

# EVALUATION MANUAL FIT-IT

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	3
2	FOCUS AND AIMS	3
3	PRINCIPLES	4
4	CHECK ON FORMAL CRITERIA FOR ELIGIBILITY	4
5	EVALUATION EXPERTS	5
6	EVALUATION PROCESS	6
6.1	Committees	6
6.2	Procedure	6
6.3	Simplified Procedure	6
7	EVALUATION CRITERIA	7
8	PROPOSAL MARKING	8
9	JURY MEETING	9
	ANNEX A	10
	ANNEX B	11
	ANNEX C	12
	ANNEX D	13
	ANNEX E	15
	ANNEX F	17

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Evaluation Manual is to provide in one document the basic rules and guidelines for the FIT-IT evaluation process. In this evaluation, international experts provide the basis for selection of proposals for FIT-IT-funded projects. This manual provides the reference for BMVIT (Federal Ministry of Transport, Innovation and Technology) and FFG (Austrian Research Promotion Agency, which provides programme-management) for organising the evaluation process. It also comprises all relevant information needed by evaluators for the FIT-IT evaluation process. Finally, it supports project proposers by establishing transparency of the FIT-IT evaluation process.

## 2 FOCUS AND AIMS

FIT-IT (short for Research, Innovation, Technology - Information Technology) is an Austrian research programme that focuses on high-quality research in the area of information and communication technology. FIT-IT has been running since 2002 and continually searches for challenging topics likely to become an important part of our IT future. Currently, there are five programme lines: Embedded Systems; Semantic Systems and Services; Systems-on-Chip; Trust in IT Systems; and Visual Computing.

FIT-IT focuses on research projects with a time-to-market in the 3-8 years time range usually with participation from both industrial and academic partners. Depending on the consortium structure, research projects receive a funding of 53-76% of the total project costs. FIT-IT also supports stimulation and accompanying measures (conferences, workshops, EU related activities etc.) and provides scholarships for doctoral students, both funded up to 100% of project costs.

The objectives of FIT-IT are the following:

- Development of radically new information technology in Austria, leading to a research prototype
- Improving the competitiveness of Austrian research and economy through research-industry cooperation, thematic focussing and creation of clusters
- Training of highly qualified researchers

- Improving the European and international visibility and networking of Austrian research in the programme topics

### 3 PRINCIPLES

The processes for evaluating proposals submitted for funding to the FIT-IT programme rests on the following principles:

- **Quality.** Projects selected for funding must demonstrate a high scientific, technical, and managerial quality in the context of the objectives of FIT-IT programme.
- **Transparency.** The process proposal selection, both the principles and the practice, must be clearly described and available to any interested party. Adequate feedback must be provided to proposers regarding the outcome of the evaluation of their proposals.
- **Equality of treatment.** All proposals should be treated equally, irrespective of where they originate or the identity of the proposers.
- **Impartiality.** All eligible proposals are treated impartially on their merits, following an independent peer review. Research proposals are evaluated by a jury of international experts that is autonomous in its decision.
- **Efficiency and speed.** The procedures have been designed to be as swift as possible, commensurate with maintaining the quality of the evaluation and respecting the legal framework within which FIT-IT is managed.

The aim is to ensure that, whenever possible, proposals are not excluded from consideration for administrative reasons only.

### 4 CHECK ON FORMAL CRITERIA FOR ELIGIBILITY

The FFG verifies that proposals meet the eligibility criteria referred to in the call for proposals. Only proposals that fulfil all of these criteria will be retained for evaluation:

- date of receipt of proposal on or before deadline for submission (in the case of fixed deadline calls)
- signatures of the participating legal entities (faxed signatures are permissible for submission, but originals must then be delivered at the earliest convenience)
- minimum number of partners as referred to in the call for proposals
- correspondence with the topic of the programme line
- completeness of the proposal, i.e. the presence of all relevant administrative forms and the project description – 1 original, 3 copies, and 1 electronic copy on CD

## 5 EVALUATION EXPERTS

All proposals that fulfil the eligibility criteria will be evaluated to determine their quality. To advise the Austrian Federal Ministry for Transport, Innovation and Technology (BMVIT) in evaluating proposals, the programme will use independent external experts. As a general rule, a minimum of three independent experts will examine each eligible proposal submitted.

