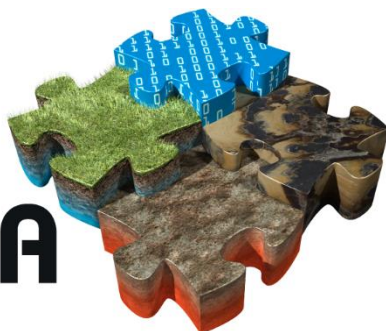


# GeoERA



Establishing the European Geological Surveys Research Area to deliver a Geological Service for Europe

## **JOINT CALL DOCUMENT NO.8**

### **EVALUATION AND SELECTION**

### **Stage Two - Project Proposals**

Joint Call on applied geoscience in the fields of:

- Geo-energy
- Groundwater
- Raw materials
- Information platform

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## 1 Introduction

This document explains how to evaluate proposals for GeoERA Stage Two Call for Project Proposals, as well as the tasks and the responsibilities of the persons involved.

Supporting documents are:

- Form 8a: Code of Conduct and Declaration
- Form 8b: Evaluation form
- Form 8c: Payment to Independent Experts
- Joint Call Document No. 3: Admissibility and Eligibility
- Joint Call Document No. 4: Scientific Scope
- Joint Call Document No. 11: Submission Guide, Stage Two

## 2 Independent Experts

Independent Experts are selected by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research, NWO, to evaluate proposals for the GeoERA Stage Two Call for Project Proposals. Experts are selected using international databases such as Web of Science™, Elsevier's Expert Lookup and Scopus on the basis of keywords from the Stage Two Call text. In addition, NWO might also use the Expert Database of the European Commission. NWO has worked with the ERCEA on the panel selection of the PE-ERC calls<sup>1</sup> and will apply the same rules for this panel selection.

NWO takes all reasonable steps to ensure that Independent Experts are not faced with a conflict of interest between their own research/business interests, and their evaluation activities of GeoERA project proposals. All Independent Experts must abide by and sign a Code of Conduct and Declaration (Form 8a) prior to beginning any evaluation.

Proposal evaluation will be carried out by Technical Experts and the Expert Panel.

### 2.1 Technical Experts

As input for the discussion of the Expert Panel NWO seeks technical expert opinions on the merits of each proposal in a written peer review procedure. The technical experts will be selected using the same criteria as the Expert Panel, but a narrower focus and deeper knowledge on the specific topics of the proposal (rather than the call) will guide their selection. Each proposal will be presented to the Expert Panel with at least three reviews of technical experts.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://erc.europa.eu/evaluation-panels>



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## 2.2 The Expert Panel

To evaluate the proposals submitted, NWO compiles a pool of appropriate Independent Experts and selects from these, members for the Expert Panel for evaluation of GeoERA Project Proposals. A Project Proposal will be evaluated by at least three appropriate Independent Experts from the Expert Panel.

When selecting Independent Experts for the Panel, NWO looks for a high level of skill, experience and knowledge in the relevant areas combined with a broad view on the scope of the call. Providing this condition can be satisfied, NWO seeks a balance in terms of:

- skills, experience and knowledge
- geographical diversity
- gender
- where appropriate, the private and public sectors

The Expert Panel must attend a review meeting for the evaluation of proposals and produce the final ranking list of proposals. NWO will liaise with Independent Experts in order to arrange the administration and logistics.

## 3 Evaluation process

### 3.1 Evaluation criteria

The three evaluation criteria for Project Proposals are:

#### 1. Excellence

To the extent that the proposed work corresponds to the topic description of the Stage 2 call:

- Clarity and pertinence of the objectives
- Soundness of the concept, and credibility of the proposed methodology
- Extent that the proposed work is beyond the state of the art, and demonstrates innovation potential (e.g. ground-breaking objectives, novel concepts and approaches, new products, services or business and organizational models)
- Appropriate consideration of interdisciplinary approaches (in particular interactions with other GeoERA themes) and use of stakeholder knowledge

#### 2. Impact

- The extent to which the outputs of the proposed Project would contribute to each of the expected impacts listed in the Stage Two Call under the relevant topic
- Any substantial impacts not mentioned in the Stage Two Call, that would enhance innovation capacity, creating new market opportunities, strengthen competitiveness and growth of companies, address issues related to climate change or the environment, cover the interest of multiple European countries, or bring other important benefits for society;



