1. Purpose of this document

This document provides guidance for panels assessing short research proposals in Research grants (IP) and Installation research grants (UIP) calls, stage 1. The role of panels also extends to stage 2, which is provided in a separate document.

2. Overview of the evaluation

Each proposal is evaluated in three domains:
1. Track record and capacity of the Principal Investigator,
2. Significance & Methodology – importance, novelty, and quality of the research plan,
3. Feasibility – practicality and likelihood that the project can be successfully delivered.

Each domain is scored on a 1–5 scale, with 5 = Outstanding and 1 = Poor, using the detailed descriptors below.

In addition to numerical scores, you should highlight key strengths and weaknesses, and justify why the score is appropriate given the descriptors. Your scores and comments are sent to applicants verbatim, so make sure that the final version is free from typos and inconsistencies.

Expected workload: 5-10 proposals; 5 pages per proposal.
Call duration: 19 January - 20 February 2026
Proposal evaluation: 24 February – 10 March 2026
Additional clarifications (if needed): 12-16 February, 2026 (in case of substantial disagreement between panel scores, we will share the opinions of panel members who scored the proposal and provide an opportunity to re-assess the score via e-mail)
Finalized ranking list: 20 March, 2026
Results of stage 1 sent to applicants at the latest on 26 March 2026

3. General principles for review

3.1 Confidentiality

All proposals, CVs, and reviews are confidential. Do not share this with third parties. Do not share proposal content or your review with anyone outside the evaluation process. Do not use any idea, data, or information from proposals for your own work. Do not upload any part or entire proposal to any AI or language editing services. Delete all copies of documents by June 1, 2026.

3.2 Conflict of interest

Before reviewing, you must declare any conflict of interest, which are listed in the online form.

3.3 Fairness, career stage, and field differences

Assess relative to career stage (e.g. early career for UIP vs. senior researcher for IP), not against an absolute standard of seniority. Respect field norms: publication practices, funding availability, team sizes, and typical outputs differ across disciplines; pay close attention to interdisciplinary proposals. Take into account documented career breaks and non-linear career paths if they are described in the CV.

3.4 Using the full scoring scale

Please use the full scale (1–5) in a way that not every decent proposal is automatically a “4” or “5”. Reserve a mark 5 (Outstanding) for proposals that clearly match the provided descriptors. Use 1 or 2 when serious weaknesses are present, as described. Your primary task is to identify a true excellence in proposals.

4. Materials you will receive

For each proposal, you will receive the short proposal form, with 8 sections: CV (section 1), Lay Abstract (2), technical Abstract (3), Research objectives, significance and novelty (4), Research plan, methodology and outcomes (5), Research team and resources (6), Feasibility, budget summary and risk matrix (7) and References (8).

5. How to approach each review (step-by-step)

1. Read the project summary and objectives to understand the overall idea.
2. Read the PI's CV, focusing on relevance and career stage.
3. Read the proposal sections on:
   - Significance, background, and objectives
   - Methodology and research plan, including research integrity and quality assurance
   - Team, resources, risk and feasibility.
4. For each of the three domains (CV, Significance & Methodology, Feasibility):
   - Compare what you see with the descriptor for scores 1–5
   - Decide which score best fits the proposal
   - Write 2–4 bullet points summarising strengths and weaknesses.

Your role is to provide independent, evidence-based judgments guided by the scales below.

6. Scoring domains and detailed scales

6.1 – PI CV (Section 1 of the application form)

Three domains considered together: outputs, grants, and other achievements.

5 – Outstanding: Strong track record relative to career stage across all three domains:
(a) several high-quality, competitive outputs with leading/senior roles,
(b) clear evidence of competitive grant leadership or strong potential (for first-time PIs, previous research output can be used as a proxy),
(c) substantial other academic achievements (keynotes, awards, industry/policy/public engagement) relevant to the proposal, with clear international visibility.

4 – Very good: Very good track record in most domains:
(a) strong publication record at national or international level, with some leading/senior roles,
(b) experience in managing competitive national or institutional grants (for first-time PIs, previous research output can be used as a proxy),
(c) some other relevant academic achievements. Overall an excellent track record at least at national level.

3 – Good: Solid and credible track record:
(a) reasonable number of relevant outputs,
(b) some experience in grant management (e.g. local PI or team member on larger projects; for first-time PIs, a strong output record can be used as a proxy),
(c) limited but visible other achievements. Clear potential to lead the proposed work.