Care will be taken to ensure that each panel of experts chosen has an appropriate range and balance of competences, industrial and scientific backgrounds and linguistic capabilities. Care will also be taken to avoid inviting experts who could be biased for or against any particular proposal they are asked to examine, for whatever reason.

The list of experts to be used for any particular evaluation session will be decided by BMVIT, as will any replacements or additional experts needed in the course of the session. At least one third of the experts used for an evaluation process will be renewed for the next call.

Experts participating in the evaluation will be required to sign a contract, binding them to confidentiality and impartiality regarding the proposals that they examine (Annex F). The terms of reference and a code of conduct for experts to be annexed to this contract is given in Annex E.

## 6 EVALUATION PROCESS

### 6.1 Committees

The FFG performs a formal check of eligibility and a check of the financial and business soundness of proposals.

The evaluation experts perform the evaluation of proposal contents. Cooperative research projects are evaluated by international experts. Human resource projects, stimulation projects and accompanying measures submitted outside of fixed calls can undergo a simplified evaluation process performed by BMVIT and FFG.

On the basis of the recommendation of the experts, the Federal Minister for Transport, Innovation and Technology is responsible for the final decision on funding.

### 6.2 Procedure

Evaluation proceeds in two steps. In the first step, the formal criteria and completeness of proposals is verified by the FFG. The FFG also performs a check of financial and business soundness of the participating companies. The soundness of the industry partners has high importance with respect to an appropriate use of the budget provided in case of funding. Companies that are in danger of financial collapse cannot be funded. Proposals submitted in fixed calls that are retained for evaluation are then sent to experts, either as electronic or paper copies, to carry out an initial evaluation at their place of work. After pre-evaluating the proposals and sending the evaluation forms back to FFG, all evaluators are invited to a central location (usually Vienna) to carry out the final evaluation in the Jury meeting. Typically, each proposal is evaluated by at least 3 experts individually and later on discussed in the jury meeting. The experts will be asked to fill in their individual evaluation forms on proposals that were selected for their evaluation. However, each expert is provided with a set of all proposals, and thus may comment on proposals that were not select for his/her individual evaluation in the overall jury meeting.

### 6.3 Simplified Procedure

Human resource projects (dissertation fellowships), stimulation and accompanying projects can undergo a simplified evaluation process performed by BMVIT and FFG. In such cases, the jury consists of representatives of the BMVIT and FFG. This jury can invite further evaluations by experts if required.

## 7 EVALUATION CRITERIA

Each eligible proposal will be examined by the independent experts against a list of criteria that is specific to FIT-IT (while following a basic structure that applies to all programmes administered by the FFG). Any particular interpretation of the criteria to be used for evaluation and any weights to be applied to the criteria are set out in the programme-specific criteria described in this document. For the detailed examination of proposals against the criteria set out in the rules for participation, the experts will generally provide comments to accompany each of their marks in a form suitable for providing feedback to the proposers. These comments must be consistent with any marks awarded. In addition, the experts will be asked to give an overall rating of proposals. Evaluators may also be asked to decide whether a proposal fits into the programme FIT-IT and addresses the particular call. The experts may be required to provide comments to justify their answers. On the basis of the experts' remarks, BMVIT reserves the right not to continue with the evaluation of any proposal which is found not to fulfil basic requirements of eligibility.

