

CREATIVE EUROPE – MEDIA Sub-programme

GUIDE FOR EXPERTS

**ON ASSESSMENT OF DEVELOPMENT OF EUROPEAN VIDEO
GAMES APPLICATIONS**

**managed by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive
Agency**

Unit B2 – MEDIA

1. INTRODUCTION

The European Commission's Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (hereafter 'the Agency') is responsible for the implementation of the actions of the Creative Europe Programme¹ under the supervision of the European Commission. The Agency is in charge of the selection of projects to be funded.

The Agency runs these selections with the assistance of independent experts. The aim is to ensure that only proposals² of the highest quality are selected for funding. The experts hired by the Agency have an advisory role; the final decision on the selection or rejection of applications remains with the Agency. For each selection round, the Agency appoints an Evaluation Committee whose role it is to give an advisory opinion to the authorising officer in view of taking the financing decision on the award of grants based on the quality assessments. The Committee is composed of representatives of the Executive Agency and the European Commission.

This Guide is a tool for experts providing instructions and guidance in order to ensure a standardised and high quality assessment of applications.

The Guide for Experts provides information on:

- the role and appointment of experts;
- the principles of the assessment;
- the assessment process in practice;
- how to assess the award criteria for each action and field.

2. THE MEDIA SUB-PROGRAMME: THE DEVELOPMENT OF EUROPEAN VIDEO GAMES SCHEME

The general objectives of the MEDIA Sub-programme of Creative Europe are to strengthen the competitiveness of the audiovisual industry in Europe and thus contribute to growth and jobs as well as to safeguard and promote cultural and linguistic diversity.

The specific objectives include the aim to support the capacity of the European cultural and creative sectors to operate transnationally and internationally; and to promote the transnational circulation of cultural and creative works and transnational mobility of cultural and creative players, in particular artists, as well as to reach new and enlarged audiences and improve access to culture and creative works in the Union and beyond, with a particular focus on children, young people, people with disabilities and under-represented groups.

Within the specific objective of reinforcing the European audiovisual sector's capacity to operate transnationally and internationally, one of the priorities of the MEDIA Sub-programme is to increase the capacity of European video game producers to develop projects with highly innovative content and quality gameplay, which will have the potential to circulate throughout Europe and beyond and to improve the competitiveness of the European video games industry in European and international markets by enabling the retention of intellectual property by European developers.

¹ The Creative Europe Programme was established by Regulation (EU) No 1295/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 establishing the 'Creative Europe Programme (2014 to 2020)' and its corrigendum of 27/06/2014.

² Please note that the terms "proposal" and "application" are used interchangeably in this Guide.

The MEDIA Sub-programme shall provide support for the following measures:

- the concept and project development (activities to the point that the concept leads to a playable prototype or trial version) of highly innovative and creative narrative storytelling video games designed for commercial exploitation for PCs, consoles, mobile devices, tablets, smart phones and other technologies.

The aim is to provide funds to video game production companies to develop works with a high level of originality and innovative and creative value, that represent cultural diversity and Europe's cultural identity and heritage, and that have a high level of commercial ambition and extensive cross-border potential able to reach European and international markets.

3. EXPERTS

3.1 Role of experts

The assessment and selection of grant applications is organised on the basis of a peer review system following a transparent process that guarantees impartiality and equal treatment of all applicants.

The role of experts allows providing a fair, impartial, and consistent assessment of project applications according to the objectives and the policy priorities of the Programme.

The assessment is an essential part of the selection procedure. Based on the experts' assessment, their review by and the resulting recommendations of the Evaluation Committee, a list of grant applications in order of quality is established, which serves as a basis for the Agency to determine which proposals may be financed.

Based on the experts' comments, the Executive Agency provides feedback to the applicants on the quality of their application (cf. section 4).

3.2 Appointment of experts, code of conduct and conflict of interest

Experts are recruited through an open call for expression of interest³. They are appointed on the basis of their skills and knowledge in the areas and the specific fields of the audiovisual industry in which they are asked to assess applications. Experts perform assessments on a personal basis, not as representatives of their employer, their country or any other entity.

For the assessment of project applications, the Agency applies a system of rotation of experts.

To ensure their independence, the Agency does not disclose information or contact details of experts in relation with a given proposal they assess. The Agency however publishes a list of experts who signed contracts with it annually on its website⁴.

Experts are required to perform the assessment to the highest professional standards and within the deadline agreed with the Agency.

