AGenT Guide for Evaluators

FOURTH CALL – JULY 2023

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The AGenT guide for evaluators describes the general principles and procedures that will be used in the evaluation and selection of proposals of the AGenT Programme. Applicants may use the guide and evaluation criteria as a checklist to ensure the quality of their proposal

1. THE AGenT PROGRAMME

AGenT is an ambitious research and training initiative designed to conduct multidisciplinary and intersectoral research projects at CRAG in conjunction with associated partner organizations (private companies, research centers and academic institutions), both national and international.

The programme offers **twenty (20) two-year postdoctoral fellowships** in four calls and is focused on: training both in specific research areas and in transferable and transversal skills; secondments and research collaborations; and networking activities in both the academic and the industrial sectors; all in order to enrich the training of the fellows and enhance their professional development while conducting projects of research excellence.
AGenT is an international, interdisciplinary, and intersectoral programme.

The main objectives of the AGenT programme are:
   a) **To improve career prospects for plant and farm animal researchers in Europe**
   b) **To contribute to the training of future leaders in the areas of plant and agricultural sciences**
   c) **To support research of excellence and boost the research capacity and international visibility of CRAG and its collaborating institutions**
   d) **To support advancing research in topics of high social impact and of importance for the UN Sustainable Development Goals.**

2. EVALUATION PRINCIPLES

While performing the evaluation work, you are expected to comply with the following principles, as stated in Annex 1 of the Code of Conduct of the expert contract signed under the AGenT programme, based on the Horizon 2020 model contract for independent experts:

   1. INDEPENDENCE
      You are appointed in your personal capacity and act independently and in the public interest, not in your country or employer´s interest
   2. IMPARTIALITY
      You treat all proposal equally and evaluate them impartially on their merits, irrespective of their origin or the identity of the applicants.
   3. OBJECTIVITY
      You evaluate each proposal as submitted and not based on its potential if certain changes were to be made.
   4. ACCURACY
      You base your judgement on the official evaluation criteria the proposal addresses, and nothing else.
   5. CONSISTENCY
      You apply the same standard of judgement to all proposals
   6. CONFIDENTIALITY
      - You discuss evaluation matters, such as the content of the proposal, evaluation results or opinions of fellow experience, only with the other experts involved in evaluating the same proposal.

- You do not contact applicants or any third parties in any case
- You do not disclose the names of other experts
- You maintain the confidentiality of documents, paper or electronic, at all times and wherever you do your evaluation work, and you must return, destroy or delete all confidential documents, paper or electronic, upon competing your work.

7. CONFLICT OF INTEREST RULES (CoI)

You have a CoI and are excluded from the evaluation session if you:

- Are involved in a competing proposal, or were involved in the preparation of the proposal (including pre-proposal checks)
- Benefit directly or indirectly if a proposal is accepted or rejected
- Have a close family or personal relationship with any person involved in the preparation of any proposal submitted to this call
- Are a director, trustee or partner or are in any way involved in the management of an organization involved in the preparation of any proposal submitted to this call
- Are employed or contracted by one of the Partner Organisations

3. OVERVIEW OF THE WORKFLOW

Duration		8 weeks Jul-Aug 23	1 week	5 weeks		1 week	10 Days	Up to 3 months
Action	Call Publication	Application	Administrative Eligibility check	Assessment Process	Interviews	Final Ranking	Appointment of Selected Applicants	Recruitment
Outcome	Announcements in different websites, social media, etc.	Nº proposals submitted	Nº eligible proposals	- Evaluation reports - Ranking of applicants - Applicants recommended for Interview	- Evaluation reports - Ranking of applicants	- Final Ranking - Applicants recommended for funding and reserve list	- Invitation letters - Acceptance letters	Hired researchers January 2024
Actors	CRAG	Applicants	CRAG	Selection Committee	Interview Committee	Interview Committee	CRAG/Applicants	CRAG

4. ROLE OF THE EVALUATORS

The evaluators conduct the evaluations on a personal basis, not as representatives of their employer, their country or any other entity. They are expected to be independent, impartial and objective, and to behave throughout in a professional manner. These individuals must have a high level of professional experience in the public or private sector in one or more of the areas being evaluated. Evaluators must also have the appropriate language skills required for the proposals to be evaluated.

5. APPOINTMENT OF EVALUATORS

CRAG has a worldwide network of collaborators, many of them with ample experience in research personnel and project evaluation at international level. CRAG will create a database of potential experts from universities, research centers and industry specific for the AGenT program. In order to be selected, experts must have a high level of expertise in the relevant field (e.g., plant

development, plant responses to stress, plant metabolism, plant and animal genomics, computational biology, among others), be available for remote evaluation and have a good knowledge of English. Depending on the field and number of applications, the Scientific Advisory Board of CRAG[1] will select the experts needed for each call, excluding evaluators with possible conflict of interest and keeping a gender balance in the composition of the Selection Committee.

