

**Health
Research Call**

Code of conduct for evaluators



*A world
to discover*

Dendritic cells interacting with T cells to direct immune response. NCI.

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1. Introduction

This document sets out the general principles that experts should follow when evaluating proposals that are submitted for evaluation in the selection process or any post-award activity provided by "la Caixa" Foundation (LCF) within the framework of the Health Research program. These are, in general, common-sense principles widely practised by experts involved in selection processes.

Therefore, a Health Research collaborator is defined as anyone who participates in the evaluation, follow-up or advising of projects within the Health Research program. This includes, but is not restricted to, remote evaluators, panel evaluators, mentors, consultants, coaches and trainers.

These principles, which aim to guarantee the observance of requirements such as transparency and equal treatment of all applications and projects, are included in this document for the dual purpose of:

- » providing a formal list that can be used as a reminder by the evaluators; and
- » outlining the principles that govern the selection processes for the Health Research program which will be published and made available to all applicants.

This document also includes a third section that describes situations in which a potential conflict of interest may arise.

2. General principles of good governance

1. Collaborators must complete the tasks assigned, upholding confidentiality and examining each application or project fairly, impartially and equally, in accordance with the evaluation guidelines provided by the promoters and organisers of the program.
2. Collaborators carry out their tasks as independent observers. They do not represent any organisation, region, country, group or discipline.
3. If a collaborator has a direct or indirect interest in the application or project evaluated, or any personal or familial connection to the applicant or project leader, the Program Office must be notified immediately (see "Conflicts of interest").
4. Collaborators must not discuss the contents of an application with anyone, least of all with the applicant.
5. Evaluators who participate in the independent evaluation processes (e.g. the pre-selection of proposals) and who evaluate the same applications must not contact each other in relation to the applications examined.
6. Collaborators must not engage in any commercial activity with the applicants or project leaders (e.g. distributing business cards). Direct contact with the applicants or project leaders must be made through the Program Office or with its explicit consent and knowledge (e.g. by being copied into all email contact).

7. Similarly, evaluators must maintain the confidentiality of the process and avoid contact, in relation to the applications examined, with people who may have written letters of recommendation for the applicants being evaluated or with doctors or researchers supervising their theses or research projects.
8. Collaborators must not disclose the names of other participating experts or those who have participated in the committees, panels or expert advisory groups until the selection process has concluded and/or the names of the selected participants have been made public.
9. Collaborators should ensure the integrity and confidentiality of the documentation they access through online channels and ensure that it is not available to third parties who may, or may not, have an interest in the progress of the selection process.
10. The documentation provided is to be used exclusively for evaluating the applications or providing project guidance. Therefore, it must not be used for any other purpose.
11. Hard or electronic copies, notes and documents obtained by or submitted to the collaborator during the independent evaluation, participation on panels or project mentoring or consulting must be destroyed or returned to the program office once the process has concluded.
12. It is of the utmost importance that the deadlines established for the tasks assigned in each Call are met. Project development or subsequent phases of the selection process could be compromised if deadlines are not respected.
13. Compliance with commitments undertaken in relation to a Call is an exercise of respect and responsibility.
14. Collaborators should be extremely careful with their wording and respectful towards the proposals presented. Observations must always maintain a strictly professional tone and a constructive spirit.
15. The Program Office will contact collaborators who are to take part in the activities of the Health Research program well in advance. Acceptance to participate in the process implies that the Program Office has confirmed this position. From that moment on, should a collaborator renounce their participation, the management of the associated activities could be seriously hindered.
16. The use of AI tools by collaborators in the drafting of their findings is not permitted, except when used for translation or grammar correction purposes, provided that such tools do not jeopardise the confidentiality of the information. In all cases, the content of the report must be original and authored by the expert.

3. Conflicts of interest

A conflict of interest refers to the possibility of an unsuitable use or abuse (whether real, apparent, perceived or potential) of the trust that the general public, applicants, project members and the promoting and organising entities of the program place in the experts who participate in Health Research program activities.

A conflict of interest is a situation in which financial, personal or professional considerations could compromise or bias the neutrality, impartiality and objectivity of an individual whose position is likely to affect, directly or indirectly, the result of a selection process or project development.

Collaborators must immediately notify the Program Office should a possible conflict of interest arise during the performance of their duties. In particular, a conflict of interest must be reported if:

- » the collaborator has actively intervened in the preparation of the proposal;
- » the collaborator has a familial and/or a close personal or professional relationship with the Project Leader, any other team member and/or any advisor to the project;
- » the collaborator has actively intervened in the development of the project that is the subject of the proposal;
- » the collaborator has been recused by one of the applicants or has a clear friendship or enmity with any of the applicants;
- » the collaborator has had professional ties with the institution(s) presenting the proposal within the past three years;
- » the collaborator has been the PhD supervisor of the Project Leader or any other team member in the last ten years;
- » the collaborator has co-authored publications or collaborated on patents directly related to the proposal in the past five years;
- » the collaborator currently invests more than €10,000 in legal entities with interests in the field of the proposal;
- » the collaborator holds intellectual property rights that might be affected by the outcome of the work of the proposal;
- » within the past five years, the collaborator has provided any expert opinion or testimony in the field of the proposal for a legal entity or other body as part of a regulatory, legislative or judicial process;
- » in relation to the proposal, project, applicant or project leader, the collaborator finds themselves in any other situation that, in their own view or that of a third party, could compromise their ability to evaluate the application or provide project advice impartially.

Please note that this list is not exhaustive and includes only some of the most common types of conflicts of interest. Other types may also be considered.

The existence or possibility of a conflict of interest does not necessarily imply that the evaluator is unable to complete the examination of the proposal. Based on the particular circumstances of each case, the Grant Project Office will determine whether the potential conflict of interest does, in fact, compromise an evaluator's activity.

Reporting a conflict of interest does not imply that the collaborator cannot complete the evaluation of an application, or that a project may not benefit from the collaborator's guidance. The Program Office will determine, according to the particular circumstances of each case, whether or not the conflict compromises the activity of the collaborator. If the Program Office and the collaborator conclude that the potential conflict of interest does not compromise the task, effective and reasonable controls will be established to guarantee that the process has not been affected in any way.

Importantly, if a non-reported conflict of interest arises during or after the evaluation of a proposal, LCF will take appropriate measures. Nevertheless, under no circumstances will the disclosure of an unknown conflict of interest after the evaluation imply that the project evaluation must be repeated.