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- The quality of the proposed measures to<sup>2</sup>:
    - Exploit and disseminate the project results (including management of IPR), and to manage research data where relevant
    - Communicate the project activities to different target audiences
  - 3. The quality and efficiency of the implementation
    - Quality and effectiveness of the work plan, including extent to which the resources assigned to work packages are in line with their objectives and deliverables;
    - Appropriateness of the management structures and procedures, including risk and innovation management<sup>3</sup>;
    - Complementarity of the participants and extent to which the consortium as whole brings together the necessary expertise;
    - Appropriateness of the allocation of tasks, ensuring that all participants have a valid role and adequate resources in the project to fulfil that role.
    - The operational capacity of each of the partners in the Project Proposal to carry out the proposed work<sup>4</sup>.

Each of these three main criteria is rated independently and has an equal weight.

### 3.2 Prior to evaluation

The GeoERA Executive Board will check the admissibility and eligibility of each proposal and only admissible and eligible proposals are evaluated. Where admissibility and eligibility criteria are not met, the GeoERA Secretariat, on behalf of the Executive Board, will notify the proposer giving her/him the opportunity within 24 hours to amend and resubmit the proposal. If the proposer fails to do so, or the criteria are still not met after resubmission, the proposal will be rejected.

### 3.3 Principles of evaluation

Proposals will be evaluated against the evaluation criteria in the Evaluation Form 8b. They will be evaluated as presented, on their own merit, and treated equally.

NWO and the GeoERA Executive Board take all reasonable steps to ensure confidentiality of Project Proposals, before, during and after evaluation. Independent Experts are required to maintain the

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<sup>2</sup> Proposed measures and approaches should specifically take into account, and align with, IPR and data management agreements and communication activities described in the overall GeoERA Grant Agreement and Consortium Agreement

<sup>3</sup> Specific guidelines for project management structures agreed in the overall GeoERA Grant Agreement and Consortium Agreement must be taken into account

<sup>4</sup> If an Independent Expert judges that one or more partners do not meet these criteria, he/she is asked to indicate the partner(s) concerned and provide a short explanation



confidentiality of all information contained within the proposals they evaluate, and of the evaluation outcomes.

Any Project Proposal which does not fulfil the conditions set out in the GeoERA Joint Call (Joint Call Document No 3) may be excluded from evaluation (e.g. a proposal which does not include the required number of partners).

Independent Experts must evaluate each Project Proposal as submitted and not on its potential if certain changes were to be made to the proposal. If Independent Experts identify shortcomings (other than minor ones and obvious clerical errors), they must reflect those in a lower mark for the relevant criterion. Independent Experts only explain the shortcomings, and do not make recommendations i.e. do not suggest additional partners, additional work packages, reduction of resources. Furthermore, proposals with significant weaknesses that prevent the project from achieving its objectives must not receive above-threshold marks.

### **3.4 Evaluation**

#### **3.4.1 Independent Experts' individual preliminary assessment**

A few weeks prior to evaluation, each Independent Expert will be emailed by NWO providing links to the proposal(s) to be evaluated and other relevant supporting documents for the GeoERA Stage Two Call for Projects.

The Independent Experts should:

- Familiarize themselves with the evaluation criteria and read the Evaluation Form 8b: Evaluation
- Understand the impact and the implementation requirements of proposals by reading Joint Call Document No. 11: Submission Guide
- Read all proposals assigned to them and form an initial opinion about each proposal
- Mark each proposal against the evaluation criteria given in the Evaluation Form 8b.
- Send evaluation forms for each assigned proposal to NWO prior to the review meeting as instructed by NWO
- Email NWO if they discover a conflict of interest, or find that the research is outside of their area of expertise. However, please note that it is beneficial to have some Independent Experts with general rather than very specific expertise
- Not discuss Project Proposals with proposers or other Independent Experts at this time.

There are key sections in Project Proposals where Independent Experts will find information most relevant to evaluation:

- Section 2 and 3 should give an overview of the proposed research against the three evaluation criteria;
- Section 1 should give a description of each participant; in order for Independent Experts to complete the operational capacity check for the consortium.