6. THE EVALUATION PHASES IN DETAIL

The evaluation process will be divided into five stages:

1) Administrative Eligibility check (1 week): once the call has closed, the administration of CRAG will check that applicants a) fulfil the eligibility rules; and b) obligatory documentation has been provided and that it respects the formatting rules. All applicants will be informed about the results of the eligibility check. Ineligible applications will be excluded from further evaluation.

Assement Process and Interviews (5 weeks):

2) Assessment Process : A Selection Committee formed by a minimum of five external national and international independent experts from recognized national and international universities, research centers and industry will remotely evaluate the applications. One of the experts will act as Evaluation Coordinator (EC). Each application will be evaluated by at least 2 experts (gender balanced if possible) from the same or a close area of discipline as the application being evaluated (avoiding conflict of interest between applicants and experts). If evaluations are significantly divergent in scores for a given application (*e.g*., > 33% difference between two experts), the EC may propose an additional evaluation by a third expert to resolve the discrepancy.

The assessment process will be focused on the **scientific merit, trajectory of the researcher** (i.e., *past performance*) and the proposed **research project**.

After finishing the evaluation of all candidates, a consensus meeting overseen by the EC will be held by all experts of the Selection Committee, and also attended by a representative of the CRAG Gender Committee (with no conflict of interest in the call) as an observer. The consensus meeting will elaborate a ranking list defining the applicants selected for a subsequent interview. All applicants will be informed about the results of the evaluation. The **evaluation report** will include the score and feedback to the applicant about the strengths and weaknesses of the application. A minimum of two applicants for each fellowship offered in the call will be invited for interview.

3) Interviews: All selected applicants will be invited to present their projects to the Interview Committee including at least two senior researchers (PIs) from CRAG (the PIs involved in the Interview Committee can't be offering a position in the call under evaluation), one international member of the Selection Committee, HR specialist or AGenT PM, and a representative of the CRAG Gender Committee as an observer. All interviews will be conducted in English through Skype or a similar video-conference tool in the same specified date(s) to provide equal opportunities to all applicants worldwide and avoiding long, environmentally-costly trips.

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[1] The Scientific Advisory Board is comprised of six independent leading and internationally recognized scientists: **Carmen Castresana**, Centro Nacional de Biotecnología (CNB), Madrid, Spain; **George Coupland**, Max Planck Institute for Plant Breeding Research (MPIPZ), Cologne, Germany; **Richard Crooijmans,** Wageningen University & Research (WUR), Wageningen, The Netherlands; **Xiaoqi Feng,** John Innes Centre (JIC), Norwich, UK; **Fabien Nogué,** Institut Jean-Pierre Bourgin (IJPB), Versailles Cedex, France; **Michael Purugganan**, New York University (NYU), USA.

Applicants will be asked to make a 10-minute presentation of themselves and their proposal, followed by 10 minutes of questions and answers. This evaluation stage puts more emphasis on the **potential of the applicant.**

4) Final ranking of applicants: After the interviews are completed, the Interview Committee will agree on the final score for each applicant, considering the results of both the Assessment process and the Interview. The Interview Committee will produce the **final ranking list** that will determine the awardees, and those included in a **reserve list**. The **final evaluation report** will include the score and feedback to the applicant about the strengths and weaknesses of the application with regard to the evaluation criteria and including the results of the interview.

5) Ethics evaluation: an ethics committee formed by two senior researchers of CRAG, with no conflict of interest in the call, will evaluate the Statement of Research Interest of applicants proposed to be awarded.

6) Appointment of Selected Applicants: the selected applicants will be invited to initiate the appointment process, and the applicants on the reserve list will be informed of their status. Selected applicants will be required to confirm acceptance of the offered position within 20 days. If an offer is rejected or the applicant does not reply to the offer in the allotted time, the reserve list will be activated by order of ranking. Selected applicants will have up to 3 months to join CRAG.

7. EVALUATION CRITERIA
A transparent, merit-based selection procedure has been established with the participation of international external experts.

