


Framework Rules of Procedure for Review Boards¹



Disclaimer: This English translation of the Framework Rules of Procedure for Review Boards is provided for informational purposes. The English text was carefully translated and reviewed for accuracy. In the event that the English and German versions of the Framework Rules of Procedure for Review Boards permit different interpretations, the German text shall prevail.

¹ Adopted by the DFG Senate on 23 October 2003, amended by resolutions of the DFG Senate on 23 January 2008, 29 April 2010, 17 March 2016 and 7 April 2020

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Preamble

These Framework Rules of Procedure provide the review boards with a framework for adopting appropriate rules of procedure, which must be approved by the Senate (Article 15 (3) of the DFG Statutes). Such approval by the Senate is deemed to have been granted if a review board's rules of procedure and any associated working principles are in compliance with the provisions of these Framework Rules of Procedure. In the event of deviations from the latter and in cases of doubt, a review board's rules of procedure must be submitted to the Senate for approval.

1. Responsibilities

- a) In accordance with Article 15 (1) of the DFG Statutes, the review boards are always responsible for the scientific and scholarly evaluation of all proposals to fund research projects in their respective subject areas, provided that these are not minor cases in the sense of Article 16 (2) of the DFG Statutes. The evaluation phase is conducted between the review and decision stages and is generally independent of these in terms of individuals and procedures involved. During their evaluation, review boards also ensure that uniform standards and criteria have been applied in the review stage. At both the evaluation and the decision stages, the results of the previous stage will be critically assessed and a separate vote will be made on this basis.
- b) The review boards will be consulted on issues concerning the further development and design of DFG funding programmes.

2. Mandate, Working Methods

- a) The term of office of a review board begins with its inaugural meeting and lasts until the inaugural meeting of the newly elected review board, which assumes its tasks and responsibilities.
- b) The review board carries out its tasks through a combination of meetings and written procedures, including by individual members. The DFG Head Office extends invitations to meetings in consultation with the spokesperson and proposes an agenda. The spokesperson or another member chairs the meeting.
- c) Several review boards may carry out their responsibilities jointly as expert forums. Conversely, review boards may decide to divide themselves into sections on a regular basis in

order to perform their tasks. In addition to the review boards, the expert forums and sections of the review boards are also evaluation bodies².

- d) Experts may be invited to attend meetings of evaluation bodies. They attend individual meetings in an advisory capacity and only have voting rights if they are members of another evaluation body.
- e) Decisions are made by consensus wherever possible. Otherwise, decisions are made by a majority of the votes cast.

3. Spokesperson and Deputy

The review board elects a spokesperson and at least one deputy spokesperson from among its members.

4. Review, Evaluation and Decision-Making Process at the DFG

The processing of a proposal for the funding of a research project submitted to the DFG essentially involves three separate procedural steps that are independent of each other. These steps are enumerated below under a) to c): review, evaluation and decision. In order to uphold this system, even the appearance of a connection in personnel or procedure between the abovementioned procedural steps must be avoided. Exceptions to this principle of separation are regulated in these Framework Rules of Procedure.

- a) The review is carried out
 - aa) in writing by reviewers selected by the DFG Head Office on the basis of their special expertise regarding the specific proposal to be reviewed, or
 - bb) orally by review panels in accordance with Section 6³.
- b) The evaluation is conducted
 - aa) by the evaluation bodies either in writing or orally in meetings in accordance with Section 5, or

² Hereinafter referred to as "evaluation bodies" whenever the specific reference to the aforementioned three working arrangements of the review boards (review boards, expert forums, sections of review boards) is relevant for the regulatory content of the respective provision.

³ Internal references are always made without specifying the Framework Rules of Procedure.

- bb) by review panels, provided at least one member of a review board is a member of the review panel, cf. Section 6 c) sentences 1, 2.
- c) The decision is made in accordance with Article 16 (4) of the DFG Statutes by, or based on, a decision by the Joint Committee or its subcommittees.
- d) Permissible exceptions to the systematic separation and independence of the procedural steps of review, evaluation and decision are:
- aa) review by review panels in accordance with Section 6 c) sentences 1, 2, and
 - bb) on the basis of a decision of principle made by a decision-making body, participation of rapporteurs from decision-making bodies on review panels that review and evaluate proposals within the purview of this decision-making body.