### 3.4.2 Review meeting

For the evaluation of Project Proposals, Independent Experts must attend a review meeting. In this case NWO will liaise with Independent Experts in order to arrange the administration and logistics of the review meeting. The meeting includes the following activities (in chronological order):

- Briefing on the evaluation process
- An Independent Expert group meeting is held per group of proposals (presumably per theme). In this meeting, the Independent Experts discuss each proposal. One Independent Expert (who is specialist in the proposal topic) will usually lead the discussions, which are expected to last around 30 minutes per proposal.
- For each proposal:
  - Independent Experts must agree a consensus on the marks and comments for each evaluation criterion and complete one Evaluation Form 8b for each proposal. Each evaluation criterion will be marked out of five. The threshold for individual evaluation criteria must be 3 and the overall threshold, applying to the sum of the three individual marks must be 10. If a proposal has scored less than this, it cannot be funded;
- A “draft ranked list” of all Project Proposals is formed based on the Independent Expert’s marks. Where two or more Project Proposals receive the same weighted mark, the Independent Experts will attempt to separate them in the “draft ranked list” through discussion and a vote;
- The Independent Experts agree the final “draft ranked list”, which will then be recommended to the GeoERA General Assembly for confirmation.

### 3.5 Confirming the ranked list

The GeoERA General Assembly approve which proposals to fund based on the ranked list and recommendations of the GeoERA Executive Board and the available budget.

The GeoERA call has a minimum budget of EUR 30.3 million of which up to EUR 10 million is co-funded by the EC. The budget is divided over the four GeoERA Themes as shown in Table 1.

Final budget allocations to the cumulative projects funded in each theme can be no more than 10% lower than the budgets indicated in Table 1 in Joint Call Document No.3: Admissibility and Eligibility.

Table 1: GeoERA Joint Call Budget

	Call Theme	Budget
<b>GeoERA co-funded call for transnational proposals</b>	Geo-energy	EUR 10,3 million
	Groundwater	EUR 7,7 million
	Raw Materials	EUR 8,4 million
	Information Platform	EUR 3,9 million
	<b>Total</b>	<b>EUR 30,3 million</b>



The following method will be applied to determine the final ranking list:

Project Proposals will first be ranked within each individual Specific Research Topic (SRT), in case more than one Project Proposal is received. For each SRT, only the highest-ranking proposal (or proposals, if the call topic description indicates that more than 1 proposal can be funded) are retained and can be recommended for funding.

Next, a ranking will be made between the retained Project Proposals within each theme. The highest-ranking Project Proposals are then recommended for funding, until the budget for each theme is exhausted (taking into account the budget guidelines outlined above).

If necessary, the GeoERA Executive Board will determine a priority order for Project Proposals which have been awarded the same score (*Table 2* below) within the final “draft ranked list”. The following approach will be applied successively for every group of ex aequo Project Proposals requiring prioritisation, starting with the highest scored group, and continuing in descending order:

- Project Proposals that address topics, or sub-topics, not otherwise covered by more highly-ranked proposals, will be considered to have the highest priority.
- The Project Proposals identified under (a), if any, will themselves be prioritised according to the scores they have been awarded for the criterion impact. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on scores for the criterion excellence.
- If necessary, any further prioritisation will be based on the following factors, in order:
  - involvement of GeoERA participants who are otherwise not involved in successful proposals;
  - synergies between projects within or across themes;
  - or other factors related to the objectives of the GeoERA call.
- The method described in (b) will then be applied to the remaining ex aequos in the group.

In case there is remaining budget within a theme, the budget may be relocated to a Project Proposal with the best quality, i.e. the highest ranked Project Proposal on the overall ranking list (covering all themes), that has not yet received funding, taking into account the previous rules.

The selection of Project Proposals to be funded will be formally announced at the GeoERA website.

## 4 Marking guidance

One completed Evaluation Form 8b is required per Project Proposal:

- There are three evaluation criteria for Project Proposals;
- Each evaluation criterion will be marked out of five; half marks may be given (*Table 2*);
- The threshold for individual evaluation criteria will be three and the overall threshold, applying to the sum of the three individual marks will be 10. If a proposal has scored less than this, it cannot be funded;
- Consensus comments must be given by the Independent Experts to support the marks given and provide feedback to the consortia.





