

Guidelines

for Reviewing Proposals in the Collaborative Research Centres Programme



Disclaimer: The English translation of this document is provided for informational purposes. In the event of a discrepancy between the English and the German versions, the German text takes precedence.

Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft

Kennedyallee 40 · 53175 Bonn, Germany · Postal address: 53170 Bonn, Germany
Tel.: + 49 228 885-1 · Fax: + 49 228 885-2777 · postmaster@dfg.de · www.dfg.de



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 criteria and questions.

If you have been asked explicitly to provide a **written review** on an individual project without participation in the on-site review, only sections I.2 (Research Project), I.3 (Service Project) I.5. (Information Infrastructure Service Project), I.6. (Science Communication Project) or I.7. (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 officer responsible for the Collaborative Research Centre at the DFG Head Office in the Collaborative Research Centres Division and the Excellence Strategy and Research Impulses Division.

I Criteria and Questions

1 Collaborative Research Centre as a Whole

How do you assess the Collaborative Research Centre as a whole considering the following criteria?

1.1 Research

1.1.1 Research quality

Scholarly significance and timeliness of research topic

Originality and openness to risk

Research aspiration and long-term perspective

Preliminary work / results achieved

International visibility of the Centre

CRC's underlying information infrastructure concept

1.1.2 Coherence and synergies

Conclusiveness of project structure
Cooperation across disciplines
Added value through cooperation

1.2 Individuals

1.2.1 Qualification of people involved taking into account their respective career stage

Relevant expertise
Publication output
International visibility and networks

1.3 Research Profile of Applicant University(-ies)

1.3.1 Core support

Staffing situation
Research infrastructure

Strategy and planning

Role of Centre in strategic planning at applicant university(-ies)
Targeted personnel planning
Where applicable: cooperation with other research institutions
Where applicable: impact on teaching

1.4 Support Structures

1.4.1 Promotion of researchers in early career phases

Participation of individuals in early career phases in the Centre
Opportunities for professional development at the doctoral and postdoctoral level

1.4.2 Promotion of equity and diversity

Participation of female researchers in the Centre
Measures to promote gender equality for researchers, diversity in research and the compatibility of research and family

1.4.3 Management and dissemination

Management structures of the Centre
Quality assurance and project selection

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Where applicable: public outreach / knowledge transfer

Please note that information on risks in international cooperation that may be listed in the proposal are not the subject of the scientific review. Instead, a straightforward plausibility check within the scope of your expertise will help the evaluation and decision-making bodies gain an overall impression of this aspect of the proposal.

Finally, we ask you for your overall assessment of the Collaborative Research Centre based on the following criteria and grades:

	6	5	4	3	2	1
Research						
Individuals						
Research Profile of Applying University/ Universities						
Support Structures						

- 6 = Excellent: Meets all requirements in an exemplary manner. Internationally leading. Groundbreaking results achieved / expected.
- 5 = Very good to excellent: Meets the requirements to an exceptionally high level. Internationally in the top tier. Many significant results achieved / expected.
- 4 = Very good: Meets the requirements to a high level. Internationally competitive. Significant results achieved / expected. Minor shortcomings.
- 3 = Good to very good: Meets the requirements to an adequate level. Internationally visible. Many relevant results achieved / expected. Moderate shortcomings.
- 2 = Good: Meets most requirements to a satisfactory level. Relevant results achieved / expected. One or more major shortcomings.
- 1 = Unsatisfactory: Does not meet the requirements to a satisfactory level. Not fundable.



2 Research Project

2.1 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 to date, handling of unexpected developments
- Qualifications, preliminary work and publication output of the project leader(s) – taking into account the individual career stage in each case
- Differentiation from other projects by the project leader(s)

2.2 How do you rate the integration of the project within the Centre?

- Does the project relate closely to the Centre's research programme?
- To what other projects in the Centre do close relationships exist? How do the projects collaborate?