Criteria for FIT-IT research projects are grouped in the following blocks of modules. Modules themselves consist of several criteria:

1 QUALITY OF PROPOSED ACTIVITY	2 RELEVANCE OF PROPOSED ACTIVITY
Innovation	Consortium co-operation
Technical Challenge	Additionality; dissemination; regional, national and EU aspects
Scientific excellence and approach	Training effects
Project management and resources	Externalities and social impact
3 SUITABILITY OF APPLICANTS / PARTNERS	4 ECONOMIC POTENTIAL AND EXPLOITATION
Industrial partners	Market prospects
Research partners	Exploitation

The detailed criteria with weightings are referenced in Annex A. The criteria and modules for dissertation fellowships, stimulation and accompanying measures are referenced in Annex B and Annex C. Further explanations to these modules and criteria are included as comments in the evaluation form Excel-files (see [www.fit-it.at](http://www.fit-it.at)).

## 8 PROPOSAL MARKING

Experts will examine the proposals assigned to them individually, providing comments and marks in one evaluation sheet per proposal. The evaluators shall send the filled in evaluation forms electronically to FFG at least one week before the jury meeting. Marks will be attributed according to the schemes set out in the evaluation form.

Each evaluation criterion will in general be marked by the experts on a four point scale (see below) with additional options to mark the criterion as “not applicable” or “K.O.”:

- poor
- fair
- + good
- ++ very good
- K.O. the proposal completely fails to address the issue under examination. Note that this will typically fail the proposal as a whole.
- N.A. the criterion does not apply in the specific context

Based on the marks for each of the individual evaluation criteria, an overall number of points will be calculated for each module. Modules are marked with percentages of relevance for each block. Note that there will be no aggregation of block marks into a single mark for each proposal.

Marks given by the experts are NOT the basis of a purely algorithmic decision or ranking system. The marks will serve as the basis for a discussion of all proposals and evaluators will be asked to give an overall decision in the beginning of the evaluation session. This first overall judgement will only consist in one the following possibilities “recommend for funding”, “discuss”, “reject”.

Proposals will then be grouped according to this first decision and discussed on the basis of this first grouping. Evaluators are free to judge the proposals based on their personal experience and expertise. Evaluators are not bound to their first decision if during the discussion

they find reason to change their opinion about the relative merits of any given proposal.

Additional experts might be asked by the FFG to report in written form to aspects of proposals that may be difficult to evaluate by the selected evaluators. These reports will be provided to the evaluators after sending their evaluation forms to FFG, but well before the jury meeting.

## 9 JURY MEETING

Approximately one month after the submission deadline, the jury meeting takes place, in which representatives from BMVIT, the programme-management FFG and the expert evaluators participate. During this meeting, the experts will attempt to agree on an overall recommendation (“fund” or “reject”) for the proposal. They will justify their recommendations with comments suitable for feedback to the proposers and agree on an overall report signed by all evaluators.

Typically, evaluators will first be asked to give an overall “yes” or “no” or “discuss” for each proposal assigned to them. As a result of this process, proposals which are likely to pass will be discussed first, together with those which are likely not to pass. Difficult cases will be discussed at the end to save most time for these cases. If during the consensus meeting it is found to be impossible to bring all the experts to a common point of view on any particular aspect of the proposal, a majority vote will be taken. The evaluation summary report will set out the majority view of the experts but can also record dissenting views from any particular expert(s). A further task of the panel(s) of experts carrying out the final examination may be to review those proposals considered to be worthy of funding and, where relevant, to make recommendations as to any possible regrouping or combination of proposals into larger projects or into project clusters.

Representatives from the BMVIT and the FFG may be present during the jury meeting. BMVIT will participate in the evaluation to overlook overall impartiality of the process and can on request provide additional interpretation of the evaluation criteria. The FFG will act as a moderator and can comment on the overall coverage of the call, the relative contribution of each proposal to the focus of the call. FFG representatives will contribute information about the financial soundness of a proposal, in particular past experience with companies from the records of the FFG.

Independent observers may be invited by BMVIT to accompany the evaluation meeting, observing that the rules and guidelines of FIT-IT evaluation are followed and to secure a fair evaluation and selection process.

