

IHI JU INDEPENDENT OBSERVER'S REPORT

Call ID: HORIZON-JU-IHI-2023- 03-single-stage

Date of evaluation: 18/04/2023 to 21/04/2023

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Present at the evaluation: 18/04/2023 to 21/04/2023



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1 Introduction and approach taken by the observer

The evaluation was followed to check the functioning and execution of the overall evaluation process, to verify the compliance with the procedures and that equal treatment is applied across proposals, to advise on the conduct and fairness of the evaluation sessions, how the evaluators apply the criteria, and how the procedures could be improved, to liaise with the IHI JU staff members and independent experts involved in the evaluation sessions and if necessary, to suggest possible corrections and potential improvements that could be put into practice for future evaluations.

In execution of her task the observer took the following approach:

The observer received information ahead of the central meeting, had a meeting with the Call Coordinators and a briefing with IHI Executive Director ad interim, and was given access to the documentation related to the call and to the proposal submission and evaluation on-line system SEP.

During the consensus meetings that took place remotely, the observer attended all days of the evaluations. In the first day only topic 1 started, the 2nd and 3rd day topics 1, 3 and 4 ran in parallel. Topic 2 ran on the last two days. The independent observer (IO) attended also panel briefing meetings and proposal ranking meetings for each topic. The IO also interacted with the IHI scientific officers and provided her e-mail to receive feedback comments from individual experts during the central meetings and after that.

2 Overall impression

- **Scale of complexity of the evaluation task:**

This report describes the observations and assessments of the observer of the evaluations of the below mentioned topics as follow:

Submission Deadline: 15.03.2023

Total available budget: 138 000 000 EUR

Total number of proposals submitted: 19

Total number of ineligible proposals: 5

Total number of proposals evaluated: 14

Total number of experts involved in the evaluation were: 26

According to the call requirements, applicants must ensure that at least 45% of the sum of total project eligible costs plus costs of any related In-kind contributions to additional activities is provided by IHI JU private members and IHI JU Contributing Partners, their constituent entities and affiliated entities. If the 45% Industry contribution is not secured collectively by the industry consortium participants, the proposal is declared ineligible and therefore is not evaluated.

This eligibility criterion was not met by 1 proposal, which was not evaluated while 4 proposals did not comply with minimum consortium composition eligibility criterion, hence a total of 5 proposals were

found ineligible. Thus, out of 19 received proposals, 14 proposals were considered admissible and eligible, therefore evaluated and discussed. None of the 2 proposals submitted in Topic 5 were eligible. Proposals were scored using the evaluation criteria (excellence, impact, quality and efficiency of the implementation) as specified within the Work Programme. The number of proposals per topic is listed below:

Topic code	Topic title	Submitted proposals	Ineligible
HORIZON-JU-IHI-2022-03-01	Screening platform and biomarkers for prediction and prevention of diseases of unmet public health need	10	2
HORIZON-JU-IHI-2022-03-02	Patient-generated evidence to improve outcomes, support decision making, and accelerate innovation	4	1
HORIZON-JU-IHI-2022-03-03	Combining hospital interventional approaches to improve patient outcomes and increase hospital efficiency	2	0
HORIZON-JU-IHI-2022-03-04	Strengthening the European translational research ecosystem for advanced therapy medicinal products (ATMPs) for rare diseases	1	0
HORIZON-JU-IHI-2022-03-05	Digital health technologies for the prevention and personalised management of mental disorders and their long-term health consequences	2	2
TOTAL		19	5

