

Guide for Evaluation

AECC TALENT MSCA COFUND

postdoctoral fellowships



1. Evaluation protocol

To ensure full transparency and equal opportunities all accepted applications will be subject to a scientific-technical **remote evaluation** by the **Spanish State Research Agency (AEI)**. After this remote evaluation step, the **25 best applications** that reach a **minimum of 80 points** will be invited to the **interview phase**. The combined score of these two evaluation steps will define the final ranking. **AECC Talent fellowships will be awarded to the 15 candidates with the highest rank order**. Finally, the Board of Trustees of the Foundation, based on the evaluation reports will ratify the final award decision, of the AECC Talent fellowships.

1.1. Preliminary Timeframe for evaluation

Phase	Date
Call deadline	23rd November 2023
Remote evaluation by AEI	January-March 2024
Communication to applicant	April 2024
Personal interview	May 2024
Communication result to applicants	July 2024

**Please note also that this timeframe is preliminary and may be subject to changes*

The following sections **Basic Principles and Quality Control describe the key evaluation principles of the Spanish State Research Agency (AEI)**. More information can be found in their website.

**from AEI's General Procedure for evaluation*

1.2. Basic Principles for evaluation

- Impartiality

The evaluation activities carried out in the AEI are based on the criteria of independent experts. AEI staff do not directly evaluate the proposals, but rather manage the entire evaluation procedure.

The evaluation processes are based exclusively on technical aspects and scientific rigor, regardless of the origin or identity of the applicants.

All the scientific collaborators sign a commitment of responsibilities, deontological standards and treatment of conflicts of interest.

- **Transparency**

With the aim of giving the process the greatest possible transparency, all the evaluation criteria are published in the calls and in the corresponding regulatory bases. In the same way, the list of all the collaborators that are part of the coordination teams of the Thematic Areas (presidents, coordinators and managers) as well as the evaluators are made public, once the selection process is finished, and it is sent to the interested parties the result of the evaluation of their proposals.

- **Confidentiality**

All experts and AEI staff who participate in the evaluation process agree to the conditions of confidentiality before starting the evaluation. All the computer applications have mechanisms that guarantee the confidentiality of the experts and the traceability of all operations.

- **Gender equality**

The AEI is committed to the objective of avoiding any gender bias in the evaluation processes. Work is continuously being done to implement measures, criteria or actions that favour gender equality in the field of scientific evaluation.

1.3. Quality controls

**from AEI's General Procedure for evaluation*

- **Ethical standards and confidentiality commitment**

The performance of the people who collaborate with the Agency, forming part of the coordination teams of the scientific technical areas or carrying out remote or face-to-face evaluations, is governed by the principles and good practices common to all professional deontology: respect for the person, sense of the responsibility, honesty, sincerity, professional competence and solidity of the objective and scientific foundation of their professional intervention. Before starting their collaboration or accepting the evaluation of an application, they sign a document

committing themselves to respect the ethical rules and to communicate all possible conflicts of interest.

All persons participating in the process must be impartial and maintain a minimum personal and professional relationship with the requesting research team / requesting entities for the actions to be evaluated. The person who evaluates an application, by accepting said evaluation, formally agrees not to transmit information about the contents of the application, the evaluation carried out and his own identity. For its part, the AEI guarantees to maintain confidentiality regarding the identity of the evaluators in relation to the applications and areas evaluated.

- **Conflicts of interest**

People who, being collaborators or experts of the AEI, participate in a request for the call that they are managing or evaluating, or who consider that there are personal or professional reasons capable of compromising the fairness and probity of their action with respect to an application, must communicate this circumstance to the presidency of the thematic area and to the Subdivision of Coordination and Evaluation.

- **Internal quality controls of the evaluation application**

AEI evaluation applications have complete traceability, so that any action carried out on each of the requests to be evaluated is recorded (assignment of evaluators, modification of the status of the files, opening, closing or correction of reports). The person who performs the action is also recorded, as well as the date and time it is performed.