Through the appointment by the Agency, experts are bound to a code of conduct as set out in the appointment letter or contract with the expert. The code of conduct for experts can be found in Annex 2.

Experts are bound by confidentiality, as all information related to the assessment process is strictly confidential. They are not allowed to disclose any information about the applications submitted and results of the assessment and selection to anyone.

The assessment of applications will be undertaken by two independent experts, external to the Agency. Experts must not have a conflict of interest⁵ in relation to the proposals on which they are requested to give their opinion. When a potential conflict of interest is reported by the expert or brought to the attention of the Agency by any means, the Agency will consider the circumstances and decide either to exclude the expert from the assessment of the given application or the whole selection round or allow the expert to take part in the assessment, depending on the objective elements of information at its disposal.

By signing their contract with the Agency, experts are bound by the obligations of impartiality (absence of conflict of interest) and confidentiality.

4. ASSESSMENT OF APPLICATIONS

4.1 Preparation for assessment

Before the start of the assessment (remote evaluations off-site), the experts are briefed by the Agency on the Programme and the action under assessment, as well as on the assessment process.

³ The list resulting from this call for expression of interest is valid for the duration of the current generation of programmes managed by the Agency, i.e. until 31.12.2020 https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/about-eacea/working-expert/call-for-expressions-interest-n%C2%B0-eacea201301_en

⁴ https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/about-eacea/working-expert-eacea/call-for-expressions-interest-n%C2%B0-eacea201301_en

⁵ Financial Regulation Art. 61(3): « ... a conflict of interests exists where the impartial and objective exercise of the functions of a financial actor or other person, ..., is compromised for reasons involving family, emotional life, political or national affinity, economic interest or any other direct or indirect personal interest.»

Experts are provided with the reference documents for the assessment and get access to the Online Evaluation Expert Tool (OEET), in which they perform the assessment using the standard quality assessment forms.

Before starting the assessment of applications, experts must:

- have a sound knowledge of the Development of European Video Games Guidelines which provide all necessary information to potential applicants on the scheme for which they apply for a grant;
- have an in-depth understanding of the award criteria applicable to the applications under assessment (cf. Annex 1);
- be familiar with all the reference documents and tools provided by the Agency.

Experts have to read the whole application carefully before completing the quality assessment form. It is recommended to read several applications before assessing any one of them in full: this allows experts to benchmark answers in different sections of the applications.

Each expert works individually and independently, gives scores and comments for each criterion and summarises his/her assessment in the assessment form.

The eligibility criteria are assessed by the Agency in the first phase of the selection process. However, the experts may be asked to contribute on the evaluation of some of the eligibility criteria.

4.2 Assessment forms

Experts carry out their assessment in English, using the Online Expert Evaluation Tool. The applications to be assessed as well as the assessment forms are accessible through the Online Expert Evaluation Tool. Experts are provided with technical instructions for the use of Online Expert Evaluation Tool by the Agency as part of their briefing.

The standard assessment forms are established by the Agency to ensure a coherent evaluation of applications across the scheme. Experts examine the issues to be considered under each award criterion, enter their scores for each applicable criterion and provide comments on each award criterion and on the application as a whole.

On completion of the assessment, experts validate the individual assessment in the Online Expert Evaluation Tool, thereby confirming that they have no conflict of interest with respect to the assessment of that particular proposal.

4.3 Assessment of award criteria and scoring

Experts assess applications only against the award criteria defined in the Guidelines. These award criteria are listed and further explained in Annex 1 of this Guide.

Each of the award criteria is defined through elements which must be taken into account by experts when analysing an application. These elements form a list of points to be considered before giving a score for the given criterion. They are intended to help experts reach the final assessment of the criterion in question.

When assessing applications against award criteria, experts make a judgement on the extent to which applications meet the defined criteria. This judgement must be based on the information provided in the application. Experts cannot assume information that is not explicitly provided.

Information relevant for a specific award criterion may appear in different parts of the application and experts take all of them into account when scoring the award criterion.