## ANNEX A

### Evaluation Criteria for Cooperative Research Projects (Annex A)

Indicator 1 - Quality of proposed activity	30	1	<b>Technical-scientific quality</b>	
			1.1	Innovation
	20	2	1.2	Degree of innovation
			2.1	Example for the sector and impact on other areas
	25	3	2.2	Technical challenge
			3.1	Technological problems and experimental challenge
25	4	3.2	Identification of risks	
		4.1	Scientific excellence and approach	
Indicator 2 - Relevance of proposed activity	35	5	<b>Quality of planning</b>	
			4.2	Project management and resources
	35	6	4.3	Project aims and work-plan (clarity, adequacy, instruments)
			4.4	Management structure
	20	7	4.3	Human resources (person effort, availability of competencies and capacities)
4.4			Adequacy of costs and financial plan (appropriateness, cost-efficiency, soundness)	
10	8	<b>Contribution to programme aims</b>		
		5.1	Consortium co-operation	
50	9	5.2	Co-operation and complementarity of partners	
		6.1	Proper involvement and contribution of partners	
50	10	6.2	Additionality; dissemination; regional, national and EU aspects	
		6.3	Additional R&D through the proposed project	
60	11	6.4	Dissemination of scientific results	
		6.4	EU research	
40	12	6.4	Austrian value added and regional aspects	
		7.1	Training effects	
40	12	7.1	Quality of training for academic staff	
		7.2	Quality of other training effects	
40	12	<b>Contribution to societal aims</b>		
		8.1	Externalities and social impact	
40	12	8.1	Employment, work conditions, quality of life	
		8.2	Participation of women	
40	12	8.3	Ethical issues, social values	
		9.1	Industrial partners	
40	12	9.1	Scientific-technical qualification for the project	
		9.2	Standing, potential impact and strategic coherence	
40	12	9.3	Importance for company RTD	
		9.4	Quality and capacities of management	
40	12	<b>Research partners</b>		
		10.1	Scientific-technical qualification for the project	
40	12	10.1	Staff and equipment for the project	
		10.2	Quality and capacities of management	
40	12	10.3	Quality and capacities of management	
		11.1	Market prospects	
40	12	11.1	Market potential and market segments	
		11.2	Competition and market entry barriers	
40	12	<b>Exploitation</b>		
		12.1	Exploitation strategy	
40	12	12.1	Protection of the idea (IPR)	
		12.2	Protection of the idea (IPR)	

## ANNEX B

### Evaluation Criteria for Human Resource Development (Annex B)

	weight (%)	Module / Sections	
Indicator 1 - Quality of proposed activity	25	1 s 2.1	Technological innovation
	25	2 s 2.1	Technical challenge
	30	3 s 2.1	Scientific excellence and approach
	20	4 s 2.2	Project management and resources
Indicator 2 - Relevance of proposed activity	20	5 s 3.1	Consortium co-operation
	20	6 s 3.2	Dissemination
	50	7 s 3.3	Training effects
	10	8 s 3.4	Externalities and social impact
Indicator 3 - Suitability of applicants / partners	50	9 s 4	Industrial partners
	50	10 s 4	Research partners
Indicator 4 - Economic potential and exploitation	100	11 s.5	Market prospects (long-term)

