

SUSTAINABLE ENERGY IRELAND

Research, Development & Demonstration Programme

EVALUATION MANUAL



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1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this manual is to define the process by which Research, Development & Demonstration (RD&D) proposal applications submitted to Sustainable Energy Ireland ("the Authority") in response to competitive Calls for Proposals will be evaluated.

The intent of the evaluation process is to ensure that, insofar as is reasonably possible, the proposals selected for funding are those that best meet the objectives of the programme and represent good value for money. The process itself has been designed to be fair, transparent and rigorous.

2 EVALUATION PROCESS

Fig. 1 on the following page provides an overview of the evaluation process via a process flow diagram.

All proposals, which pass administration compliance, will progress to Stage 2 of the evaluation process, where they will firstly be subject to a selection check. Proposals, which pass this selection check, will progress to Stage 3 and undergo a detailed technical evaluation. This will be performed via a parallel review, and will require the relevant subject matter experts to complete appropriate technical annexes.

Although the parallel review of proposals requesting support of less than €100,000 (excl. VAT), will generally involve internal evaluators, external experts may be called upon at the discretion of the Authority. For all proposals requesting support of €100,000 (excl. VAT) or more, the involvement of external evaluators in the parallel review is mandatory.

Customer Services is responsible for completing Stage 1 of the evaluation (grey area in Fig. 1), and the relevant Programme Manager¹ is responsible for coordinating and completing Stage 2 & 3 of the process.

Each evaluator will then receive appropriate documents from the following list, according to the particular stage in the process:

- A copy of the Proposal Application form;
- The relevant Information Pack containing;
 - General information and conditions
 - The Call for Proposals
 - The Programme Strategy
- This Proposal Evaluation Manual, the Proposal Evaluation form and the relevant technical annex.

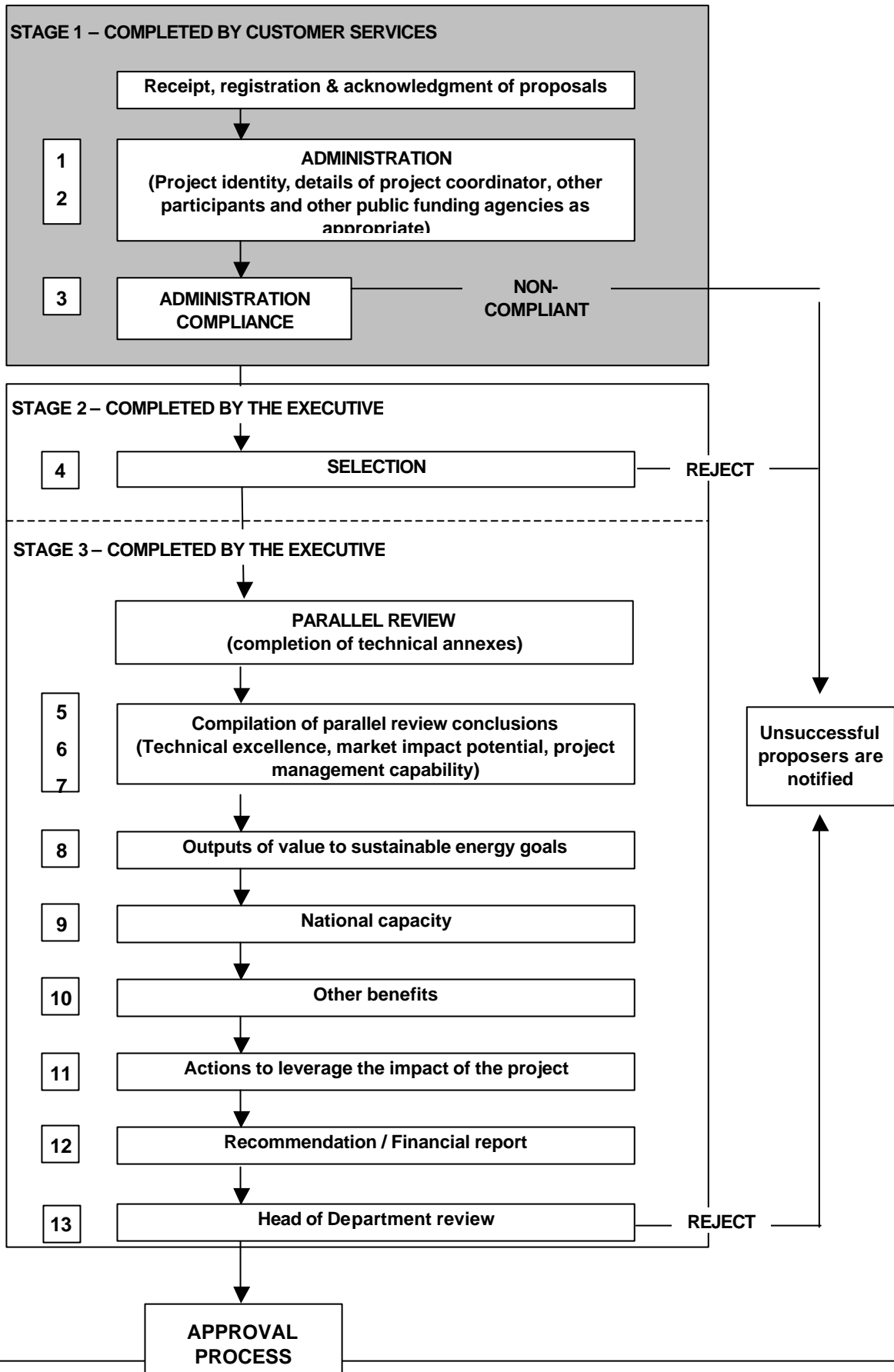
Evaluators are asked to read these documents to help them understand the context in which they are being asked to carry out the evaluation.