An application can receive a maximum of 100 points for all criteria relevant for the action. The table below shows the relative weightings of each criterion:

	Criteria	Definitions	Max. Weighting
1	Quality of the content and activities	Quality of the content, the storytelling of the project and originality of the concept against existing works	30
2	Innovative character of the project	Innovation i.e. the extent to which the project pushes the boundaries of the existing offer proposing "cutting edge" techniques and content	20
3	Relevance and European added-value	The development strategy and potential for European/international exploitation (including management of IP rights)	20
4	Dissemination of project results	The distribution, communication and marketing strategy and suitability for the target audience including accessibility features	20
5	Impact and sustainability	The financing strategy for the development and production and the feasibility potential of the project	10

Within the maximum number of points per award criterion, ranges of scores are defined that correspond to a fixed definition of the expected quality standard so that as coherent an approach as possible is implemented, across experts as well as across schemes. The score cannot include decimals. The standards on a 10-point scale are as follows:

- 9-10 Very good – the application addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion in question convincingly and successfully. The answer provides all the information and evidence needed and there are no concerns or areas of weakness.
- 7-8 Good – the application addresses the criterion well, although some small improvements could be made. The answer gives clear information on all or nearly all of the evidence needed.
- 5-6 Acceptable – the application broadly addresses the criterion, but there are some weaknesses. The answer gives some relevant information, but there are areas where detail is lacking or the information is unclear.
- 3-4 Fair – the application addresses the criterion, but there are many weaknesses. The answer gives some relevant information, but there are several areas where detail is lacking or the information is unclear.
- 1-2 Very weak – the application fails to address the criterion or cannot be judged due to missing or incomplete information. The answer does not address the question asked, or gives very little relevant information.
- 0 No evidence – the application fails to include a minimum amount of evidence to enable the criterion to be evaluated.

N.B. Although indicated on the scoring scale, experts should avoid "0" which relates to "no evidence". If experts want to score a "0" to a given criterion, experts should notify the agency staff à priori.

Experts are expected to give comments on each award criterion highlighting its relative strengths and weaknesses and, in their comments, refer explicitly to the elements of analysis under the relevant criterion. The comments on each award criterion have to reflect and justify the score given for it.

As their comments will be used by the Agency to provide feedback to applicants, experts must pay particular attention to clarity, consistency and appropriate level of detail. All evaluation reports are to be written in English.

The Agency monitors the quality of expert assessments and can require the expert to revise the assessment should the necessary quality standard not be met.

Experts must assess all applications in full, regardless of the score given to any award criterion.

4.4 Possible problems with applications

Experts are under no circumstances allowed to contact applicants directly. In case of any problems arising during the assessment, experts contact the Agency. The Agency decides whether the applicant will be asked to provide additional information or clarifications or if the application should be assessed in the form it was submitted.

Also, if experts notice during the assessment that the same or similar text appears in two or more applications submitted, as well as any other indications of possible double submissions and overlaps, they should inform the Agency immediately.

4.5 Consolidated assessment and final score

At the first stage of assessments, the role of expert 1 and expert 2 are identical. Both experts do their assessment individually and submit the evaluation through the Online Expert Evaluation Tool.

Once an application has been assessed by the two experts, the two individual assessments will be consolidated in order to arrive at the final score and comments for the application. The consolidation is an integral part of the tasks of the expert and must be done for each application.

After the submission of the two individual assessments, the Agency will open the consolidation phase in the Online Expert Evaluation Tool. The expert 1 at individual evaluation stage will generally act as validator of the consolidated evaluation report. The consolidation takes the form of a consultation between the two individual experts and a consolidation of the report in the Online Expert Evaluation Tool.

If the two experts' positions are too distant for an agreement to be reached, the Agency will decide on the need of an independent assessment by a third expert. The final score will then be determined by the two assessments that are closest in terms of their overall score, whilst relevant elements of the most extreme assessment in terms of overall score will be taken into account for the consolidated assessment.

All consolidated assessments will be reviewed by the Evaluation Committee.

5. Feedback to applicants

The Agency notifies the applicants in writing of the selection result once the grant award decision is taken, providing the relevant information on the assessment scores and comments.

In case of a request for further information or appeal by an applicant, the Agency may request the experts involved in the assessment to provide additional elements of information on the assessment as necessary.

Annexes:

1. Award criteria for Development of European Video Games
2. Code of conduct for experts

AWARD CRITERIA	Definition and elements for analysis	Max. weighting
Quality and content activities	1. Quality of the content, the storytelling of the project and originality of the concept against existing works	30 points
	1a) Quality of the story and storytelling and originality of the concept	10
	1b) Quality of the content <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • quality of the graphic and sound design (if available) • quality of the level and character design (if available) • visual approach (as shown through e.g. artwork, mock-ups, sketches, mood boards, etc.) 	10
	1c) Quality and originality of the gameplay and integration between gameplay and storytelling	10
Innovative character of the project	2. Innovation i.e. the extent to which the project pushes the boundaries of the existing offer proposing "cutting edge" techniques and content	20 points
	2a) Innovative techniques <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • innovative aspects in terms of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gameplay • use of new technologies or new platforms • Graphical User Interface • Head-up Display (or HUD) 	10
	2b) Innovative content <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • innovative aspects in terms of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • storytelling • visual/graphic approach • musical/sound approach 	10
Relevance and European added-value	3. The development strategy and potential for European/international exploitation (including management of IP rights)	20 points
	3a) The development strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • adequacy of the development plan to the needs of the project • sufficiency of detail • adequacy of development schedule planned 	10