5. Written Review Procedure and Subsequent Evaluation by Review Boards

- a) Individual research grant proposals are generally reviewed in a written procedure.
- b) The Head Office examines the formal aspects of the proposal and, if necessary, advises applicants on how to amend the proposal documents.
- c) The Head Office selects reviewers in consideration of the following criteria: qualifications and expertise in the relevant area, absence of bias/conflict of interest and workload. It forwards the proposal to the persons entrusted with the review.
- d) Members of the review boards may at any time confidentially obtain information from the Head Office regarding the proposals within their purview that are being processed by the Head Office and the persons to whom they have been forwarded for review.
- e) Reviewers prepare opinions in which they justify their recommendation with regard to the type and (if applicable) scope of funding.
- f) On the basis of these opinions, the Head Office drafts a funding recommendation.
- g) The Head Office submits the entire case (proposal documents, correspondence, opinions received from reviewers, funding recommendation) to the responsible member(s) of the relevant evaluation bodies. These members evaluate the entire case, either individually in writing or orally in meetings. They review the following criteria:
- aa) their own expertise in the subject area and any participation of additional elected researchers from review boards,
 - bb) appropriateness of the selection of reviewers by the Head Office and avoidance of bias/conflicts of interest,

- cc) quality of the proposal and of the opinions obtained, funding priority, and appropriateness of the funding recommendation by the Head Office.
- h) The member of the evaluation body, if applicable together with other members, makes a funding recommendation to the responsible decision-making body. In the case of a written evaluation by the evaluation body, the opinion of one member is sufficient.
- i) Members of decision-making bodies may not be involved in proposal evaluation procedures, including taking part as guests at review board meetings.
- j) Individual grant proposals from review board members and individual grant proposals involving review board members as participants and/or cooperation partners are generally evaluated in a written procedure involving only individual members of the respective evaluation body. Such proposals may only be assessed in evaluation body meetings if special reasons justify a deviation from this rule. The reasons must be documented in the minutes of the meeting. In such cases, the persons concerned must leave the room when their own proposal and the ranking of proposals are discussed.

6. Review and Evaluation by Review Panels

- a) The review and evaluation of proposals in coordinated funding programmes is generally carried out by review panels. Individual grant proposals should only be reviewed and evaluated by review panels in exceptional cases.
- b) The Head Office processes the proposal documents and determines the composition of the review panel in agreement with at least one member of a review board.
- c) The review panel may only carry out the review and evaluation stages at the same time if at least one member of the relevant evaluation body is involved. This member of the evaluation body ensures that uniform scientific evaluation criteria and standards are applied in all funding procedures. If only reviewers participate in the meeting, subsequent assessment by the evaluation body is required. If only review board members attend the meeting, a prior review by external reviewers is required.
- d) Rapporteurs of decision-making bodies are not members of the review panel, even if they co-sign the review minutes. A rapporteur may not be appointed chair of the review panel.
- e) Additional expert opinions may be obtained in advance in preparation of the review panel meeting.

- f) The review panel makes funding recommendations. These are recorded by the Head Office, including the reasons for the recommendations. As a rule, rapporteurs of decision-making bodies who participated in the review, as well as any chairpersons of review panels, will co-sign the review minutes.
- g) The Head Office then forwards the review minutes to the responsible decision-making body.

7. Cooperation with Other Bodies

Within their respective purviews, review boards may determine how they wish to cooperate with other bodies in order to carry out their tasks and responsibilities.

8. Obligations of Review Board Members

- a) General obligations

Members of review boards agree to attend the meetings of the evaluation bodies as regularly as possible, to carry out their tasks in the written evaluation procedure, and to participate in oral reviews in accordance with Section 6.

- b) Obligation to observe the rules of good research practice according to the DFG Code of Conduct

Members of review boards agree to observe the [Guidelines for Safeguarding Good Research Practice](#) in its current version in accordance with the DFG Code of Conduct, also with regard to carrying out their tasks in the evaluation bodies (current versions can be accessed under www.dfg.de/good_scientific_practice). These are in particular the obligations to maintain confidentiality and to observe the rules on conflicts of interest (Guideline 16). The rules on conflicts of interest are contained in the [Guidelines for Avoiding Conflicts of Interest](#) (DFG form 10.201), which can be downloaded in its current form from the DFG website. Violation of the Guidelines for Safeguarding Good Research Practice or of the rules on conflicts of interest in their current version (both linked above) may constitute research misconduct in accordance with the [DFG Rules of Procedure for Dealing with Scientific Misconduct](#) (DFG form 80.01).

- c) Diversity and equal opportunities in funding activities

- aa) Criteria unrelated to research, such as absolute age, gender, ethnic origin, sexual identity, illness or disability, may never be used to the detriment of applicants in scientific evaluations. Where an opinion submitted to the evaluation body or

review panel contains a reference to such inadmissible criteria, the scientific evaluation may nevertheless be based on the opinion if it remains useful in its scientific statements. However, the evaluation body or review panel may never use such inadmissible criteria to the detriment of applicants in their own scientific evaluation of a grant proposal.

- bb) Unavoidable delays in the research career of applicants, for example due to childcare, chronic illness or disability, will be duly taken into account in their favour.
- cc) If the evaluation body or review panel also finds the scientific statements unconvincing due to inadmissible citing of non-research criteria to the detriment of the applicant, it will explicitly state so.