



Fundação
para a Ciência
e a Tecnologia



FUNDAÇÃO
BELMIRO
DE AZEVEDO

Belmiro de Azevedo Foundation Prize for “Conservation, Restoration, and Monitoring of Biodiversity in Portugal” – 2023

EVALUATION GUIDE

JULY 2023



REPÚBLICA
PORTUGUESA

This **Evaluation Guide** sets out the details of the evaluation process and the procedures adopted for the BELMIRO DE AZEVEDO FOUNDATION PRIZE announced by FCT on July 3, 2023. It complements the legal documents establishing the rules of this Prize, namely the Announcement of the Call, Regulation of projects funded under the partnership between FBA and FCT, I.P. (in Portuguese) and the Application Guide.

The period of applications submission for the current call is from July 4 to August 7, 2023.

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I.

Belmiro de Azevedo Foundation Prize

Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, I.P. (FCT), the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology, is the Portuguese public Agency that funds and supports Science and Technology in all areas of knowledge.

Belmiro de Azevedo Foundation (FBA) is a private institution, founded in 1991, whose purpose is, among others, to promote education and professional training, and may support social solidarity initiatives, including intergenerational solidarity that guarantee a sustainable horizon for the new generations, through the conservation and restoration of Biodiversity and generation of knowledge in this area.

FCT and the Belmiro de Azevedo Foundation (FBA) signed a protocol for the attribution of the **Belmiro de Azevedo Foundation Prize**, which aims to promote the implementation of projects with clear merit and impact at the national and international level in the field of conservation, restoration, and monitoring of biodiversity in Portugal.

The **Belmiro de Azevedo Foundation Prize** is intended to support researchers and their teams from Portuguese institutions, who present projects developed in Portuguese territory to contribute to sustainable development, through the conservation and restoration of Biodiversity, as well as the production of knowledge in this scientific domain.

This initiative aims to support projects, with a minimum duration of 24 months and a maximum of 36 months, of recognized merit and impact at the national and international level in the field of conservation, restoration and monitoring of biodiversity in Portugal. Each project will have a maximum amount of €250,000.00 and a minimum of €100,000.00. This prize has matching funds from both entities and totalizes €500.000,00.

Eligibility criteria

1) The following can apply for Support:

- a) non-profit legal persons governed by private law with headquarters in Portugal, including scientific societies or non-profit scientific associations; and
- b) higher education institutions and their R&D institutes and units, whether public or private;

which aim or have as their main activity the carrying out of conservation, restoration and monitoring of biodiversity projects taking place in Portuguese territory.

- 2) Each proposal must indicate a researcher responsible for coordinating the work of the entity, who hold a “Doctor” degree for at least 5 years.
- 3) A researcher cannot integrate more than one application.

For eligibility purposes, the following restrictions are also applied:

- Entities that are in violation of contract with the entities promoting this initiative;
- Entities in a situation of insolvency in law or in fact;
- Public entities with the exception of those referred to above.

II.

Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation criteria, and their relative weight, are the following:

- A. Scientific merit, methodology and expected results **(40%)**
- B. Scientific merit of the host entity, research team and partnerships involved **(25%)**
- C. Feasibility of the work program, potential impact and budget reasonability **(35%)**

Criterion A

The assessment of the **Scientific merit, methodology and expected results**, which will account for **40%** of the final score, should consider the *Scientific quality, relevance and innovative nature of the research plan*, based on the methodology, goals and expected outcomes, and breakthrough potential beyond the current state of the art.

In this criterion the panel members should evaluate the importance of the topic proposed for investigation, the quality of the diagnosis, formulated hypotheses, and proposed lines of work, as well as the quality, clarity, coherence and feasibility of the proposed methodology and plan of action against the intended objectives, as well as the expected results. All the above, taken together in an integrated manner.

Criterion B

The assessment of the **Scientific merit of the host entity, research team and partnerships involved** will account for **25%** of the final score and should consider, in an integrated manner: the experience of the entity and the team involved in the areas of intervention; the technical and financial involvement of any partners in the relationship with the entity and in the proposal and its relevance. It should also be considered any specific conditions provided by the host entity with a positive impact in the feasibility of the research plan.

