

# MANUAL FOR REVIEWS OF FIT-IT PROJECTS

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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Manual for reviews of FIT-IT projects is to provide the basic rules and procedure of the review. In this review, international and Austrian experts evaluate the progress, work, efforts, and results of FIT-IT funded projects and give recommendations on the project or the programme. This manual should help the reviewers in preparing for the evaluation, as well as help the reviewed project partners for preparing their presentation. It describes the process, states the people involved and their functions, and lists the relevant information needed by reviewers for the process. For general information on the FIT-IT programme see [www.fit-it.at](http://www.fit-it.at).

## FIT-IT PROGRAMME

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 three programme lines: "embedded systems", "semantic systems and services" and "systems-on-chip". For each of these topics there is a short introduction and characterisation of the scope available from the programme management.

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 50-75% of the total project costs. FIT-IT also supports 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:

1. Development of radically new information technology resulting in a functional prototype in Austria
2. Improving the competitiveness of Austrian research and economy

3. Training of highly qualified researchers
4. Improving the European and international visibility and networking of Austrian research (corresponding to FIT-IT programme lines)

## OBJECTIVES OF THE REVIEW

The aims of the review of projects funded by the FIT-IT programme are the following:

- To assess the project progress, its overall status and its conformity to the objectives of the programme
- To compare project work with the state-of-the-art and current developments in related fields
- To assess the excellence of the scientific work
- To examine the role of the industry partners and/or of applications of the new technology within the project
- To examine the adequacy of the resources spent on the project
- To assist the project team through recommendation and information

## PRINCIPLES OF THE REVIEWS

The process for reviewing projects funded by 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 results and recommendations of the review

should be clearly communicated to the project partners. All involved organisations in the implementation of the programme are present at the review.

- **Confidentiality.** FFG or programme management staff will not discuss aspects of the review with any persons not involved directly in the project unless this information is explicitly public. FFG, BMVIT and programme management staff will take all the necessary measures to ensure appropriate confidential treatment of project information.
- **Impartiality.** All projects are treated impartially on their merits, following an independent peer review of international experts (including experts from Austria) who are autonomous in their opinion.
- **Efficiency and speed.** The procedures have been designed to be as swift as possible, commensurate with maintaining the quality of the review and respecting the legal framework within which FIT-IT is managed.

## EXPERTS

The programme management will organise a transparent review according to this manual. The programme management will propose independent external experts for the review to BMVIT. In doing so, they will take care to avoid assigning projects to experts who might have a direct or indirect link with project partners. A minimum of two independent experts will examine the FIT-IT projects.

Experts chosen should be appropriately competent in the field of the projects, and should have appropriate industrial and/or scientific backgrounds and linguistic capabilities. Care will also be taken to avoid inviting experts who could be biased for or against any particular project partner, for whatever reason. The list of experts to be used for any particular review session will be decided by BMVIT, as will any replacements or additional experts needed in the course of the session.

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

FFG and programme management staff will brief experts on the procedures to be followed, by this manual, on request before the meeting, and at the beginning of the review meeting.

## PROCESS

The date of reviews should be after midterm and before the end of projects. A proposed date is selected by the programme management together with the programme owner and announced at least three weeks in advance to the prime contractor of the projects. Representatives of the projects have to accept or refuse this date within a week.

The names of the reviewers are announced to the consortia at least two weeks before the review meeting. The project consortia may propose to change reviewers based on an existing or reasonably presumed conflict of interest. The final decision for refusing or accepting reviewers lies with BMVIT.

Reviewers will receive the following information well before the review meeting by FFG:

- Project proposal (as submitted in the FIT-IT call that selected this project)
- Comments of the evaluators on the proposal (as of the jury meeting that selected this project)
- Call text (as of the call addressed by the submitted proposal)
- Manual for reviews of FIT-IT projects
- Progress reports (in German and English transcripts where applicable)
- Person costs accumulated and reported so far (where applicable)

The venue of the review is also proposed by the programme management in co-operation with the project consortia. It might occur that some projects are evaluated on the site of one of the partners. Usually reviews will take place at BMVIT or FFG, except when a review of equipment at a partner's site appears worthwhile for the aims of the review.

## CRITERIA

Each project will be examined against specific criteria outlined below. For future work (if early in the project) the experts may recommend any course of action that may be required in order to achieve the project objectives and/or remedy non-performance. Furthermore, the experts may recommend future activities in the course of the project after the end of it.

The reviewers should outline and comment on the consortium's information dissemination plans (methods to be used, means, events, publications & media coverage, technology transfer activities, etc.). If possible, the reviewers should also comment on the potential impact of the project results. This could include the relevance to long-term scientific, technological or socio-economic objectives and the potential for commercial exploitation (including opportunities for start-ups).

Reviewers are strongly encouraged to highlight points of special interest, for example: major scientific results achieved, novel approaches identified, important changes in direction of research or new industrial perspectives due to new insight, broader initiatives/actions that would be relevant, etc.

