

MI2 JU INDEPENDENT OBSERVER'S REPORT

Call ID: H2020-JTI-IMI2-2018-14-two-stage

IMI2 JU 14th Call for Proposals

Stage 2 Evaluation

Date of evaluation: 15-16 January 2019

Number of pages in this report (title page included): 5

Charlotte Andersdotter

Present at the evaluation: Tuesday 15 to Wednesday 16 January 2019

1. Introduction and approach taken by the observer

This report describes the Independent Observer’s assessment of Stage 2 evaluation process of the following call:

Call for Proposals: H2020-JTI-IMI2-2018-14-two stage-stage 2

Published: 15 March 2018

Deadline: 11 December 2018

Budget: From EFPIA companies and IMI2 Associated Partners: EUR 84 920 360

From IMI2 JU: EUR 82 357 000

This call covers the following topics:

Topic
Topic 1: Targeted immune intervention for the management of non-response and relapse
Topic 2: Non-invasive clinical molecular imaging of immune cells
Topic 3: Development of a platform for federated and privacy-preserving machine learning in support of drug discovery
Topic 4: Centre of excellence – remote decentralised clinical trials

For Stage 2, each of the first-ranked short proposals from Stage 1, was evaluated.

The four proposals were all eligible.

This report analyses the efficiency of the procedures, the usability of the IT tool, System for Evaluation of Proposals (SEP), conduct and fairness of the evaluation sessions and compliance with the applicable rules.

The objective of this report is to give an independent view and, if necessary, advice for improving the evaluation processes for IMI2 funding.

The IMI2 JU evaluation procedure is organised in two-stages; where in the second stage only the first ranked proposal per topic from Stage 1 is invited to submit a full proposal. The full proposals are evaluated remotely by independent experts and discussed jointly on-site in Brussels to prepare the Consensus Reports.

1.2 Methodology

This report includes observations done during the on-site evaluation in Brussels between 15-16 January 2019.

The Observer had participated in the Stage 1 evaluation 3-6 July 2018, and was thus familiar with the IMI evaluation process. The Observer received soon after the deadline, on 17 December 2018 the link to the full proposals submitted. The deadline to finalise the individual evaluation was on 9 January and the Observer had shortly after access to all draft reports.

At site, prior to the start of the consensus meetings, all relevant information and supporting documents including copies of all proposals and draft consensus reports were provided to the Observer, both printed and on a USB key.

The preparations and support given to the Observer was very well organised and most helpful to carry out the tasks.

The objective was to gather as much input as possible from different sources to get a holistic view of the evaluation process.

Views and observations were gathered through participation in the two general briefings done by the Executive Director and the Head of Scientific Operations on 15 and 16 January, in consensus meetings, and through informal discussions with the independent experts, moderators and the Head of Scientific Operations.

2. Overall impression

2.1 Efficiency, reliability, transparency and usability of the implementation of the procedures

The evaluation of IMI2 Call 14 follows a standard procedure for IMI2 two-stage call and the evaluation was run in full coherence with the guiding principles outlined in the documentation. The procedures were very well executed given the complexity of the process.

The evaluation procedure was fully transparent and conformed to the rules established for IMI 2. The proposals were reviewed by five to seven Independent Experts. All experts were registered in the European Commission central database and selected based on their expertise matching the topics with as fair as possible balance in terms of gender, nationality, public and private sector and previous experience as evaluator. Each panel included a majority of experts already involved in Stage 1 evaluations and new experts which provided a very good balance between consistency and valuable new inputs to ensure a high-quality review of each proposal.

The level of expertise of each expert was very high and represented a relevant mix of knowledge and experiences fully in line with each topic. The balance between experts in the four panels in terms of gender and geographical coverage was considered satisfactory.

The issue with potential conflict of interest amongst the experts was clearly explained prior to the start of evaluations and was properly underlined by the IMI team in the briefing introducing the consensus phase. The invited experts had to declare any potential conflict of interest. No conflict of interest was signaled.

Two general briefings, which were delivered on each morning clearly explained the evaluation procedures and experts were invited to ask questions during the briefing to secure full transparency and clarity of the evaluation.

The IMI2 JU staff answered questions around the process in a very open and professional way, which removed any potential uncertainties and consequently the evaluation process was perceived as highly transparent.