## ANNEX C

### Evaluation Criteria for Stimulation and Programme Accompanying Measures (Annex C)

	weight (%)	Module	Quality of proposed activity
Indicator 1 - Quality of proposed activity	45	1	Quality of the proposed activity
			1.1 Goals and ambition
			1.2 Relevance
	30	2	Technological excellence and methodology
			2.1 Clarity, adequacy and consistency of the approach
	25	3	Quality of planning
3.1 Project management and resources			
3.2 Management structure			
3.3 Human resources (person effort, availability of competencies and capacities)			
			3.4 Adequacy of costs and financial plan (appropriateness, cost-efficiency, soundness)
Indicator 2 - Relevance of proposed activity	10	4	Consortium
			4.1 Co-operation and complementarity of partners
			4.2 Proper involvement and contribution of partners
	30	5	Improving R&D environment
			5.1 R&D competence for Austria
	30	6	Relevance for FIT-IT
			6.1 Goal adequacy
			6.2 Quality of training for academic staff
	20	7	Dissemination
			7.1 Dissemination strategy
	10	8	Externalities and social impact
8.1 Employment, work conditions, quality of life			
8.2 Participation of women			
			8.3 Ethical issues, social values
Indicator 3 - Suitability of applicants / partners	100	9	Partners
			9.1 Qualification and experience of partners
			9.2 Standing and potential impact of partners
			9.3 Strategic coherence
			9.4 Quality and capacities of management

## ANNEX D

### **Role of BMVIT and FFG in FIT-IT evaluations**

1. FFG staff will organise a confidential, fair and equitable evaluation of each proposal according to the criteria described in the programme-specific evaluation annex and guide to proposers in full respect of the relevant procedures, rules and regulations set out for this task.
2. FFG staff will assign proposals to experts for evaluation. In doing so, they will take care to avoid assigning proposals (or competing proposals) to experts who might have a direct or indirect link with the proposal (see Annex F for definitions of such links).
3. BMVIT selects experts for the evaluation of proposals, assisted by FFG. BMVIT will ensure: the appropriate range of competences required an appropriate balance between academic and industrial expertise and users a reasonable distribution of geographical origins of experts regular rotation of experts between evaluations.
4. FFG staff will, where needed, take action to ensure the correct implementation of the process. This includes briefing experts on the procedures to be followed, reminding experts of the rules and reporting any irregularities to the responsible BMVIT official, who will exclude a person from the process if he/she deems them to be in breach of the contractual or confidentiality obligations.
5. When coordinating meetings of expert panels for establishing advice to the BMVIT, FFG staff will act as moderators, seeking consensus between the external experts, without any prejudice for or against particular proposals or the organisations involved. FFG and BMVIT staff present at the meetings of evaluation panels will provide any additional explanation or information needed to allow a proper evaluation of proposals.
6. BMVIT staff are responsible for overseeing the performance of the work by experts. They must check that the above mentioned points are taken into account.
7. FFG staff will be responsible for maintaining an “audit trail” (i.e. a file on each proposal containing, for example, experts’ marking

sheets and comments). They will record the marks from the individual experts' marking sheets and identify any criteria on which discussion is needed to arrive at a consensus, according to the rules set out in this document.

8. FFG will not discuss aspects of the evaluation or selection process with proposers or any persons not involved directly in the process unless this has been explicitly authorised (on a case-by-case basis) by BMVIT, as appropriate. This will only be done in exceptional cases, taking full account of the need to maintain the confidentiality of the process.
9. BMVIT and FFG staff will treat in the strictest confidence the assignment of experts to proposals. The list of all experts who have taken part in evaluations can be made public at regular intervals without indicating their specific assignments to individual proposals or to calls.
10. BMVIT and FFG staff will take all the necessary measures to ensure appropriate confidential treatment of proposals and any other documents related to the evaluation. In particular: Proposals and related documents will not be shown to any persons other than those representatives of FFG and BMVIT who need it for the proper performance of their work, and to the experts and proposers themselves, unless the proposers have explicitly agreed otherwise. Evaluation reports and advice to BMVIT from experts will be restricted to persons who need it for the proper performance of their work.
11. BMVIT and FFG staff will restrict the copying of proposals and evaluation documents to a minimum and ensure that copies and any documents/notes used during the evaluation are destroyed when they are no longer needed.