Following evaluation, each proposal will follow one of three routes to approval depending upon the level of support requested; further details are given in Section 3.

¹ Programme Manager or appropriate delegated person.

Fig. 1

EVALUATION PROCESS FLOW CHART



STAGE 1: ADMINISTRATION – TO BE COMPLETED BY CUSTOMER SERVICES

Please note, in the following process description a reference is made to the corresponding section in the evaluation form as appropriate.

Receipt, registration & acknowledgement of proposals

Upon receipt of a proposal Customer Services send an acknowledgment letter to the project co-ordinator, advising him/her of the unique reference number and the project contact for their proposal. The master (hard) copy of the Proposal Application form is retained in Customer Services.

Administration (Section 1 & 2)

Customer Services are responsible for completing the following sections of the RD&D Proposal Evaluation form:

- Section 1: Project Identity;
- Section 2: Details of Project Co-ordinator.

Administration compliance (Section 3)

Customer Services are also responsible for ensuring the proposal application complies with the Authority's administration requirements. Proposals will fail administration compliance if:

- There is a significant non-observance of the conditions in the Call (either as specified in the Call itself or in any supplementary documents to which it may refer);
- If the Proposal Application form is not completed and signed correctly;
- If there is insufficient budget in the programme to support the project

Proposal applications, which **pass** administration compliance, proceed to the second stage of the evaluation process.

Proposal applications, which **fail** administration compliance, are reviewed with the Head of Customer Services, subsequently a letter of rejection is written and proposers are notified of their non-compliance with the programme.

STAGE 2: SELECTION – TO BE COMPLETED BY THE EXECUTIVE

Selection (Section 4)

The Programme Manager conducts a selection process check in order to assess the overall eligibility and technical quality of a proposal.

Proposals are considered ineligible if they fail any of the eligibility criteria listed in Appendix A of the proposal evaluation form.

The technical quality of the proposal is assessed by rating proposals against the following selection criterion:

1. Relevance to and alignment with the appropriate SEI programme strategy;
2. General overview of the quality of the proposal's composition;
3. Capacity / credibility of the proposer (organisation) and/or any subcontractors/partners, with the proposed project.

