,

unavoidable delays in the scientific careers of applicants (for example longer periods of qualification, gaps in publication history, or less time spent abroad due to family reasons) should be taken into account. More information is available via www.dfg.de/diversity/.

II.4. 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 includes the intentional or grossly negligent statement of falsehoods in a scientific context, the violation of intellectual property rights, the impediment of another person's research work, and noncompliance with the confidentiality rules above. The circumstances of each 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.

III. Information on the Review and Decision Process

III.1. Review Process

The **preliminary meeting of the review panel** on the morning of the first day provides information about the review process and discussion of the particularities of the proposal. It provides an opportunity to answer questions and to get to know the other reviewers.

The subsequent **presentation of the Collaborative Research Centre** takes place as plenary talks and interviews with individuals. The interviews are structured by posters on the various projects. If appropriate, visits to workstations, laboratories, etc. are possible.

In the **first closed meeting** of the review panel in the afternoon and evening of the first day, an initial assessment of the proposal is made based on the projects, and further questions to the Collaborative Research Centre are identified.

In the **plenary discussion** on the morning of the second day, representatives from the administration(s) of the applicant institution(s) discuss the structural integration and role of the Collaborative Research Centre, and how the university intends to support it, with the reviewers. Early-career support and gender equality measures should also be addressed. Then the review panellists discuss any open questions regarding the proposal with the participating researchers.

The purpose of the subsequent **second closed meeting** is to make a final assessment of the proposal, both in terms of the projects and the centre as a whole. The review panel makes a recommendation to the Grants Committee regarding approval or rejection of the proposal. One or a few representatives from the administration of the applicant university commonly attend the second closed meeting as guests.

Participants in the review also include two members of the Grants Committee on Collaborative Research Centres in a reporting function, and generally two representatives from the DFG Head Office.

III.2. Decision Process

The outcome of the review serves as the basis for the funding decision. The Grants Committee

on Collaborative Research Centres makes this decision as part of a multidisciplinary and comparative discussion of all relevant review findings and taking into account the available financial resources. The decision is based on the minutes of the review, which are prepared by the DFG Head Office in agreement with the reporting committee members, as well as on these members' oral report. The Grants Committee meets twice each year in May and November.