2. Evaluation procedure

2.1 Composition of the Committees

All committees involved in the application and selection process will include national and international members with the relevant expertise in cancer research and experience to assess the candidates, and have an adequate gender balance:

- **Programme Committee (PC): Programme Managers** (FCAECC staff) Its responsibilities during selection include the eligibility phase, supporting candidates through the selection process, managing the applications

documentation and the needed infrastructure, briefing external evaluators and providing candidates with selection results and evaluation summary reports.

- **Peer Review Panel (PRP):** To carry out the evaluation, the programme will rely on the **Spanish State Research Agency (AEI)**, attached to the Ministry of Science and Innovation and responsible for the proposal, management, monitoring and evaluation of the State programmes and the strategic actions of the State Plan of Scientific and Technical research and innovation. The number of experts of the PRP will depend on the number of applications received. Gender-balanced will be sought among the evaluators as well as diversity in countries and/or nationalities and expertise sectors (research centres, hospitals, universities, companies).
- **Selection Committee (SC):** will be made up for members of the **AEI rapporteur** and **PRP representatives** (at least 1 expert per proposal, who has participated in the external peer review process, up to 10 experts). For the composition of this committee gender balance and the inclusion of members of different sectors and cancer research disciplines will be sought. The SC will take part in the interview process and evaluate independently each shortlisted candidate and proposal considering the **face-to-face interview evaluation criteria**.
- **Redress/appeal Committee:** This committee, will receive and manage any complaint from candidates that may arise during the eligibility check, the peer review evaluation, the face-to-face meetings, the selection and award procedure. Candidates will receive an answer within 10 days.

2.2 Evaluation Phases

To ensure transparency and equal opportunity to the proposals will undergo a **three-step evaluation process**.

- **1st Phase: Eligibility check or pre-selection process:** Firstly, each application will be checked by the **Programme Committee** for administrative and legal matters to ensure that they meet the formal criteria for the call. Applications that do not comply the requirements of the call will be excluded from the

process and **applicants will be informed consequently**. Only application that fulfil all the criteria will be included in the remote evaluation phase. Supporting documentation may be requested to verify compliance with all eligibility criteria.

- **2nd Phase: Remote evaluation:** The pre-selection procedure is done by remote evaluation providing written assessment by the **Peer Review Panel**. Each eligible proposal will be evaluated by independent external experts in cancer research. The maximum total score for the 3 evaluation criteria that can be reached in the remote evaluation is 100 points and the threshold for this evaluation will be 80. A **rapporteur from AEI** will elaborate an **Evaluation Summary Report (ESR)**, a consensus report gathering all the relevant comments from the PRP. As a result, a **ranking list of proposals** recommended for funding will be elaborated. The 25 candidates whose **applications have the highest ratings** (with at least 80 points) **will be invited to the 3rd Phase**. All applicants will be notified in due time by email if their proposals have been invited for the interview stage or their proposal have been rejected for funding.
- **3rd Phase: Face-to-face interviews:** candidates that reach this 3rd phase will be invited for online interviews; these will be entirely in English. In addition to the SC, **FCAECC representatives will also attend this meeting** as observers of the whole selection process. Applicants invited to the interview phase will have the opportunity to present their projects and defend the suitability of their fit in the AECC Talent call. The SC members will give a score for each candidate according to the evaluation criteria. At the end of all interviews, the SC must notify the FCAECC representatives of their scores for each candidate interviewed.

After these interviews a ranking list will be elaborated considering the **remote evaluation score with a weight of 70%** and the **face-to-face interviews with a weight of 30%**. Based on the final ranking list, the SC will select the 15 applications with the highest scores to have the final list of fellowships granted in a final committee meeting hold by videoconference and organized by the PC.

In case of **ex-aequo**, and following MSCA recommendations, the prioritising criteria will be:

- 1) scores awarded for the criterion "Excellence", and if these scores are equal, priority will be based on scores for the criterion "Impact",
- 2) if necessary, the gender balance among AECC Talent fellows will be used as a factor for prioritisation,
- 3) if a distinction still cannot be made, the Board of Trustees may provide recommendations to further prioritise by considering other factors such as gender and other diversity aspects in the research activities, participation of the nonacademic sector, geographical diversity, or international collaborations. The SC will also provide a **ranked reserve list of candidates**, to be used in the event that any of the appointed fellows resign.

