EVALUATION GUIDELINES

1. EVALUATION PROCESS

Requests for Services are evaluated by a Selection Panel (SP) comprised of two external (non-Sonar-Global) members and one Sonar-Global partner.

1.1. Project information

Reviewers receive request/application information from the Service Manager (TNA Manager) who operates the online shop.

For products and Service requests:

- Service details,
- User details: name, employer name and address, researcher status, year of the last degree,
- Project details

1.2. Scoring and decision

Evaluations by the SP consist of a numerical score from 0-3 (0: lowest, 3: highest score) in each of three areas, as described on the application form.

For products and access to facility requests:

- Technical quality,
- Expected public health outcomes,
- Applicant capacity building.

The evaluation of the 3 criteria is done online, on an evaluation form.

Each area has a text field for short bullet-point style comments on strengths and weaknesses. Longer text comments are not required. Reviewers' comments should not be identifiable.

1.3. Evaluation outcome

The Service Manager collates the scores and evaluations, calculates the final score out of the 3 individual scores of the reviewers, and sends the evaluation feedback (Request "accepted", "rejected with revision encouraged", or "rejected") to the applicant. Scores and summary texts of the evaluation are anonymously provided to the applicant and to other evaluators of the same proposal.

A request for Services is acceptable if the total score summed across the three criteria is ≥6, given that each of the individual areas is scored ≥1.

A score of zero in any of the three areas ("fails to address the criterion") will class the request/ application as unacceptable ("rejected").

A request/application with a total average score below 6 is unacceptable ("rejected").

In the case of a total average score above 6, but when one of the reviewers gives a score below 6, the Service Manager requests the User to provide more information in response of the reviewer's comments. The additional information provided by the User is sent to the reviewer for re-evaluation.

If the reviewer does not approve the second version of the request/application, the Service Manager will request project evaluation by a fourth reviewer. If no clear decision emerges from the additional reviewer, a final resolution is found by the vote of a majority of the Sonar-Global Steering Committee.

1.4. Rejected requests/applications and resubmission

Rejected requests/applications can be revised by the applicant and resubmitted. For those with promise but numerical scores that indicate major deficiencies, evaluator text comments should highlight the areas of weakness that need to be improved by the applicant.

A new request/application must be resubmitted. The User is invited to clearly describe the aspects of the original proposal that were changed, and how the changes strengthen the new proposal. It will be re-evaluated by the same reviewers.

1.5. Amended request

After a submitted request is evaluated and approved, applicants can amend their project proposal. Amendments must be submitted before production of the material, and will be subject to an expedited re-evaluation in some cases.

An amendment is required for major project modifications: addition of new products, requestor PI change or other changes modifying the request substantially.

For a change in the number of units ordered or additional product options, the modification of the request may be done by Service Manager, directly on the online request. Those modifications are typically requested after discussion with the product provider or others, to increase the statistical or technical power of the project. They can be done before or after the evaluation, but not after production has started.

2. SELECTION PANEL GUIDELINES

2.1. Evaluation criteria

The evaluation is made by reviewers from the Selection panel. The goals of the evaluation process are:

- Identify and support technically sound community and public health services;
- Exclude technically deficient projects that would likely waste Sonar-Global resources;
- Support services that contribute to career development of junior personnel;
- Support services that aid capacity strengthening of institutions in less developed countries;
- Support services that strengthen the capacities of small or medium enterprise (SME) commercial companies working in the emerging diseases/disease outbreak field, including product development and improvement;
- Strengthen emerging diseases/disease outbreak by adding a social sciences approach to emerging diseases/disease outbreak research.

Acceptable categories of requests for products can include but not necessarily limited to:

- hypothesis-based studies;
- risky studies with potential for innovation;
- exploratory and pilot studies designed to collect feasibility data;
- descriptive studies, for example designed to generate a useful public database;
- public health activities.

Evaluation of requests for services is based on scientific merit, taking into account that weight should be given to users who:

- have not previously received the same Sonar-Global service;
- are working in countries where no equivalent research infrastructure exists.

Potential for institutional capacity building should be weighed as an important evaluation criterion. The level of experience and country origin of the applicant are indicated by the biographical information provided by the applicant.

2.2. Risk Assessment of Requests for Implemented Services

In addition to the evaluation of User requests for Sonar-Global services, performed by a Selection Panel to determine the eligibility of the submitted project, all user requests for Implemented Services such as the Implementation of a Vulnerability Assessment are subject to a risk assessment, based on IRB review.

The expected outcomes of the described risk assessment, might be the following, depending on the severity of the risk:

- The requestor might be asked to provide further justifications of project design
- The request might need to be revised if the risk is assessed as too high.

2. CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY FOR PROJECT EVALUATION

Before evaluating a request/application, reviewers should make sure there is no conflict of interest (COI) between them and the applicant.

Situations that create an actual or potential COI include:

- when the reviewer has collaborated within the preceding three years with the applicant,
- has trained/or has mentored or trained the applicant (for example, supervised as postdoc or student in the laboratory);
- is in collaboration, is negotiating collaboration, or is preparing an application or publication with the applicant;
- has a primary professional appointment in the same institute as the applicant;
- is in a situation that could create the appearance or concern of COI to a reasonable observer.

General professional interactions, including joint participation with the applicant in large European networks or projects, or past collaboration or mentorship, do not automatically create a COI if they do not respond to the criteria above.

Please contact the Service Manager if you have questions.