2.3 If the project deserves funding:

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

2.4 How would you rate the project based on the following grade definitions?

Excellent:	Meets all requirements in an exemplary manner. Internationally leading. Groundbreaking results achieved / expected. Integration into the Collaborative Research Centre is excellent.
Very good to excellent:	Meets the requirements to an exceptionally high level. Internationally in the top tier. Many significant results achieved / expected. Integration into the Collaborative Research Centre is very good.
Very good:	Meets the requirements to a high level. Internationally competitive. Significant results achieved / expected. Minor shortcomings. Integration into the Collaborative Research Centre is at least convincing.

Good to very good:	Meets the requirements to an adequate level. Internationally visible. Many relevant results achieved / expected. Moderate shortcomings. Integration into the Collaborative Research Centre is at least good.
Good:	Meets most requirements to a satisfactory level. Relevant results achieved / expected. One or more major shortcomings. Integration into the Collaborative Research Centre is at least satisfactory.
Not fundable:	Does not meet the requirements to a satisfactory level. Not fundable. / Integration into the Collaborative Research Centre is not satisfactory.

3 Service Project (if proposed)

3.1 How do you rate the quality of services with regard to the following criteria?

- Quality of methods and infrastructure to be used
- Viability of the work programme
- For renewal proposals: results obtained, contribution to the success of the Collaborative Research Centre
- Qualifications, preliminary work and publication output of the project leader(s) – taking into account the individual career stage in each case

3.2 How do you rate the integration of the project within the Centre?

- Which projects benefit from this service project, and how do they profit from it?
- How do you rate the overall significance of this service project to the Centre?

3.3 If the project deserves funding

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

4 Integrated Research Training Group (if proposed)

4.1 How do you rate the training strategy with regard to

- the quantity and quality of the qualification programme and other training opportunities?

4.2 How do you rate the organisation and supervision strategy 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?

4.3 How do you rate the integration into the academic 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 training, supervision and organisation take into account the multiple locations?

4.4 If the project deserves funding

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

5 Information Infrastructure Project (if proposed)

5.1 How do you rate the quality of the project, its integration within the Centre and its integration at the site?

- Standards
 - Are subject-specific standards (e.g. drawn from scholarly societies, review boards, NFDI consortia) applied to the handling of research data and research software?

- Are information-specific standards taken into account?
- If no such standards exist: how do you assess the alternative approach being used in the research project?
- Integration and environment analysis
 - Are appropriate structures and workflows from the academic projects established in the INF project (e.g. for data flow or software development)? How do you assess the internal integration of the project within the consortium?
 - How does the project relate to relevant existing infrastructures and evidence systems both inside and outside the applicant university (e.g. NFDI consortia)?
- Curation
 - Are the research data generated by the Collaborative Research Centre appropriately curated and enriched with the relevant metadata?
 - Are suitable development and versioning environments used for research software?
- Documentation and legal issues
 - Are standards applied to document the collection and analysis of research data or the development of research software?
 - Are aspects of copyright, data protection and licensing adequately taken into account?
- Archiving and reuse
 - Are appropriate measures taken to ensure the medium and long-term preservation and dissemination of the CRC's research data and research software beyond the end of its funding?
 - Are principles such as FAIR, CARE or FAIR4RS taken into account? Are there licensing rules?
 - Is open access to the CRC's research data and research software envisaged? If not, is this plausibly justified?
- Expertise and environment
 - Are the expertise and working environment of the research project leaders suited to implementation of the planned measures?
- Skills development, further training and early career researchers

- How are skills in the handling of research data and research software taught within the consortium? How do researchers in early career phases receive further training in this area?

5.2 If the project deserves funding:

- Is the requested funding amount appropriate considering the available core support? Is this funding limited to project-specific additional requirements that go beyond the measures required to comply with the rules of the Code?