2.3 Appeal procedure

Candidates rejected at any step of the evaluation and selection process will be informed of the reasons for rejection by FCAECC. In case of justified disagreement, applicants will have the right appeal within two weeks after the notification of rejection. To do so candidates must complete a request for redress via GMS. All requests for redress will be **treated in confidentiality**.

The PC shall revise the appeal and **send an answer to the candidate within 10 days**. The redress process cannot be used in any case as an opportunity to submit additional documentation that was missing in the original application before the call deadline.

The redress procedure will be used to address procedural and administrative errors, but not to question the evaluation panel's decisions, ratings, or comments. The selection and evaluation processes themselves will not be changed if the applicant does not agree with the evaluation score in any case.

3. Evaluation criteria

Expert reviewers will evaluate independently each eligible proposal on each of the three evaluation criteria displayed below on the indicated score system.

3.1 Evaluation Criteria for Remote evaluation

Remote Evaluation (weight of 70% of the final score):		
Excellence (50%)	Implementation (20%)	Impact (30%)
Quality of the project and innovation objectives (and the extent to which they are ambitious and go beyond the state of the art)	Quality and effectiveness of the work plan, assessment of risks and appropriateness of the effort assigned to each objective and work packages	The magnitude and importance of the project's contribution to the expected scientific, social, and economic impacts. Potential impact on cancer control and benefit for cancer patients and cancer survivors.
Soundness of the proposed methodology (including interdisciplinary approaches, gender dimension and other diversity aspects of the research, quality of open science practices)	Quality and capacity of the host research groups, appropriateness of the research environment (i.e. infrastructure)	Suitability and quality of the measures to maximize expected outcomes and impacts (e.g. possibility of transferring the research results into clinical practice to solve health issues)
Quality of the supervision (supervisor CV), training and of the two-way transfer of knowledge between the researcher and the host group/organization	Conditions and support for the fellow. Suitability of potential collaborations with other entities and/or proposed international, intersectoral and/or interdisciplinary secondments	Credibility of the measures to enhance the career perspectives and employability of the fellow and contribution to his/her skills development
Quality and appropriateness of the fellows' professional experience, competences and skills, scientific output (publications and patents), outreach activities		

3.2 Evaluation Criteria for face-to-face interview

Face-to-face interview (weight of 30% of the final score)		
Professional career and motivation (50%)	Candidate's potential (30%)	Impact of the project (20%)
Quality of the contributions made to the chosen cancer research field, experience in research management, and motivation to implement the project. Professional career, interests and what is the motivation to participate in the AECC Talent programme	Potential soft skills of the candidate will be evaluated: clear consistent discourse and articulation of ideas, ability to present complex reasoning, ability to work as part of a team and to work independently, capacity to innovate and leadership potential.	Novelty and originality of the research project, feasibility and foreseen impact on society and cancer patients as well as in clinical practices and cancer care. Short and long-term outcomes.

3.3 Scoring system

	Score	
Fail	0 -9	The proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed (missing or incomplete information)
Poor	10-39	The criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses
Acceptable	40-59	The proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses
Good	60-79	The proposal addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present
Excellent	80-100	The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor

4. Recommendations and requirements for written remote evaluations

The comments should refer to each criterion and sub-criterion:

- Specific to the relevant criterion.
- Clear and substantial.
- Definitive and final: they shall state the opinion of the reviewer, avoiding phrases like: "We/I think that", "Possibly", etc.

- Consistent with the score awarded, balancing strengths and weaknesses.
- Each strength and weakness shall be reflected only once in the scores.
- Of adequate length.
- Relative to the proposal as it stands.

The comments must not:

- Be a summary of the proposal.
- Be too short, too long or otherwise inappropriate/incorrect.
- Be categorical statements, not properly verified.
- Contain assumptions: if the proposal is unclear on important aspects, then this should be reflected in comments and scores.
- Make recommendations and provide advice on improving the proposal. They should not describe what the proposal should do or could do, or what the experts would like to see.
- Refer to the same weakness under different criteria.
- Contain contradictory statements about strengths and weaknesses.
- Be based on the potential of the proposal, rather the comments must reflect the proposal as it stands.
- Be discriminating or politically incorrect.