When assessing this criterion, the Evaluation Panel should consider how the Principal Investigator (PI) scientific profile will allow to successfully implement the research plan proposed.

Criterion C

The assessment of the **Feasibility of the work program, potential impact and budget reasonability** will account for **35%** of the final score and should consider, in an integrated manner, the following aspects:

- The proposed reporting methodology for both, the assessment and monitoring of the objectives, as well as expected results; plan for potential risks and respective mitigation measures; and a results dissemination plan.
- The scientific work to be carried out and its results contribute to the sustainability or significant improvement in the biodiversity of the systems to be studied.
- The technical, financial, and material resources presented in the proposal.
- The possibility of sustainability of the presented initiative, once the financial support is exhausted, and its long-term impact on biodiversity.

III.

Scoring System

The scoring system uses a **9-point scale, using 0.1 increments**. The maximum score is 9 and the minimum is 1, as presented in Table I.

Table I – Qualitative descriptors associated to the 9-point scale.

Evaluation	Score	Strengths & Weaknesses
Excellent	9	Exceptionally strong with no weaknesses
Very good	8	Very strong with some negligible weaknesses
	7	Strong with some minor weaknesses
Good	6	Some strengths with numerous minor weaknesses
	5	Some strengths but with at least one moderate weakness
Adequate	4	Few strengths with several minor weaknesses
	3	Few strengths and major weaknesses
Poor	2	Very few strengths and serious weaknesses
	1	Cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information

An application can be considered non-assessable when it is submitted in a language different from English.

The final score (FS) is given by the following formula:

$$\text{FS} = 0.40 \text{ A} + 0.25 \text{ B} + 0.35 \text{ C}$$

The final score (FS) calculated using the formula above will be presented with two decimal places.

Situations in which the information provided in the application does not allow a sustained score for a given evaluation criterion will deserve a score of 1 (one).

For the purposes of selection and funding decisions, proposals that obtain a FS equal to or greater than 5.0 are considered eligible and prioritized.

The projects will be prioritized in descending order of the FC obtained in the evaluation process.

In cases of ties in the final score, the following criteria for tie-breaking will be used, in this specific order:

- a) score awarded to criterion A;
- b) score awarded to criterion C;
- c) score awarded to criterion B.

IV.

Evaluation Process

Constitution of the Evaluation Panel

The selection of projects for funding will be based on a peer review process carried out by a international Evaluation Panel covering the specific field of the call - conservation, restoration, and monitoring of biodiversity.

Evaluation Panel is composed by a Chairperson and Panel Members of international affiliation appointed by the Board of Directors of FCT and FBA. All Panel Members are of recognized competence in the scientific domains of the applications under evaluation and cannot be affiliated with any Portuguese R&D Institution.

The composition of the Evaluation Panel takes into consideration as much as possible the scientific nature of submitted applications, and Panel Members' gender balance and a balanced geographical and institutional distribution. If an expertise is missing in the Panel, the Chairperson may require External Reviewers to provide an assessment on specific applications.

The Panels' composition will be announced on the FCT website before the preliminary hearing period.

Confidentiality and Conflicts of Interest

Confidentiality Statement

The confidentiality of the applications must be protected. All Panel Members involved in the evaluation are obliged not to copy, quote, or otherwise use material from the applications. All Panel Members are also requested to agree with a statement of confidentiality relative to the contents of the applications, the evaluation process and the evaluation results.

Conflicts of Interest (Col)

Researchers who applied to the present call cannot participate in the evaluation process as a reviewer. Those with first-degree relationships, domestic partnership or married to an applicant are also hindered from being a member of the panel to which the application was submitted.

Any Col of the Chairperson or a Panel member is declared prior to the evaluation process, based on limited information on the applicant's identification, current affiliation and host institution. In case the Chairperson or Panel Member declares a Col, he or she will not have access to the full application, or any evaluation produced. If any additional Col is detected upon the contact with the full application, it should be immediately reported to FCT and the Panel Chairperson.