Table 2: Definition of evaluation marks

0	Fail: the proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information (unless the result of an 'obvious clerical error')
1	Poor: the criterion is inadequately addressed or there are serious inherent weaknesses
2	Fair: the proposal broadly addresses the criterion but there are significant weaknesses
3	Good: the proposal addresses the criterion well but with a number of shortcomings
4	Very Good: the proposal addresses the criterion very well but with a small number of shortcomings
5	Excellent: the proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion; any shortcomings are minor

## 5 Roles and responsibilities

### 5.1 GeoERA General Assembly

The GeoERA General Assembly is responsible for implementing GeoERA and the selection of the proposals to be funded taking into account the advice from the Expert Panel. The GeoERA General Assembly may NOT attempt to influence the opinion of the Independent Experts or express any opinion to the Independent Experts on the merits or otherwise of any proposal.

### 5.2 The GeoERA Executive Board

The GeoERA Executive Board operates under the guidance of the GeoERA General Assembly and is responsible for:

- Preparing a recommendation to the General Assembly for funding of full proposals, in line with regulations outlined here in section 4.6.
- Dealing with expense claims and the honorarium for Independent Experts via Form 8c: Payment to Independent Experts
- Approval of monitoring as outlined in WP4 the GeoERA Joint Projects when under implementation.

### 5.3 The Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO)

NWO is responsible of the selection of Independent Experts for the Expert Panel and for the evaluation process. This includes arranging the administration and logistics of the evaluation of proposals, including the review meeting. Besides, NWO checks the admissibility and eligibility of proposals and records the outcome of evaluations.

NWO staff members may not attempt to influence the opinion of the Independent Experts or express any opinion to the Independent Experts on the merits or otherwise of any Project Proposal.



NWO staff may act as moderators in discussions at the review meeting. A moderator seeks consensus between the Independent Experts, without any prejudice for or against particular Project Proposals or the organisations involved, and may assist with details of the processes involved.

#### **5.4 Independence of the Experts**

Independent Experts selected for the Expert Panel act in a personal capacity, and when performing the evaluation, they must not represent any organisation, national interest, or other entity. Independent Experts must declare any links to a particular consortium and must sign “Form 8a: Code of Conduct and Declaration” prior to the beginning of any evaluation. The Independent Experts are responsible for:

- Maintaining the confidentiality of the documents they are assessing;
- Evaluating the merits of each application against the given evaluation criteria;
- Reporting results of the evaluation to NWO on the relevant forms;
- Deleting or destroying all documents after evaluation;
- Informing NWO of any conflict of interest.

#### **5.5 The GeoERA Independent Observer and the European Commission’s representative**

GeoERA’s Independent Observer will review the evaluation process. He does not participate directly in the evaluation procedure but will have access to all areas of the process, and will report back his observations and opinions on the process to the GeoERA General Assembly and to the European Commission. The European Commission may also send a representative to the review meeting.

### **6 Review of evaluation procedure**

If proposers consider that the evaluation of their Project Proposal has not been carried out in accordance with the Horizon 2020 rules for Participation, the relevant work plan or the call for Project Proposals, they can request a review. A request for review shall relate to a specific Project Proposal, and shall be submitted by the individual project coordinator of the Project Proposal to [info@geoera.eu](mailto:info@geoera.eu) within 30 days of the date on which the GeoERA Executive Board informs the Project Proposal submitter of the evaluation results.

On receipt of a request for review, the GeoERA Executive Board will form an evaluation review committee composed of the members from the GeoERA General Assembly. The examination will cover only the procedural aspects of the evaluation, and not the merits of the Project Proposal.

The evaluation review committee shall provide an opinion on the procedural aspects of the evaluation process. The committee may recommend one of the following:



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- Re-evaluation of the Project Proposal primarily by evaluators not involved in the previous evaluation;
  - Confirmation of the initial evaluation.

On the basis of this recommendation, a decision will be taken by the GeoERA General Assembly and notified to the coordinator of the Project Proposal. The GeoERA General Assembly will take such decision without undue delay.