6 Science Communication Project (if proposed)

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

- 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 Centre's research topic?
- Are the Centre'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 checks planned?
- How does the project relate to other science communication activities at this location and elsewhere?

6.2 How successful is the integration into the local environment?

- Are plans for collaboration with relevant entities, such as the applicant university's communications office, convincing?
- What is the project's added value compared to the applicant university's general PR activities?
- How will the proposed science communication activities be integrated within the Centre and the university over the long term? What structural impact can be expected at the applicant university?

6.3 If the project deserves funding:

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

7 Transfer Project (if proposed)**7.1 How do you rate the quality of the project and its integration within the Centre?**

- What is the scientific quality of the 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 is the expected impact of the project on science and research, and especially on the Collaborative Research Centre?

7.2 How do you rate the objectives and work programme?

- Are the objectives and the criteria for success plausible and assessable?
- To what extent is the work programme suited to achieve the stated objectives? Is it adequately supported by all partners?

7.3 How do you rate the application partner?

- To what extent does the partner appear capable of conducting the project?
- For projects involving commercial partners: To what extent is the transfer project in the pre-competitive range?
- To what extent is the partner's contribution of personnel, material and scientific resources adequate?

7.4 How do you rate the working environment?

- How conducive to the project's success are the available resources in terms of staff, institutional environment, space and instrumentation?
- What opportunities does the project provide for participating research associates to further their academic or professional qualification?

7.5 If the project deserves funding:

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

7.6 How would you rate the project based on the following grade definitions?

Excellent:	Meets all requirements in an exemplary manner. Internationally leading. Groundbreaking results achieved / expected. Integration into the Collaborative Research Centre is excellent.
Very good to excellent:	Meets the requirements to an exceptionally high level. Internationally in the top tier. Many significant results achieved / expected. Integration into the Collaborative Research Centre is very good.
Very good:	Meets the requirements to a high level. Internationally competitive. Significant results achieved / expected. Minor shortcomings. Integration into the Collaborative Research Centre is at least convincing.
Good to very good:	Meets the requirements to an adequate level. Internationally visible. Many relevant results achieved / expected. Moderate shortcomings. Integration into the Collaborative Research Centre is at least good.
Good:	Meets most requirements to a satisfactory level. Relevant results achieved / expected. One or more major shortcomings. Integration into the Collaborative Research Centre is at least satisfactory.
Not fundable:	Does not meet the requirements to a satisfactory level. Not fundable. / Integration into the Collaborative Research Centre is not satisfactory.

II Formal Aspects of the Review

1 Confidentiality

All proposals to the DFG, all correspondence with reviewers and all reviews must be treated confidentially. You may not exploit the contents of a proposal that you review for purposes of your own or others' research. If you have been asked to provide a written review, we request that you not identify yourself as a reviewer to the applicants or to any third party. Consequently, the responsibilities of a written review may only be undertaken personally and may not be delegated to third parties, and the DFG may release the contents and arguments of reviews to applicants only anonymously and, if necessary, with redactions.

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 10.201.

www.dfg.de/formulare/10_201

3 List of publications

In the proposal you will find a project- and subject-related list of publications, and also a list of scientific results in the curriculum vitae. The DFG provides clear guidelines regarding the structure of publication lists in a proposal. To find out more, see our Guidelines for Publication Lists (DFG form 1.91). Please include the publication lists in your assessment, especially the highlighted papers in the proposal's list of publications. Additional information is available at:

www.dfg.de/formulare/1_91

The assessment of a researcher's achievements must be carried out in its entirety and based on substantive qualitative criteria. In addition to the publication of articles, books, data and software, other dimensions can be taken into account, such as involvement in teaching, academic self-administration, public relations or knowledge and technology transfer. Details of quantitative metrics such as impact factors and h-indices are not required and are not to be considered as part of the review.