The technical verification in the course of the review should objectively establish:

- > The degree of fulfillment of the project work plan;
- > The degree of achievement of the project objectives as described in the initial proposal;
- > The degree of fulfillment of the deliverables as described in the initial proposal;

- Any elements which may give rise to reasonable doubts as to the reality of the resources that the contractors purport to have employed;
- Any elements which may give rise to reasonable doubts as to the use of reasonable endeavours by the contractors to achieve the results aimed at by the project;
- Any elements which may give rise to reasonable doubts as to the likelihood of the achievement of the results aimed at by the project, or which can reasonably be expected to result in a considerable diminution of the use potential of such results

Of particular importance are:

- Degree of innovation of the performed work on the project
- Scientific and technological excellence of the work
- Adequacy of dissemination activities
- Proper involvement of industrial partners

The reviewers should also carefully examine project management. This will take into account technical achievements, business development, co-ordination of information, meetings, communication, changes in consortium, and human and financial resources. Where problems have been identified, these should be described together with the reviewers' recommendations.

## REVIEW MEETING

Project reviews are carried out by panels of 2 or more independent experts, normally chaired by the programme management (eutema). Representatives from the programme management, the programme financial management (FFG) and programme owner (BMVIT) will be present at the reviews and will provide additional explanation or information needed to allow a proper review of projects. During the course of the review process, FFG representatives may contribute information about the resources (person months) spent in the project.

Review meetings usually will be held in front of one or two representatives each of BMVIT, FFG and eutema, and two or three reviewers. At least one member of each project partner should be present at



the review meeting, where the prime contractor takes the lead in the presentation. If there are two or more projects reviewed at one day, the project partners will not be allowed to participate in another project's review.

The content and form of the presentation is up to the consortia and depends on the project. It is indeed welcome to present live prototypes and show-case technology if possible.

The presentation is to cover the following questions (if applicable):

1. Scientific and technical objectives and (intermediate) results
  - Technical challenges and scientific excellence
  - Innovation
  - Achievements and obstacles
  - Changes in the state-of-the-art and risks
  - Description and presentation of the prototype (if existent)
  
2. Project consortium and project management
  - Collaboration (meetings, in-house co-operation, communication flow)
  - Intellectual property rights
  - Dissemination of (intermediate) results
  - Project resources and deviations (person months, finances, infrastructure etc.)
  - Training effects and quality of staff
  - Impact on innovation / R&D within the organisations
  
3. Market prospects and other issues relevant for FIT-IT
  - Time-to-market of project results
  - Market potential, barriers and strategy for competition
  - Characteristics of the market of results
  - Other relevant aspects (regional, employment, work conditions, quality of life, gender issues)

The time frame for the presentation of the project at the review meeting is one to two hours, depending on the number of projects reviewed at one day. A typical agenda of a review day including 2 projects to be reviewed may look as follows:

**Project #1**

- 09:00 Welcome address and review aims, BMVIT
- 09:05 Introduction to the agenda and introducing the reviewers, eutema
- 09:15 Presentation of the project, project consortium (incl. a coffee break of 15 min.)
- 11:00 Questions and answers (if not included in previous slot)
- 11:30 Reviewer consultation meeting
- 12:00 Feedback of the reviewers to the consortium and closing discussion
- 12:30 End of the review

**Project #2**

- 14:00 Welcome address and review aims, BMVIT
- 14:05 Introduction to the agenda and introducing the reviewers, eutema
- 14:15 Presentation of the project, project consortium (incl. a coffee break of 15 min.)
- 16:00 Questions and answers (if not included in previous slot)
- 16:30 Reviewer consultation meeting
- 17:00 Feedback of the reviewers to the consortium and closing discussion
- 17:30 End of the review
  
- 17:30 Feedback of the reviewers to BMVIT, eutema, FFG
- 18:00 End of the review day

The agenda may be adapted to the project consortia's needs on request.

## REPORTING

Reviewers are asked to outline a short report of two to five pages on the findings of the review meeting following above criteria. This report is delivered to BMVIT, FFG, eutema and the prime contractor of the reviewed project.

## ANNEX A

### 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, FFG, or programme management 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; or
- > he/she has been involved in the preparation of the proposal; or
- > he/she is related to an applicant or a member of the proposing team; or

—→ 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 Commission 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 the Commission services 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.

## ANHANG B

### 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 FIT-IT programme management staff as soon as he becomes aware of this.  
An evaluator has a direct link with a proposal or a project if he:
  - 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:
  - 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.

Organisation: .....

Name: .....

Place, date: ..... Signature:.....

## CONTACT

FIT-IT is an initiative of the Austrian Ministry for Transport, Innovation, and Technology (BMVIT), that is implemented jointly with the programme management eutema and the Austrian Research Promotion Agency.

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