2 – Weak: Modest or weak output:

(a) limited publication record and/or weak relevance to the topic,
(b) little or no experience in grant management,
(c) few other achievements; potential is visible but the track record is modest for career stage.

1 – Poor: Very limited or no relevant research outputs, no evidence of grant management capacity, and no relevant other achievements; track record does not support leading the proposed project.

6.2 Significance & Methodology (Sections 4 and 5)

5 – Outstanding: Proposals that identify top-level objectives of high scientific or societal importance, with clear novelty. Methodology is very strong, well-justified, and includes advanced elements of research integrity like validation, sensitivity analysis or equivalent robustness checks. Research plan is coherent and realistic, with excellent value for money. Outcomes clearly match the objectives and have potential for international impact. No major shortcomings; any minor issues can easily be addressed.

4 – Very good: Proposals that identify important objectives with very good, though not groundbreaking, novelty. Methods are appropriate and mostly well described; the research plan is coherent with good value for money. Outcomes are realistic and likely to have national or international impact in the field. Some weaknesses can be identified, but they do not substantially increase the risk of failure.

3 – Good: Proposals that address relevant topics, with limited or moderate novelty. Methodology is generally adequate but with some gaps or limited justification. The plan and resources are broadly aligned but not optimised; outcomes have moderate expected impact. Shortcomings require clarification or revisions, but the proposal remains viable.

2 – Weak: Proposals that address topics of limited significance or are poorly articulated, with serious weaknesses or insufficiently justified methods, leading to questionable value for money. Outcomes are vague or of low impact. Substantial revisions would be required to make the project fundable.

1 – Poor: Proposals where objectives are unclear or misaligned with the call and overall significance is low. Methodology is inappropriate or not credible, and the proposed work is unlikely to deliver meaningful outcomes regardless of funding.

6.3 Feasibility (sections 6 and 7)

5 – Outstanding: Very low overall risk. The team has all key expertise and an excellent track record with similar work. Access to all critical data, resources, and infrastructure is secured or clearly guaranteed (no foreseeable risks). Work plan and timeline are realistic with realistic margins for delays. Risks are systematically analysed with clear mitigation measures and credible backup strategies.

4 – Very good: Minor risks, all manageable. The team has the necessary expertise, with some external support where needed. Most resources are in place and any remaining dependencies are low-risk. The work plan is well structured and the risk analysis is present and mostly adequate.

3 – Good: Some moderate risks regarding data access, recruitment, methods, or dependencies on external partners. The team is generally capable but with some gaps; the plan is workable but tight in places. Risk analysis is present but limited, making feasibility acceptable but not fully convincing.

2 – Weak: Substantial risks in key elements (team skills, data and resources, regulatory approvals, external dependencies). Timeline and plan appear optimistic, and risk analysis is superficial. There are substantial doubts that the project could deliver as proposed.

1 – Poor: Major, unresolved risks and/or missing critical expertise and resources. No credible plan to mitigate problems, leading to overall very low feasibility.

7. Writing good comments

Your written comments are important both for assessment but also applicants career development. Please be specific and evidence-based. Instead of: "Weak methodology", say: "The sample size justification is missing and no power calculation is provided, making it unclear whether the study is adequately powered." Comment on both strengths and weaknesses (at least one bullet of each per domain, if possible). Align your comments with the score: a "4 – Excellent" should not read like a "2 – Weak" or vice versa. Avoid personal remarks or value judgments about individuals, excessive jargon, or direct comparisons to other named proposals or people.

Where possible, your comments should help the applicant understand how to improve the proposal for future applications.

8. Process outcomes

Your individual scores will be summed up to create a ranking list, with scores ranging from 3-15. There are no threshold or cut-off points, and all panels are making their separate lists. If two or more proposals share the same sum of scores, then priority in the ranking list will be given to the proposal with higher Significance & Methodology score (sections 4 and 5). If the proposals still have the same sum after this, then priority will be given to the proposal with higher Feasibility score (sections 6 and 7).

We will invite up to twice as many proposals relative to the funding amount to submit the full project proposal submission (stage 2). You are expected to participate at this stage, by assessing the overall proposal evaluations and providing a finalized ranking list for the Management board of the HRZZ.