

Factsheet for members of evaluation bodies

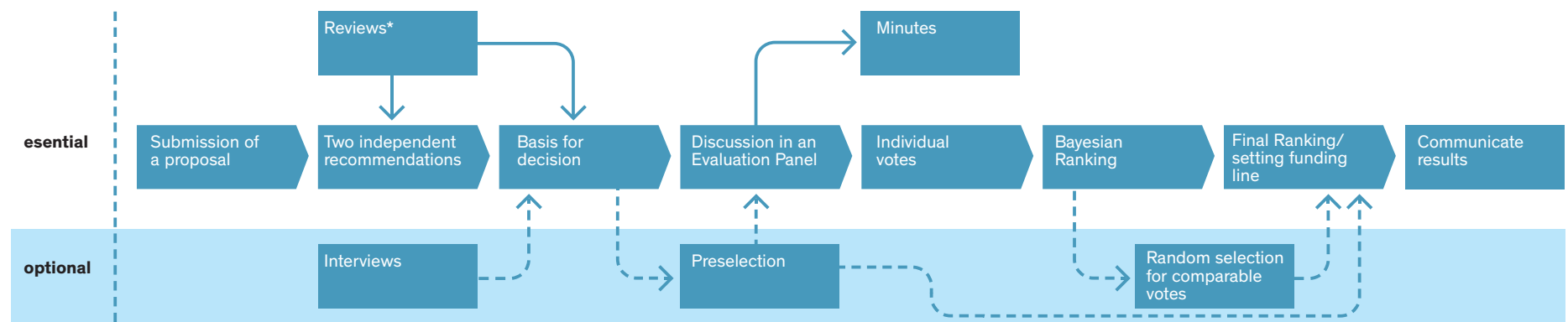
SNSF Unified Evaluation Procedure (UEP)



The objective of the UEP is to ensure quality, efficiency and interoperability of the evaluation procedures across funding schemes. With this new modular and flexible procedure, the SNSF is striving to ensure a very high standard of fairness and transparency.

The UEP covers all steps of the evaluation process, from the external reviews through to the final ranking of projects and the communication of funding decisions to applicants. Due to its modular and flexible form, the UEP can be applied in all funding schemes and evaluation panels at the SNSF.

SNSF Evaluation Procedure



* External reviews may be optional in some funding schemes.

A unified rating scale

One of the main elements of the UEP is the new rating scale that is used throughout the whole evaluation process. It provides clear guidance for external reviewers and members of evaluation panels on how to grade the proposals and allows for statistical procedures to be applied to generate a final ranking based on the grades.

Basis for decisions

Two written and independent recommendations from the referees provide the basis for an informed decision in the evaluation panels. If a preselection process is applied, two written and independent referee recommendations are required to determine which proposals will not be discussed in the evaluation meeting. Factsheets for each proposal, containing information on the applicants, the external reviews, the referee assessments, the budget, as well as other indicators (use-inspired, lead agency, etc.) ensure a fair discussion and informed decision on each proposal.

Individual voting

Every panel member electronically casts a vote after the discussion of the proposal. The panel members are free to choose a grade from the entire scale. During the casting, the individual votes are hidden. Only after all the members have submitted their votes, the results of the individual votes, including who voted for which grade, are displayed. This ensures a clear independent vote based on the recommendations of the referee and co-referee, as well as on the information displayed and discussed during the evaluation. If votes deviate three or more points from the recommendations made by the two referees (whichever is closest), and the arguments on which these votes are based are not evident, the panel chair may request that the relevant panel members justify their votes once the voting results have been fully disclosed.

Preselection

Preselection can be applied across funding instruments to reduce the workload associated with a large number of proposals. The Research Council Divisions or Specialised Committees decide whether they will apply the proposed shortened procedure according to the following minimal conditions:



Request for discussion The Office informs all evaluation panel members about which proposals enter the shortened procedure. A short synopsis of the two referee recommendations is added to the factsheet to ensure an informed decision of the panel members. Every member, as well as the Office, can request a discussion of a proposal.

Number of proposals It is recommended that evaluation panels discuss at least 50% of all proposals. Furthermore, the expected funding line should be roughly centred within the discussed proposals. The Research Council Divisions or Specialised Committees define and document how to identify these proposals.

Quality In general, the preselection process should be applied for uncompetitive proposals of low quality (preselection for rejection).

Bayesian ranking

Ranking proposals simply based on their average evaluation grades / votes can be problematic, as this ranking does not consider random variation and other sources of uncertainty that emerge in the evaluation and voting process. Some panel members might not vote on all proposals because of conflicts of interest, not every proposal may have the same number of votes, some panel members are reluctant to give high grades, while others are less severe in their judgement. The Bayesian Ranking (BR) method (Heyard et al. 2021; Lingsma, Eijkemans, and Steyerberg 2009) is based on a statistical model that is flexible enough to account for diverse settings in which the votes are cast and compares every proposal against every other proposal, correcting for random effects, to generate a comparative ranking.

Random selection

Random selection is applied when proposals cannot be clearly distinguished in the Bayesian Ranking, and if the funds are not sufficient to support the entire group of proposals with comparable ranks. Random selection groups are defined based on the BR method.

Setting funding lines

After the content-based evaluation (by the evaluation panel), the funding line is drawn in a separate step based on the final ranking of the proposals and the available financial resources. If the funding line falls within a group of proposals of similar scientific quality, a random selection is applied.