## ANNEX E

### Terms of Reference and Code of Conduct for Expert Evaluators

1. The task of the expert is to participate in a confidential, fair and equitable evaluation of each proposal according to the procedures described in this manual and in any programme-specific evaluation document. He/she will use his/her best endeavours to achieve this, follow any instructions given by BMVIT or FFG staff (in this order with BMVIT having highest priority) to this end and deliver a constant and high quality of work.
2. The expert works as an independent person under contract to FFG or BMVIT. He/she is deemed to work in a personal capacity and, in performing the work, does not represent any organisation, even if the contract for remuneration is concluded with the organisation employing the expert.
3. The expert will sign a declaration of confidentiality before starting the work. In doing so the expert commits him/herself to strict confidentiality and impartiality concerning his/her tasks. Invited experts who do not sign the declaration will not be allowed to work as an evaluator. If an expert has a direct or indirect link with a proposal, or any other vested interest, is in some way connected with a proposal, or has any other allegiance which impairs or threatens to impair his/ her impartiality with respect to a proposal, he/she must declare such facts to the responsible staff as soon as he/she becomes aware of this. The evaluation staff will ensure that, where the strength of the link is such that it could threaten the impartiality of the expert, the expert will not participate in the evaluation of that proposal, and, if necessary, competing proposals. An expert is deemed to have a direct link with a proposal if
  - he/she is currently or has recently been employed by one of the proposing organisations;
  - he/she has been involved in the preparation of the proposal;
  - he/she is related to an applicant or a member of the proposing team;

→ he/she may be knowingly involved in the publication or exploitation of the results.

An expert is deemed to have an indirect link with a proposal if he/she is employed by an organisation which has contractual links with one of the proposing organisations in the field covered by the proposal or if he/she has any direct link with or works for an organisation submitting a competing proposal.

4. Experts should not discuss any proposal with others, including other experts or BMVIT/FFG staff not directly involved in the evaluation of the proposal, except during the formal discussion at the meetings moderated by or with the knowledge and agreement of the responsible evaluation staff.
5. Experts may not communicate with proposers, nor should any proposal be amended during the evaluation session. Experts' advice to BMVIT on any proposal may not be communicated by them to the proposers or to any other person.
6. Experts are not allowed to disclose the names of other experts participating in the evaluation. BMVIT may make public lists of names of experts at regular intervals without indicating which proposals they have evaluated or in which particular call evaluation they participated.
7. Where it has been decided that proposals are to be posted or sent electronically to experts, who then work from their own or other suitable premises, the expert will be held responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of any documents or electronic files sent and erasing or destroying all confidential documents or files upon completing the evaluation. In such instances, experts may seek further advice or information in order to allow them to complete their examination of the proposals, provided that any discussions or contacts with others respect the overall rules for confidentiality and impartiality.
8. Experts are required at all times to comply strictly with any rules defined by BMVIT and the FFG for ensuring the confidentiality of the evaluation process (for instance, regarding communication with persons outside the evaluation sessions). Failure to comply with these rules may result in exclusion from the immediate and future evaluation processes.

## ANNEX F

### **DECLARATION OF CONFIDENTIALITY AND CONFIRMATION OF NON-EXISTENCE OF A CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

I, the undersigned, confirm that I have read and understood the terms for expert evaluations and reviewers.

1. The evaluator commits himself to strict confidentiality and impartiality concerning his tasks.
2. If an evaluator has a direct or indirect link with a proposal or a project, he must declare such facts to the FFG staff as soon as he becomes aware of this. An evaluator has a direct link with a proposal or a project if he or she:
  - is currently or has recently been employed by one of the proposing or participating organisations; or
  - has been involved in the preparation of the proposal or the project; or
  - is related to an applicant or a member of the proposing or participating team; or
  - may be knowingly involved in the publication or exploitation of the results.

An evaluator has an indirect link with a proposal or a project if he or she:

- is employed by an organisation which has contractual links with one of the organisations in the field covered by the proposal or the project;
  - or has any direct link with or works for an organisation submitting a competing proposal or project.
3. The evaluator should discuss proposals or projects only with the nominated evaluation team members.
  4. The evaluators may not communicate with proposers.
  5. The proposals should not be subject to amendments during the evaluation process.
  6. The evaluators are not allowed to disclose the names of other experts, nor proposers, nor evaluation results.