4 Equity and diversity

In all of its funding programmes, the DFG actively promotes equity and diversity in the German research system. The review must not be based on non-scientific criteria such as age, gender, family obligations, origin or health restrictions, to the detriment of the applicant. Researchers are encouraged to declare periods of absence and periods of restricted academic activity (minimum duration: three months in a year) due to unavoidable delays in their career. Such periods should be given appropriate consideration in the researcher's favour in order to compensate for any disadvantages experienced. For further information on equity and diversity in research, see:

www.dfg.de/diversity/en

In order to be able to make non-discriminatory, science-led funding decisions, it is important for the evaluation process to be based solely on the above criteria and free of non-scientific factors. Regularly engaging with the topic of bias can sensitise people to their own, often unconscious prejudices, thereby counteracting any potential bias in assessment. For further information, please refer to the recommendations and background material that are available at:

www.dfg.de/bias/en

5 Obligation to Observe the Principles of Good Research Practice¹

The principles of good research practice must also be observed during the review processes. A violation of these principles 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, or breaching the principles set out in the section on confidentiality. The circumstances of each case shall be considered on an individual basis. In cases where scientific misconduct has been established, the DFG may impose one or more sanctions in accordance with its Rules of Procedure, depending on the nature and severity of the misconduct.

¹ The principles of good research practice are presented in detail in the DFG Code of Conduct [Guidelines for Safeguarding Good Research Practice](#).

The DFG is looking closely at the potential uses of artificial intelligence (AI) in the form of generative models for text and image creation – both in research work itself and when submitting proposals to the DFG. When submitting proposals to the DFG, the use of generative models is permissible because of the considerable opportunities and development potential they offer, but such usage must be disclosed in a scientifically appropriate manner. The use of generative models is to be assessed neutrally per se when it comes to evaluating the subject-specific quality of a funding proposal. As far as the content of a proposal is concerned, full responsibility for research integrity remains with the applicants. Documents that are provided to you for review are confidential and they may not be used as input for generative models. The use of generative models in the preparation of reviews is inadmissible in any case due to the confidentiality of the review process. What is more, the processing of proposal content using a generative model may constitute a copyright infringement.

III Information on the Review and Decision Process

1 Oral Review

The preliminary meeting of the review panel on the morning of the first day is designed to provide information about the review process, discuss particularities of the proposal, and prepare reviewers for their task. It also provides an opportunity to discuss initial assessments. The members of the review panel are asked to provide short written preliminary statements in advance.

The subsequent presentation of the Collaborative Research Centre and the university/universities takes place in the form of 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 afternoon of the first day, the review panel holds a debriefing session in which any open questions that need to be addressed with the Collaborative Research Centre are identified.

On the morning of the second day, the members of the review panel discuss any open questions about the proposal with the participating researchers, where necessary.

The purpose of the subsequent closed meeting is to make a comprehensive and final assessment of the proposal, in terms of both the individual projects and the Centre as a whole. The review panel makes a recommendation to the Grants Committee regarding approval or rejection of the proposal. A representative from the relevant federal state's ministry commonly attends the closed meeting as a guest.

In a final meeting, the results of the peer review will be communicated to the head(s) of the applicant university/universities and the board of the Collaborative Research Centre. Participants in the review also include two members of the Grants Committee on Collaborative Research Centres as rapporteurs, and generally two representatives from the DFG Head Office.

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 rapporteurs, as well as on the rapporteurs' oral report. The Grants Committee makes its decisions twice a year – in May for proposals with a funding start date in July and in November for proposals with a funding start date in January.

3 Written Review

Supplementary proposals for projects in the Collaborative Research Centres Programme are reviewed in writing. As a rule, two independently working reviewers are called on for each proposal. Based on their reviews, the DFG Head Office prepares a recommendation for a decision. The funding decision is made by the Grants Committee on Collaborative Research Centres.

The grant decision will be communicated to all persons involved in the review process. The DFG will share reviews with applicants in an anonymised form. The DFG Head Office may redact passages of the review, e.g. if they permit identification of the reviewer.