Disqualifying conflict of interest

In case a disqualifying Col is identified, the panel member **cannot evaluate the respective application**. Circumstances that constitute a disqualifying Col are the following:

1. Personal or financial interest in the application's success;
2. Current or planned close scientific cooperation with the applicant;
3. Research cooperation with the applicant (*e.g.*, joint publications) within the last 3 years before the opening date of the call;
4. Supervisory relationship with the applicant (*e.g.*, teacher-student relationship up to and including the post-doctoral phase), within the last 3 years before the opening date of the call;
5. Dependent employment relationship with the Host Institution or the Beneficiary Institution within the last 3 years before the opening date of the call;
6. Affiliation, or pending transfer, to any Institution involved in the application;
7. Be an active member in a Council or similar Supervisory Board of the Department, Institution or Research Centre to which the applicant has been affiliated to within the last 3 years or will be connected to in the scope of the application.

Potential conflict of interest

Circumstances that are classified as potential conflict of interest include, but are not limited to:

1. Relationships other than first-degree, marriage or domestic partnership; other personal ties or conflicts;
2. Professional relationships, other than those listed above;

3. Participation in Academic Bodies other than those listed under no. 7, *e.g.*, Scientific Advisory Committees;
4. Involvement in a Project with a closely related research topic (competition issues);
5. Participating in an on-going scientific or inter-personal conflict with the applicant(s);
6. Any other circumstances the reviewer feels that they may not be impartial.

If a **potential Col** is identified, the panel member must also immediately notify FCT, which will analyse and decide if an unbiased evaluation may be carried out, or if the conflict is considered disqualifying.

If a **disqualifying Col** is declared, the panel member is not only prevented from evaluating that application or have access to any information or evaluation reports produced, as well they will not participate or be present in the discussion of the application during the panel meeting, The Panel meeting report lists all declared Cols.

No direct contact between applicants and any member of the Evaluation Panels is allowed **under penalty of exclusion from the Call**.

Evaluation stages and methodology

The evaluation of the *FBA Prize* applications will take place entirely via the *myFCT* website (<https://myfct.fct.pt/>), which is also the platform where the applications are submitted. The structure of the Application Form, which only allows plain text, is outlined in Appendix I.

Applications eligibility and assignment

FCT is responsible for verifying the eligibility of the submitted applications according to the binding criteria described in the Announcement of the Call. While this verification process takes place after the end of the submission period, an application can be declared ineligible at any stage of the evaluation. If, during the evaluation, any panel member detects any element that may raise doubts on the eligibility of the application, the Panel Chair and FCT should be informed.

Each application will be **individually assessed by two Panel Members**, one lead reviewer of the application (1st reader and rapporteur) and one second (2nd) reader. The distribution of the

applications to Panel Members (and, if applicable, to External Reviewers) will necessarily take into consideration the declaration of Col and the matching of scientific expertise of the Panel Members with the topic of the research plan.

Evaluation stages

After the assignment of applications to Panel Members, the evaluation process comprises these stages:

1. Individual stage
2. Consensus stage
3. Final Panel meeting

External Reviewers only contribute during the individual stage.