The time given to finalise the Individual Evaluation Reports (IERs) and draft the Consensus Report (CR) was considered as sufficient. One expert per panel was appointed as rapporteur to prepare a draft consensus report prior to the meeting.

The second stage evaluation included a hearing with consortium members. Before the hearing, the panel prepared a number of questions to be clarified during the meeting with the consortium. No additional information was allowed to be introduced beyond that which served to clarify points that were already in the proposal. The hearings were all well performed and fully in line with the guidelines. The hearing was perceived as an extremely valuable part of the evaluation process to be able to finalise the consensus scores. Experts also felt that the hearings reassured that the consortium can deliver what they have expressed in the proposal.

The time set for the consensus meetings including the hearings, was considered sufficient.

To ensure a high quality and efficient consensus meeting, it is important that the moderators keep focus on the key questions where there are disagreements or ambiguities while letting all experts have their say. A well-prepared draft consensus report ahead of the meeting is also important to allow for an efficient process.

In each of the four panels, the moderators showed a high level of professionalism and a very good capacity in bringing out the essential issues to discuss, while letting all experts come to speak and reach an agreement in due time.

Although the time constraint to come to Brussels for a meeting is challenging, the experts expressed that on-site consensus meetings are important, as the discussions between the experts are key to assure a high-quality outcome.

The individual assessments and the consensus reports were completed within the planned timeline and no major delays were encountered.

2. 2 Impartiality, fairness and confidentiality

To ensure fairness and a balanced view, each of the proposals was evaluated by at least five different experts. The experts had been clearly instructed to assess each proposal on its own merit and only on what has been written in the proposal to ensure that each proposal is treated equally.

The experts noted that they had a very good preparation and on-site introduction with enough background information to perform the evaluation and consensus phase. The documentation provided to the experts was seen as adequate and of high quality.

The preparation of the evaluation was well organised and in due time before the remote individual evaluation and central consensus meeting.

2.3 Quality of the IMI evaluation process in comparison with the evaluation procedures of national and/or other international research funding schemes

Compared to similar experiences with national evaluation procedures, the IMI2 evaluation process is of high quality and very professionally run with an important eye on details. Considering the complexity of multinational research and innovation programmes, the level of transparency and confidentiality is high with procedures in place to secure that the best proposal gets through.

2.4 Quality of the evaluation process overall

The overall quality of IMI2 evaluation process is very well organised, fully respecting the rules on transparency and equality in treatment of each individual proposal and respecting the planned time schedule. All experts considered the IMI2 JU Staff as highly competent, available and ready to support when needed. The staff welcomed all suggestions on how to improve the evaluation procedures.

3. Any other remarks

The Observer has the following additional remarks, not already mentioned:

- All panels ran smoothly with a high level of integrity, openness and exchange of views between the experts. Although there was only one proposal per topic, each proposal was reviewed in a critical manner to ensure that the proposal was of highest quality.
- Thanks to the professional and well organised IMI2 JU evaluation team, the overall work atmosphere was very pleasant and with a good team spirit.
- The infrastructures and working conditions for evaluators were very good.

4. Summary of Recommendations

The IMI2 JU Call 14 evaluation was very well performed and fully in line with the guidelines and requirements to ensure a fair and transparent process. The IMI2 evaluation team was very much appreciated by the experts due to their professionalism, knowledge and overall well organised evaluation.

A few suggestions from the experts came up to consider for the future.

- It would be helpful for the experts if there was more clarity in the differences between Stage 1 and Stage 2 proposals in terms of content. In some cases, the experts found it difficult to capture what had been further elaborated and/or changed since the Stage 1 proposal.
- At the hearing, the questions prepared in advance to be put to the Consortia were checked with the legal team to ensure that these questions, in accordance with IMI rules, sought only clarification on existing points in the proposal and did not introduce new elements and/or requirements for discussion. Experts found it useful if they were additionally briefed by the IMI 2 JU team on what kind of additional questions they could ask at the hearing, besides the ones already prepared. A suggestion is to bring this up at the general briefing so that experts feel comfortable with what possible follow-up question to ask.

5. Acknowledgements

Many thanks to all the Independent Experts and IMI2 JU staff to share experiences, thoughts and being supportive during the evaluation.