Proposals are rated on a scale of 1 to 10, and must score 5 or above on each of the criterion to warrant proceeding to the external parallel review phase of the evaluation process.

Proposals, which fail any of these criterion are forwarded to the relevant Head of Department, to endorse the reason for rejection.

Should the Head of Department endorse either criterion (1) or (2) as the reason for rejection, the proposer is usually notified immediately of their failure to meet the standards of the selection process, however, it may be appropriate for the Programme Manager to discuss with the proposer how they may improve the quality of their application. In the case where the Head of Department disagrees with the Programme Manager's assessment, the evaluation of the proposal resumes and the proposal proceeds to the parallel review stage of the evaluation process.

Proposals failing on criteria (3) only will be submitted to the Advisory Committee for consideration.

- In the case where the Advisory Committee **agrees** with the Executive's assessment, proposers will be notified of their failure to meet the standards of the technical qualifier assessment.
- In the case where the Advisory Committee **disagrees** with the Executive's assessment, the evaluation of the proposal resumes and the proposal proceeds to the parallel review stage of the evaluation process.

STAGE 3: TECHNICAL EVALUATION – TO BE COMPLETED BY THE EXECUTIVE

Parallel review (Technical annex, sections 5, 6 & 7)

A parallel review has been included as part of the evaluation process, as it enables the Programme Manager to incorporate the impartial views and comments of one or more evaluators with relevant expertise, and therefore ensures a consistent high quality standard of appraisal. The **parallel review** will consider, the technical excellence, market impact potential and project management capability of a proposal, and **must be performed** on all proposals that pass Stage 1 & 2 of the evaluation process.

Although the parallel review of proposals requesting support of less than €100,000 (excl. VAT), will generally involve internal evaluators, external experts may be called upon at the discretion of the Authority.

For all proposals requesting support of €100,000 (excl. VAT) or more, the involvement of external evaluators in the parallel review is mandatory. As far as practicable these external evaluators will be selected from a predetermined panel of experts. Depending upon the content of the proposals more than one external expert may be required.

Evaluators will be required to declare areas where they are likely to encounter a conflict of interest. In addition, external evaluators will be required to sign a standard confidentiality agreement with respect to the content of the proposals given to them for evaluation, in order to ensure alignment/compliance with the Authority's policy in respect to confidentiality.

The relevant Programme Manager is responsible for co-ordinating the parallel review. Firstly, the Programme Manager selects one or more appropriate parallel evaluators; this decision is largely driven by the industry focus of the proposal. He/she then needs to select the correct technical annex. There are four possible technical annexes, one for each category of proposal; details are given in the Table 1.

RE RD&D Annex Cat 1	Demonstration	RE RD&D Annex Cat 3	Public Good R&D
RE RD&D Annex Cat 2	Shared Cost R&D	RE RD&D Annex Cat 4	Public Good Activities

The technical annex requires each of the parallel evaluators to complete a detailed review, involving a comprehensive score weighting system. The evaluators are invited to consider both the proposal's relevance to the RD&D programme objectives via the technical excellence and market impact potential criterion, and the project management capability of the project team.

Technical excellence (Section 5)

This section is designed to assess the technical excellence and level of innovation contained in the proposal. Please note that 5b in the technical annex is an essential criterion and that each proposal received is required to score a minimum of 9/20 to qualify for further review.

Market impact potential (Section 6)

Here the extent to which the proposal assists the achievement of a least cost path for CO₂ equivalent emissions reduction and sustainability is considered.

Project management capability (Section 7)

The purpose of this section is to ensure that the proposal has the appropriate level of project management, in terms of methodology, utilisation of resources and appropriateness of requested funding, required to complete the project and through doing so identify any risk associated with the project.