	<p>3b) Potential for European/international exploitation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • transnational appeal taking into account • the subject • the type of game • potential to cross borders taking into account • the team • the story and characters • the strategies presented 	10
Dissemination of project results	4. The distribution, communication and marketing strategy and suitability for the target audience including accessibility features	20 points
	<p>4a) The distribution strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • relevance of the distribution strategy in terms of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • distribution methods foreseen, • choice of platform/media • partners in place or envisaged • awareness of the markets, European/international vision • choice of territories (local, European, international) 	10
	<p>4b) The communication and marketing strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • relevance of the marketing strategy in terms of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • marketing channels and promotional activities • adequacy of the communication and marketing plan • unique selling points (USP) 	5
	<p>4c) Suitability for the target audience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identified target audience taking into account <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gender • age • game rating (PEGI or equivalent) • type of users and platforms • project adapted to the target audience • project encouraging accessibility for gamers with disabilities and other impairments 	5

Impact and sustainability	5. The financing strategy for the development and production and the feasibility of the project	10 points
	5a) The financing strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • quality and realism of the financing strategy / plan • adequacy of the financing strategy compared to the estimated production costs • awareness of the suitable potential partners • experience or ability of the applicant to secure the necessary co-financing 	5
	6b) Feasibility potential of the project <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • likelihood to succeed due to artistic qualities • potential to attract distributor(s) / publisher(s) • potential to go into production • sales potential and revenue streams 	5

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR EXPERTS

1. PERFORMING THE WORK

1.1. The expert must work independently, in a personal capacity and not on behalf of any organisation.

1.2. The experts must:

- (a) evaluate each proposal in a confidential and fair way, in accordance with the applicable rules;
- (b) perform his/her work to the best of his/her abilities, professional skills, knowledge and applying the highest ethical and moral standards;
- (c) follow the instructions and time-schedule given by the Agency.

1.3. The expert may not delegate the work to another person or be replaced by another person.

1.4. If a person or entity involved in a proposal(s) approaches the expert before or during the evaluation, s/he must immediately inform the Agency.

2. IMPARTIALITY

2.1. The expert must perform his/her work **impartially** and take all measures to prevent any situation where the impartial and objective implementation of the work is compromised for reasons involving economic interest, political or national affinity, family or emotional ties or any other shared interest ('**conflict of interests**').

The following situation will **automatically** be considered as **conflict of interest**:

(a) **for a proposal(s) s/he is requested to evaluate**, if s/he:

- (i) was involved in the preparation of the proposal(s);
- (ii) is a director, trustee or partner or is in any way involved in the management of an applicant (or linked third party or other third party involved in the action);
- (iii) is employed or contracted by one of the applicants (or linked third parties, named subcontractors or other third parties involved in the action).

In this case, the expert must be excluded from the evaluation of the proposal(s) concerned (and may not take part in the consensus group, panel review or hearings when the proposal(s) is being discussed). Part(s) of an evaluation to which the expert already participated must be declared void. Comments and scores already given must be discounted. If necessary, the expert must be replaced and the proposal(s) concerned must be re-evaluated.

However, in exceptional and duly justified cases, the responsible Agency staff may decide to nevertheless invite the expert to take part in the panel meeting, if:

- the expert works in a different department/laboratory/institute from the one where the action is to be carried out and
- the departments/laboratories/institutes within the organisation concerned operate with a high degree of autonomy and

- the participation is justified by the requirements to appoint the best available experts and by the limited size of the pool of qualified experts.

In this case, the other experts in the group of evaluators will be informed about the situation of the expert.

(b) for a proposal(s) s/he is requested to evaluate AND for all proposal(s) competing for the same call budget-split, if s/he:

- (i) was involved in the preparation of any proposal(s) submitted to the same topic/other topic within the same call budget-split;
- (ii) would benefit if any proposal(s) submitted to the same topic/other topic within the same call budget-split is accepted or rejected;
- (iii) has close family ties (spouse, domestic or non-domestic partner, child, sibling, parent etc.) or other close personal relationship with a person (including linked third parties or other third parties) involved in the preparation of any proposal(s) submitted to the same topic/other topic within the same call budget-split, or with a person which would benefit if such a proposal(s) is accepted or rejected.