7.1 Administrative Eligibility check
CRITERIA 1: Eligibility rules (eligible/not eligible)
CRITERIA 2: Obligatory documentation (eligible/not eligible)

7.2 Evaluation criteria for the Assessment Process
The assessment process is focused on the **scientific merit, trajectory of the researcher and project proposed** and will be based on the following criteria:

CRITERIA 1: Excellence of the professional background (Score: 0-50)
1.1 Research experience: PhD thesis and related work, prior postdoctoral experience, other research or technology development experience. (Score: 0-20).
1.2 Scientific production: number and relevance of peer-reviewed articles, conference presentations and proceedings (usual indicators will be used for evaluating this part: number of citations for articles, impact of the Journal or of the publication, position of the applicants in the authors order, relevance of the publication for the field, etc.). (Score: 0-20).
1.3 Personal grants and fellowships, awards and other professional activities (reviewer, chair, etc.). (Score: 0-5).
1.4 Teaching and supervision of early-career students. (Score: 0-3).
1.5 Participation in dissemination and communication activities. (Score: 0-2).

The criteria used for the evaluation of the curriculum will be weighed and parameterized (e.g., publications per research period, i.e. PhD, Postdoc, rather than total number of publications). This will guarantee avoiding any possible bias against youngest researchers or researchers with career breaks despite the fact that the CV will have a 50% weight in this step.

CRITERIA 2: Excellence of the Statement of Research (Score: 0-40)
2.1 Quality, originality, innovative nature of the proposed project, including international, interdisciplinary and intersectoral aspects. (Score: 0-10).
2.2 Coherence and feasibility of the research plan. (Score: 0-10).
2.3 Techniques/scientific facilities to be used and collaborations. (Score: 0-5).
2.4 Impact on enhancing the potential and future career prospects of the researcher. (Score: 0-10).
2.5 Scientific, societal and economic impact of expected results. (Score: 0-5).

CRITERIA 3: Letters of Reference (Score: 0-10)
Personal nature of the letter, specific to the project in question, and whether or not it refers to subjective aspects and personal characteristics of the candidate and also to his or her intellectual skills and to the academic or professional project presented. Assessment of the reference letters should consider the suitability and aptness of the person who writes the letter with regard to the candidate´s project (Score: 0-10)

The overall threshold for applicants to be ranked for interviews will be 70/100. In case of ex aequo, priority is defined by the score of Criteria 1.

7.3 Evaluation criteria for the Interview
This stage emphasizes on the **potential of the applicant** and will be based on the following criteria:
CRITERIA 1: Scientific knowledge and skills in the area of research. (Score: 0-70).
CRITERIA 2: Presentation and communication skills, defence of the project and ability to take part in scientific discussions. (Score: 0-30).

The overall threshold for applicants to advance to the final ranking step will be 70/100. In case of ex aequo, priority is defined by the score of Criteria 1.

7.4 Final ranking

The final score will be calculated based on the score of the Assessment Process (weight 60%) and the score of the Interview (weight 40%). The threshold for selection will be 75/100.

PHASE	CRITERIA	SCORE	TOTAL SCORE	THRESHOLD	WEIGHT
1. Eligibility check	CRITERIA 1: Eligibility rules	n/a	n/a	Eligible / not eligible	n/a
	CRITERIA 2: Obligatory documentation				
2. Assessment Process	CRITERIA 1: Excellence of the professional background	0-50	0-100	70	60%
	CRITERIA 2: Excellence of the Statement of Research	0-40			
	CRITERIA 3: Letters of Reference	0-10			
3. Interview	CRITERIA 1: Scientific knowledge and skills in the area of research	0-70	0-100	70	40%
	CRITERIA 2: Presentation and communication skills, defence of the project and ability to take part in scientific discussions.	0-30			
FINAL SCORE = Total score from phase 1 * 60% + Total score from phase 2 * 40%				75	

8. EVALUATION REPORTS

8.1 ASSESSMENT PROCCES

Individual Evaluation Report

The Evaluator is responsible for drafting the Individual Evaluation Report. Please form an opinion based on your own expertise. Please do not consult with other evaluators and do not, under any circumstances, contact the applicant.

If you are asked to evaluate more than one application, you are advised to evaluate all applications before finalising your grades and comments as this will enable you to see the full spectrum of applications allocated to you.

Many evaluators find it useful to make comments highlighting what they perceive as weak and strong points for each criterion and then use this to form their judgement and assign the grade.

When evaluating a proposal, please note that the grade alone is not enough for your evaluation to be well understood and that the evaluation panel must also write a consensus report to be submitted to the applicant.