The parallel evaluators are asked to independently complete the relevant technical annex within an agreed timeframe, set by Customer Services. Once the completed technical annexes are returned to the Programme Manager, any queries or gaps in knowledge may then be fed back to the proposer and/or appropriate external source.

Compilation of parallel review conclusions

The relevant Programme Manager is responsible for compiling the view of the parallel evaluators and providing a summary/conclusion to each of the corresponding sections in the evaluation form. The conclusion from this exercise is then displayed pictorially in the *Parallel Evaluation Summary Matrix*.

Outputs of value to sustainable energy goals (Section 8)

In this section the Programme Manager is asked to consider how the tangible outputs from the proposed project could be used to promote the delivery of solutions which enable effective policies and standards to be applied, and technical and other barriers to be overcome.

National capacity (Section 9)

This element of the evaluation process is intended to turn the Programme Manager's attention towards Ireland's capacity to access, develop and apply international class R&D. He/she is therefore asked to indicate the extent he/she considers the proposal will help establish or strengthen the national R&D knowledge pool on a continuing basis.

Other benefits (Section 10)

This section is included to provide the Programme Manager with the opportunity to explore the potential of the proposal to contribute to an additional national benefit, impact upon economy wide measures or further contribute to broader sustainable goals.

Actions to leverage the impact of the project (section 11)

This the final section of the evaluation analysis is designed to encourage the Programme Manager to consider other actions which could be taken by or on behalf of the Authority to maximise the value of the project.

Recommendation (Section 12)

Upon completion of the evaluation process the Programme Manager is asked to reflect on the combined assessments in the previous sections and provide a recommendation for the proposal including a suggested level of support. In the case where the recommended level is less than the requested amount a reasoned justification must be provided.

- In the case where the a proposal is **not recommended** for support, the Programme Manager is required to complete the recommendations box by selecting the appropriate reason(s) for rejection from the list provided in Annex 1 of the evaluation form, and provide an explanation as to why the proposal has been unsuccessful.
- Proposals **recommended** for funding are supported by appropriate rationale in the recommendations box.

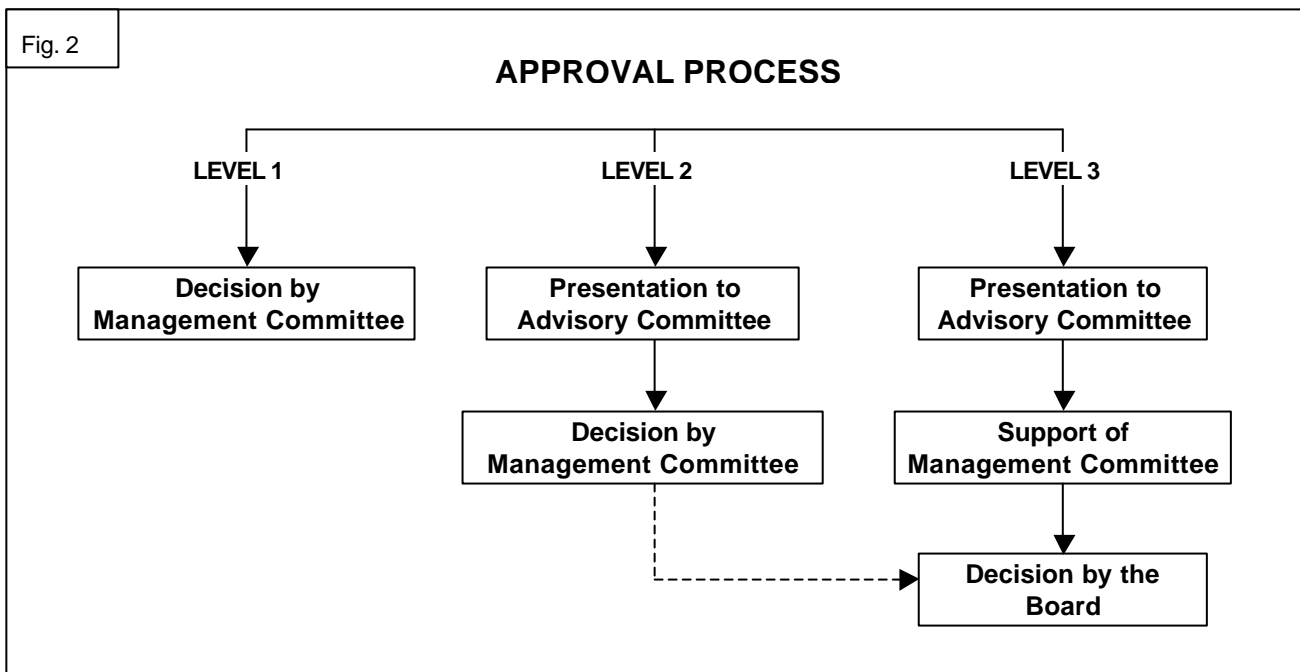
Head of Department review (Section 13)