- **Transparency of the procedures:**

Overall, in all topics the execution of all consensus and ranking procedures were clear and transparent. At the beginning of the Evaluation Process the experts were duly informed on the procedures, evaluation process, scoring and its meaning, deadlines, and tools to be used – SEP for evaluation, and WebEx for the Consensus phase. The procedures were clearly stated in the documentation, reiterated during the briefing sessions and when needed, moderators clarified the scoring system to the experts. Every panel commenced its work with a briefing and explanations by the moderator. A briefing by the Executive Director ad interim was presented too for each panel. All the moderators were coherent and explained the procedures in a transparent manner. The need to treat proposals equally and in a consistent manner was reminded several times during the meetings. The difference between a weakness, shortcoming and minor shortcoming was clarified in order to facilitate reaching consensus. The necessity to point to the strengths in order to argue the assigned high scores was also reminded. The moderators always facilitated the process and made efforts to stay impartial, asking the experts to decide all together and to reach consensus. In general, the moderators encouraged discussion to highlight the proposal's strengths, weaknesses and/or shortcomings and based on the comments to decide on a consensus score. Comments by the quality checker were discussed and

agreed. Finally, the experts agreed with the ranking list.

- **Throughput time of the process and the efficiency of the procedures**

The time of the whole process starting from the submission closure and the remote evaluation was rather tight but this was communicated to the experts from the beginning of the process. The IERs were submitted by the experts in SEP on time. The consensus meetings ran smoothly and lasted 4 days covering the topics 1 to 4 since topic 5 had no proposals for evaluation. The throughput time varied between the topics depending on the number of proposals but all evaluations were completed on time. The meetings started at 8:30-9.00 and ended well around 18:00. The panel moderators monitored closely the panel advancements to ensure timely completion of all consensus reports and ranking lists. Consensus was achieved after careful consideration of the consensus report by the experts with the assistance of the panel moderator and the quality controller.

- **Efficiency, reliability and usability of the implementation of the procedures, including the IT-tools:**

All meetings were held through the WebEx tool. The overall quality of connectivity to the WebEx was very good. All experts were familiar with the IT tools. The CRs were finalised on the text of the draft CR provided by the rapporteur. For each topic either a dedicated rapporteur or an evaluator acting also as a rapporteur was assigned. Moderators had highlighted the points of discussion, weaknesses or shortcomings that facilitated reaching consensus. Generally, the technology allowed extended discussions. The Webex chat function was used effectively for messages and for short text editing. The CRs were submitted and approved in SEP. The proposal ranking was performed for each topic by the call coordinator with the presence of the experts who approved it in SEP.

- **Impartiality, fairness and confidentiality:**

All procedures were put in place to ensure an impartial, fair, transparent and confidential evaluation. Each group of experts was briefed by the responsible IHI scientific officer on the first morning of their evaluation. An introductory video delivered by the IHI Executive Director ad interim, and the PowerPoint presentation were played. The procedures were highlighted including confidentiality and conflicts of interest. Experts were asked to declare any potential conflict of interest at any time of the entire evaluation and to ensure confidentiality of all information. At the start of the individual evaluation process, experts were asked to check for Conflict of Interest (Col). In case a Col was reported by the expert, the moderator assessed the Col situation with the legal team and a final decision was taken depending on the type of Col: (i) exclusion from the entire evaluation; (ii) participation in the individual remote evaluation (without assessing the conflicted proposal) but not in the consensus meeting; or (iii) participation in the entire including consensus meeting (without assessing the conflicted proposal and without participating in its discussion). There was only one Col case reported prior the consensus meeting phase. IHI JU assessed the Col situation and a final decision was taken by excluding the expert from the concerned evaluation meeting. The guiding principles of independence, impartiality, objectivity, accuracy, and consistency were reiterated to avoid marking down a proposal for the same critical aspect under two different criteria (double penalisation).

- **Conformity of the evaluation process witnessed with the evaluation procedures published in the HE Grants Manual:**

The evaluation process followed the procedures published in the HE Grants Manual as they are reproduced for the procedures for experts for IHI calls.