In this case, the expert must be excluded from the evaluation of the proposal(s) concerned AND from all the proposal(s) competing for the same call budget-split. Part(s) of an evaluation to which the expert already participated must be declared void. Comments and scores already given must be discounted. If necessary, the expert must be replaced and the proposal(s) concerned must be re-evaluated.

(c) for ALL proposal(s) under the call in question, if s/he:

- (i) is a member of an advisory group set up by the Commission to advise on the preparation of EU or Euratom Horizon 2020 work programmes or work programmes in an area related to the call in question;
- (ii) is a National Contact Point (NCP) or is working for the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN);
- (iii) is a member of a programme committee.

In this case, the expert must be excluded from the evaluation of the call concerned. Part(s) of an evaluation to which the expert already participated must be declared void. Comments and scores already given must be discounted. If necessary, the expert must be replaced and the proposal(s) concerned must be re-evaluated.

The following situations **may be** considered as **conflict of interest** if the responsible Agency staff so decides, in view of the objective circumstances, the available information and the potential risks:

- (a) employment of the expert by one of the applicants (or linked third parties or other third parties involved in the action) in the last three years;
- (b) involvement of the expert in a contract, grant, prize or membership of management structures (e.g. member of management or advisory board etc.) or research collaboration with an applicant, a linked third party or another third party involved in the action in the last three years;
- (c) any other situation that could cast doubt on his/her ability to participate in the evaluation impartially, or that could reasonably appear to do so in the eyes of an outside third party.

In this case, the responsible Agency staff may decide to exclude the expert from the evaluation (and on the scope, i.e. only for the proposal(s) concerned or also for competing proposal(s) or the entire call) and, if necessary, to replace him/her and organise a re-evaluation.

2.2. The expert will be required to **confirm** – for each proposal(s) s/he is evaluating – that there is no conflict of interest, by signing a declaration in the Participant Portal electronic exchange system (see Article 21).

If the expert is (or becomes) aware of a conflict of interest, s/he must immediately **inform** the responsible Agency staff and stop working until further instructions.

2.3. If the expert breaches any of his/her obligations under Points 2.1 and 2.2, the Agency may apply the measures set out in Chapter 5, and in particular terminate the Contract (see Article 17).

3. CONFIDENTIALITY

3.1. During implementation of the Contract and for five years after the date of the last payment, the expert must keep confidential all data, documents or other material (in any form) that is disclosed (in writing or orally) and that concerns the work under the Contract (**'confidential information'**).

Unless otherwise agreed with the responsible Agency staff, s/he may use confidential information only to implement the Contract.

The expert must keep his/her work under the Contract strictly confidential, and in particular:

- (a) not disclose (directly or indirectly) any confidential information relating to proposal(s) or applicants without prior written approval by the Agency;
- (b) not discuss proposal(s) with others (including other experts or Agency staff that are not directly involved in the evaluation of the proposal(s)), except during evaluation meetings and with prior approval by the responsible Agency staff;
- (c) not disclose:
 - details on the evaluation process or its outcome, without prior written approval by the Agency;
 - detail on his/her position/advice;
 - the names of other experts participating in the evaluation.
- (d) not communicate with applicants (including linked third parties or other third parties involved in the actions) during the evaluation or afterwards – except in panel hearings.

If the Agency makes documents or information available electronically for remote work, the expert is responsible for ensuring adequate protection and for returning, erasing or destroying all confidential information after the end of the evaluation (if so instructed).

If the expert works on Agency premises, the expert:

- (a) may not remove from the premises any documents, material or information on the proposal(s) or on the evaluation;
- (b) is responsible for ensuring adequate protection of electronic documents and information and for returning, erasing or destroying all confidential information after the end of the evaluation (if so instructed).

If the expert uses outside sources (for example internet, specialised databases, third party expertise etc.) for his/her evaluation, s/he:

- (a) must respect the general rules for using such sources;
- (b) may not contact third parties, without prior written approval by the Agency.

The confidentiality obligations no longer apply if:

- the Agency agrees to release the expert from confidentiality obligations;
- the confidential information becomes public through other channels;
- disclosure of the confidential information is required by law.

3.2. If the expert breaches any of his/her obligations under Point 3.1, the Agency may apply the measures set out in Chapter 5.