Finally, all proposals are forwarded to the relevant Head of Department for consideration and endorsement, ahead of returning the completed form to Customer Services.

- In the case where the a proposal is **not recommended** for support, Customer Services copy the information provided by the Programme Manager in recommendations box and paste it into the otherwise standard letter of regret, which is then issued to the proposer.
- Proposals **recommended** for funding are then prepared for circulation to the Advisory Committee or Management Committee as appropriate.

3 APPROVAL PROCESS

Depending on the level of support recommended the proposal then follows one the approval process routes detailed in Fig. 2 below.



LEVEL 1: Proposals requiring the approval of less than €100,000 (excl. VAT)

The Management Committee takes the decision on such proposals. However, the Advisory Committee will have sight of all applications, where it is considered prudent and/or where there is particular merit in receiving their advice below this level.

LEVEL 2: Proposals requiring approval of €100,000 (excl. VAT) or more and below €500,000 (excl. VAT)

The Programme Manager presents his/her evaluation of the proposals recommended for funding each month at the Advisory Committee meeting. It is the responsibility of the Committee Secretary to record the advice and comment given by the Advisory Committee on the evaluation form. The Committee Secretary drafts minutes from the meeting and circulates them to:

- (i) The Advisory Committee for Approval
- (ii) The Programme managers for appropriate action, i.e. clarification, queries etc.

Contract letters are then drafted for recommended proposals, which do not require any further clarification. The contract letters consider both the recommendation from the evaluator and the advice and comments of the Advisory Committee. Finally, the relevant Head of Department presents the draft contract letters to the Management Committee for approval.

In the case where a proposal is recommended pending further clarification, all the outstanding issues must be clarified before the draft contract letters and be written and presented to the Management Committee.

Should the Executive wish to act contrary to the advice of the Advisory Committee, the Board must be notified, and a period of 21 days must elapse before the Executive may act. Should the Board respond within 21 days, the decision will be taken by Board in accordance with its procedures.

LEVEL 3: Proposals requiring funding €500,000 (excl. VAT) or more

The Board is to be consulted on all projects involving significant policy or financial risk. While there are no limits in these respects projects involving disbursements of €500,000 or more will automatically be presented to the Board.

The Authority reserves the right to attach conditions to any approved proposal at all levels of approval.

4 POST APPROVALS PROCESS

In all cases the proposal is returned to Customer Services and written notification is sent to the proposer as soon as a decision has been reached.

Notify proposers

After a final decision on a proposal has been taken the Authority is required to notify the proposer of the results. A proposer will normally receive confirmation within 8 weeks following the end of the month of receipt of that proposal. However, if a decision cannot be made within 8 weeks the proposer will be notified and given a revised estimation of the decision date.

Contract negotiation

Support in the form of grants will be awarded subject to the terms and conditions of a contract between Sustainable Energy Ireland and the applicant organisation(s).

The contract for funding of all research, development and demonstration projects will be performance based. All contracts will be based on the elements of the application approved for support, agreed delivery milestones and linked payment phases.