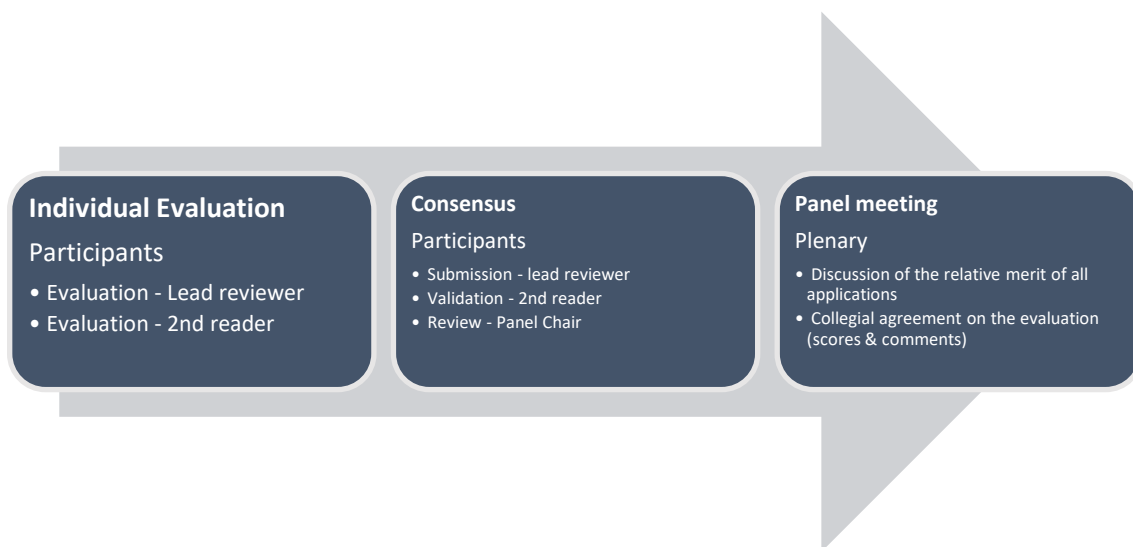


Figure 1 – Diagram of the Evaluation stages for the FBA Prize

Individual Stage

Prior to the assessment, Panel Members must declare, for all applications, whether (or not) a Col is identified, by following the rules above mentioned.

Panel Members must submit an individual report with their assessment for each application assigned to them by the Chair. This report includes:

- Substantive comments, for each evaluation criterion, including strengths and weaknesses, as well as the scores for each criterion using the 1-9 scale. **For criterion C, the comment should include the amount to be funded**, propose by the reviewer, in case the proposal is funded;
- Confidential comments to the evaluation Panel and/or FCT (optional).

During the individual stage, Panel Members **should not interact** with each other.

The Panel Members should perform their assessments considering **only the information provided** and included in the application.

Panel Members and External Reviewers must submit their individual evaluation within the established deadline and prior to the beginning of the consensus phase.

Consensus Stage

The Panel member appointed as 1st reader will prepare the consensus report for each application based on the two individual reviews, and, when existing, the external expert's assessment. The consensus report proposed by the 1st reader is submitted for validation to the 2nd reader.

If the 2nd reader rejects the submitted consensus proposal, the 1st reader should amend the consensus report according to the comments of the other reader, as much as possible.

If the 1st reader is unable to propose a consensus report based on the individual review the Chair should be informed and contribute to solve the differences, preferably in advance of the Panel meeting.

Information regarding any cases where there was disagreement, will be available for all Panel Members at the Panel meeting discussion.

The consensus report is similar in structure to the individual reports. The consensus is the starting point for the discussion during the final Panel meeting. Comments **must include strengths and**

weaknesses for each evaluation criterion and agree with the given scores (according to Table I), and reflect, as much as possible, the perspectives of the different Panel Members.

Final Panel Meeting

The final Panel meeting will take place by videoconference, and will be coordinated by the Panel Chairperson to proceed with the following activities:

- Ensure a fair judgement and an appropriate discussion of each application;
- Settle the final scores for each criterion in each application, as well as the comments to be conveyed to the applicants – in accordance with the collegial decisions of the Panel - and **ensure the scores are in agreement with the Panel comments**. Final comments are revised and submitted in the “Panel report” by the 1st reader;
- Guarantee that the adopted criteria are coherent across applications;
- Preparation of a ranked list of all applications;
- Approve the Panel Meeting Report (prepared by the FCT Officer and the Panel Chair) with a brief description of the meeting and addressing the following issues:
 - o Working methodology adopted by the Panel;
 - o Identification of reported Conflicts of Interest;
 - o The ranked list of the Panel’s applications, with the final and partial scores (criteria A, B and C).
- Discuss recommendations to FCT on the different aspects of the evaluation process that may help improving procedures in future Calls.

Selection of Applications for Funding

The Board of Directors of FCT and FBA, following the ranking order decided by the Evaluation Panel, are responsible for the final decision on awarding the prize(s), considering the available budget.

Preliminary Hearings

Once the ranked list of the evaluation results is communicated, applicants may use their right to dispute the proposed decision in the preliminary hearing phase in the following 10 working days. The applicants must submit their comments in English and address their peers using polite, dispassionate, and analytical language.

After the reception of the candidates' claims, Panel Members will be asked to analyse and answer to preliminary hearings containing comments of scientific nature regarding one or more of the evaluation criteria. The Evaluation Panel are responsible for correcting any possible errors or clarifying alleged inaccuracies. The FCT officers will assist the Panel Chairs in the quality control of the Panel responses to the submitted preliminary hearings.