- **Quality of the EU evaluation process in comparison with the evaluation procedures of national and/or other international research funding schemes:**

The evaluation process was of high quality when compared to similar national and other international evaluation procedures. Experts appreciated the consensus process and the multidisciplinary and high expertise panels, interactions and role of the moderators. The follow-up for the report writing, and the evaluations were very streamlined and comprehensive. The percentage of brand new experts/new experts in IHI Call 3 was **41,7 %**. The experts learned a lot during the current evaluations and with everyone bringing their own expertise, they were able to adjust justifiably their opinion after hearing the other reviewers' comments/concerns, with the purpose of reaching a consensus.

- **Quality of the evaluation process overall:**

The evaluation was successfully completed on time with the overall quality of the evaluation to be high. All eligible proposals were evaluated, scored and ranked in a transparent, fair and impartial manner. The overall quality of the evaluation was observed as being best practice with active discussion and diligent evaluation of all aspects of each proposal. Careful consideration was given to each expert's questions and expressed opinions. The IHI staff has performed an exemplary remote evaluation process. Accordingly, the evaluation process was observed to be of high quality and demonstrated consistency, fairness and transparency.

3 Any other remarks

- Quality of the documentation provided to experts beforehand was useful.
- Quality of the on-site briefing sessions was high, comprehensive and helpful.
- Experts had a good understanding of their role, the topic (context, scope), the evaluation process and the scoring scheme.
- The allocation of experts to proposals: balance (gender, geographic, sector), relevance and balance of expertise was good. Generally, for the call as a whole, gender balance of experts was achieved, i.e. 16 female experts and 20 male experts were engaged. Out of 36 experts, 4 experts were from non-EU countries, e.g. United States, United Kingdom. Good balance was achieved in regard to the involvement 20 out of 36 experts from Higher or secondary education establishment /Research organisations compared to Other and Private for profit organisations. As a whole, the evaluators' expertise was sufficiently diverse to ensure the proper evaluation of proposals.
- The allocation of experts to proposals in terms of gender, geographic, expertise, relevance, previous experience was exceptionally well executed. The IHI staff has spent considerable time in selecting,

recruiting and supporting the experts in their evaluation tasks (individual and consensus). In each topic at least 5 experts were involved with a maximum of 7 in topics 3 and 4. All IHI staff were polite, courteous and considerate towards the experts and the observer.

- An important level of respect was shown by all experts of others' opinions and views. Very few cases were observed where experts were attempting to monopolise the consensus meetings. In these cases, the moderator intervened and politely invited the rest of the experts to provide their opinions. The moderators were excellent and they helped in staying focused in the call text, answering questions and guiding the discussions while at the same time letting the experts discuss freely.
- The criteria and scoring scheme ensured a fair assessment of the proposals. The moderators during the online consensus meetings encouraged experts to justify their scores and openly discuss their reasoning.
- The process of the final panel meeting and the actors involved was well organised. The independent observer could not be present in all meeting duration especially the 2nd and 3rd day when meetings of different topics ran in parallel.
- The quality of the evaluation summary reports was high, as particular attention was paid to this.
- The moderators were mindful of involving all the experts in the discussions. Still, in the different topics it happened that some experts were more active than others. The moderators were very skillful regarding the online running of the evaluations. They followed the same standards in the different topics. The responsiveness and professionalism of the IHI Scientific Officers is acknowledged.
- Generally, the schedule was well balanced starting from 8.30-9:00 a.m. and finishing at 6:00 p.m. with a lunch break and some coffee breaks. Occasionally, it was necessary to postpone and shorten the breaks in order to complete certain parts of the evaluation and text editing.
- Generally, the experts managed well the workload and the time given for the remote phase and consensus meetings. The experts had freedom and time to speak and discuss the weaknesses and strengths of proposals.
- There was no comment from experts on the remuneration.

4 Summary of Recommendations

The HORIZON-JU-IHI-2023-03-single-stage consensus evaluation process is considered successful, transparent, fair and at the highest standard possible based on the HE rules and no specific recommendations are needed. The observer would like to congratulate the call coordinator, moderators and IHI staff for their keen and open approach, and their hard work for the successful execution of this complex task.