"Do's and Don'ts"
- Do write your comments using full and clear sentences for each criterion.
- Do avoid summarising the application. The applicant and the evaluators know what the application is about.
- Do focalise on strong and weak points based on the given criteria. Do avoid general statements such as: "*The research could have been described better*".
- Do avoid statements such as "*the candidate has few publications for his/her age*". If you believe the track record of any participant to be inadequate then, include a comment such

as "*It has not been demonstrated in the application that the proposed fellow has a strong enough track record to carry out this project*". Please consider the possibility that the applicant has resumed a research career and assess the total time spent on research.
- Do avoid writing personal comments about the applicant.
- Do only consider the material included in the application.
- Ethical issues are of considerable concern and you should make a note of those raised by the proposed project. Ethical issues should not affect your evaluation but will need to be managed by the applicant and the fellow supervisor.
- Do avoid talking about "he or she", instead use "fellow" or "applicant".

Consensus Report
The comments of all evaluators will be unified in a single document that will be discussed during the Consensus meeting in order to elaborate the Consensus Report for each applicant.

Feedback to applicants
The consensus report is sent to the applicant together with the final decision on the application. This will help candidates in the future applications. The names of the evaluators are not provided.

8.2 INTERVIEW
Final Report
After the interviews are completed, the Interview Committee will agree on the final score for each applicant, considering the results of both the Assessment process and the Interview. The Interview Committee will produce the **final ranking list** that will determine the awardees, and those to be considered as **reserve list**.

Feedback to applicants
The **final evaluation report** will include the score and feedback to the applicant about the strengths and weaknesses of the application with regard to the evaluation criteria and including the results of the interview.

9. AGenT CONTACT
By e-mail: agent@cragenomica.es
By phone: (+34) 935 636 600 (Ext. 3032)

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08193 Cerdanyola del Vallès
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Annex 1 – TEMPLATE FOR THE ASSESSMENT PROCCES

ASSESSMENT PROCESS			
CRITERIA 1: Excellence of the professional background (Score: 0-50)			
Sub-criteria	Documents/sections related to the criteria	Score	Comments
1.1 Research experience PhD thesis and related work, prior postdoctoral experience, other research or technology development experience. (Score: 0-20)	CV		
1.2 Scientific production Number and relevance of peer-reviewed articles, conference presentations and proceedings (number of citations for articles, impact of the Journal or of the publication, position of the applicants in the authors order, relevance of the publication for the field). (Score: 0-20).	CV		
1.3 Personal grants and fellowships, awards and other professional activities (reviewer, chair, etc.). (Score: 0-5).	CV		
1.4 Teaching and supervision of early-career students. (Score: 0-3).	CV		
1.5 Participation in dissemination and communication activities. (Score: 0-2).	CV		

CRITERIA 2: Excellence of the Statement of Research (Score: 0-40)

Sub-criteria	Documents/sections related to the criteria	Score	Comments
2.1 Quality, originality, innovative nature of the proposed project, including international, interdisciplinary and intersectoral aspects. (Score: 0-10)	Research Project *Sections 1.3, 1.5 and 1.6*		
2.2 Coherence and feasibility of the research plan. (Score: 0-10)	Research Project *Sections 1.4*		
2.3 Techniques/scientific facilities to be used and collaborations. (Score: 0-5)	Research Project *Section 1.4 and 1.6*		
2.4 Impact on enhancing the potential and future career prospects of the researcher. (Score: 0-10)	Research Project *Section 2.1*		
2.5 Scientific, societal and economic impact of expected results. (Score: 0-5)	Research Project *Section 2.2*		

Research Project - Sections	
1 DESCRIPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT *1.1 Abstract* *1.2 State of the art* *1.3 Research Project Overview and Specific Objectives* *1.4 Methodology and Research Plan* *1.5 Originality and innovative aspects* *1.6 Secondment Plan (if any)*	*2 IMPACT* *2.1 Impact of the fellowship on your career* *2.2 Scientific, societal and economic impact*

CRITERIA 3: Letters of Reference (Score: 0-10)

Sub-criteria	Documents/sections related to the criteria	Score	Comments
Personal nature of the letter, specific to the project in question, and whether or not it refers to subjective aspects and personal characteristics of the candidate and also to his or her intellectual skills and to the academic or professional project presented. Assessment of the reference letters should consider the suitability and aptness of the person who writes the letter with regard to the candidate´s project. (Score: 0-10)	Letters of Reference		

Annex 2 – TEMPLATE FOR THE INTERVIEW

INTERVIEW			
CRITERIA 1: Scientific knowledge and skills in the area of research (Score: 0-70).			
Sub-criteria	Documents/sections related to the criteria	Score	Comments
Scientific knowledge and skills in the area of research. (Score: 0-70)	Presentation		
CRITERIA 2: Presentation and communication skills, defence of the project and ability to take part in scientific discussions (Score: 0-30).			
Sub-criteria	Documents/sections related to the criteria	Score	Comments
Presentation and communication skills, defence of the project and ability to take part in scientific discussions. (Score: 0-30)	Presentation		