The analysis of the preliminary hearings is neither a second assessment of the application **nor** an additional opportunity for the applicant to present new information. It should only serve to identify any error by the Evaluation Panel that may have occurred during the evaluation and that is addressed by the applicant in their claim. Any identified error should be corrected and, depending on its nature, the score of the respective evaluation criterion may be changed accordingly or remain the same.

The evaluation process will only be completed upon the final decision that follows the preliminary hearings period.

V.

Feedback to Applicants

The **quality of the comments** to be transmitted to the applicants is of **paramount importance** and highly relevant to the process. Therefore, the preparation of these comments is a major task of the Evaluation Panel.

All Panel Members should comply with the following additional guidelines in the elaboration of the Panel (final) reports.

Comments must:

- Be coherent with the marks and scoring descriptors (Chapter III).
- Be clear and consistent (please check for any contradicting statements).
- Include strengths and weaknesses of the application for each evaluation criterion.
- Use dispassionate and analytical language.
- Avoid dismissive statements about the applicant, the proposed science, or the concerned scientific field.
- Be polite.
- Address the submitted work plan and not the work Panel Members may consider that should have been proposed.

What should be avoided:

- Description or a summary of the application.
- The use of the first person or equivalent (*e.g.*, “I think...”, “This reviewer finds...”). Instead, use expressions such as “The panel...”.
- Recommendations or advice for improving the application.
- Comments not related to the criterion under evaluation.
- Comments that are too short or too long or use inappropriate or vague language.
- Categorical statements that have not been properly verified.
- Scores that do not match the comments.
- Marking down a proposal for the same critical aspect under two different criteria.

APPENDIX I – COMPONENTS OF THE APPLICATION

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR INFORMATION

Principal Investigator

Information imported from CIENCIA ID (Name, Email, Gender, Nationality, ID, ORCID)

The PI must fill in the date of PhD conclusion and attach the document that proves the doctor's degree.

PI most relevant works

Description of PI research, academic and professional experience, preferably in the last 5 effective years of scientific activity, aiming to demonstrate your competence for the proposed project. (max. 2.000 characters)

CIENCIA VITAE

Permission for FCT to access CIENCIA VITAE of the candidate

Upload of CIENCIA VITAE CV in PDF

INSTITUTIONS

Host Institution

The host institution is the beneficiary entity that leads the project and that dialogues with FCT on behalf of all partners. In approved projects, the host institution will receive all the payments, having to transfer the corresponding values to the partner institutions.

Institution name and description of the Institution (max. 2.000 characters), which must contain the competences for the development of the project.

Partner institutions

Identification of all partner institutions, as well as their description and respective competences for the development of the project. Letters of support from partner institutions may also be attached. (max. 4.000 characters)

RESEARCH PLAN

General description

Title

Acronym (optional)

Abstract (max. 2.000 characters)

Keywords (max. 5)

Project duration (months)

Project presentation (max. 10 slides)

Main scientific area (Scientific domain / Scientific area / Scientific sub-area)

Goals and state of the art

Goals and state of the art (max. 2000 characters)

Work plan

Methodology and work plan (max. 5000 characters). Description of the proposed research plan, tasks and methodologies to be used. It should also present a list of milestones. For each milestone, you must indicate the date on which you expect to reach a certain objective or if you expect to complete a phase or obtain a result. Milestone dates must be marked on the schedule.

Bibliographic references (max. 2000 characters)

Human and technical resources

Human and technical resources (max. 4000 characters). Justification of the framework and competences of the research team and its coherence for the proposed work plan. In addition, it must describe and justify the technical resources necessary to achieve the expected results of the project.

Results

Expected outcomes (max. 2000 characters)

Promotion and dissemination of results (max. 2000 characters)

Management structure

Description of the management structure (max. 2500 characters)

Timeline

FUNDING

Budget

Justification of the requested budget (max. 3000 characters)

Unsolicited funds

Origin of remaining unsolicited funds (max. 2000 characters)

Economic sustainability

Long-term economic sustainability of the project (max. 2000 characters)



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