

ITALIAN MINISTRY OF UNIVERSITY AND RESEARCH

Expert Group on Research Funding Procedures

Guidelines for Public Research Calls Management

and Research Proposals Evaluation

Analysis, Guidelines, and Recommendations

Expert Group

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Disclaimer

These views represent the consensus of the Expert Group members acting in a personal capacity, not representing any particular institution, in an advisory non-binding role, pro bono, and independently from the institutions that are funders, recipients, or reviewers of grants. The Group's mandate was to examine international practices, compare key aspects of call management and proposal evaluation in Italy and elsewhere, and identify key criteria and recommendations. The document is intended for publication on the MUR website once finalised.

Executive Summary

Public funding for research is a critical driver of national and international innovation, ingenuity, economic competitiveness, and social wellbeing. The mechanisms through which such funding is allocated—especially competitive calls and peer review—greatly contributes to the quality and the ensuing impact that science (including natural science, engineering as well as social sciences and humanities) has on people and humanity at large. Italy has recently taken important steps to modernise its research funding landscape, notably through the introduction of a three-year research plan (Piano Triennale della Ricerca 2026–2028), annual PRIN cycles with a guaranteed minimum endowment, and the establishment of new dedicated directorate within MUR. These are welcome developments.

However, significant structural improvements remain necessary to align Italian practices with those of leading international funding bodies such as the ERC, DFG, NIH, and UKRI. The present guidelines provide a systematic analysis of international best practices and translate them into concrete recommendations for MUR's procedures. They address the full lifecycle of a competitive call—from strategic objective-setting and call design, through evaluation and selection, to feedback and redress—with particular attention to independence, impartiality, transparency, conflict-of-interest management, and the responsible use of technology.

The document is structured in five sections: (1) Managing Public Calls, (2) Evaluating Research Proposals, (3) International Trends in Research Assessment Reform, (4) Comparing International Models and Drawing Lessons, and (5) Key Recommendations. Ten core recommendations are presented at the end.

Section 1. Managing Public Calls

1.1 Why: The Importance of Public Funding for Research

Public investment in basic and applied research is one of the most productive uses of government expenditure. Historical evidence from the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom and the European Union consistently demonstrates that public research funding generates substantial economic returns, stimulates private R&D investment, underpins university-industry knowledge transfer, and provides the scientific base for technological innovation. Studies from the US National Academies of Sciences indicate that the thriving of the private sector R&D is strictly associated with decisions to allocate industry close to hubs of academic knowledge <<Ref.

Programmes such as NIH (with an annual budget exceeding USD 45 billion) and the ERC (with approximately EUR 2 billion per year under Horizon Europe) have demonstrated that competitive, excellence-driven grant mechanisms are capable of identifying and nurturing world-class science.

Italy's investment in public research has historically been below the European average. Italy spends approximately 1.3% of GDP on R&D (public and private combined), against a European Union average of 2.24¹ and a target of 3%. While recent commitments—including the PNRR-linked research investments and the Piano Triennale della Ricerca 2026–2028—represent a positive trajectory, the effectiveness of public spending depends not only on the amounts allocated but critically on the quality of the mechanisms used to select the most meritorious projects.

Competitive grant mechanisms, when governed by robust peer review, impartiality, transparency and program management serve multiple public functions: they reward merit and innovation; they attract and retain talented researchers; they mitigate the concentration of resources in established networks; and they ensure thorough implementation, and provide accountability to citizens and taxpayers. A bottom-up system of Calls, leaving researchers the choice of the topics and approaches, provide the freedom to identify also new, emerging areas of research that might not have reached (yet) policy attention. The definition of strategic priorities for research—an upstream governance function— may add an additional layer by ensuring that public investments are aligned with societal needs (as expressed during public consultations, for examples) and national and/or international scientific priorities.

1.2 Strategic Objective-Setting, Advisory Boards, and Interaction with Policy

Strategic Planning and Priority-Setting

Before any call is launched, funding bodies need a clearly articulated strategic framework. This encompasses the analysis of the structural strengths and weaknesses in a research ecosystem, including the space for basic as well as applied research, attractiveness of conditions for talented people from within the country and outside to pursue research and contrast brain drain, the identification of long-term scientific priorities, the identification of thematic or structural gaps in the current research portfolio. Such analysis is needed before the design of specific calls to strengthen the whole research ecosystem. Strategic documents such as Italy's Piano Nazionale della Ricerca (PNR) or the EU's Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda provide the overarching framework within which individual calls should be designed.

Good international practice holds that strategic priority-setting is a participatory, evidence-based process. At the NIH, the strategic plan is developed through extensive consultation with the scientific community, patient organisations, public health stakeholders, and the broader public, and is revised regularly. At the ERC, the ERC Scientific Council—composed of eminent scientists elected for their excellence and independence—holds full scientific authority and sets the scientific strategy (then implemented with the annual ERC Workprogrammes) entirely independently and consulting the wider community. This model of delegated scientific governance is widely regarded as a gold standard to safeguard independence, foster long-term strategic approaches to research planning and avoid short-term political pressures.

¹ Eurostat (2024), https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=R%26D_expenditure

Advisory Boards

Advisory boards or scientific advisory councils serve as the interface between the funding body, the scientific community, and the government. Their functions include: (a) providing independent scientific advice on priority areas (in terms of needs of the research ecosystem such as retaining and attracting talents, or broader themes like Open Science) and call designs (including type of instruments, review process); (b) reviewing the effectiveness of past investments; (c) ensuring disciplinary breadth and methodological rigour in priority-setting; and (d) lending scientific credibility and legitimacy to funding decisions.

Key design principles for effective advisory boards include: members should serve in a personal capacity, not as representatives of their institutions; membership should ensure disciplinary, gender, career-stage, and geographic diversity; terms should be staggered and time-limited to ensure regular renewal; declared conflicts of interest should be managed rigorously; and the board's remit, composition, and decisions should be made publicly available.

Governance of the Reviewer Selection Function

A critical—and often overlooked—governance dimension is the structure of the body responsible for defining and maintaining the lists of eligible reviewers and evaluation committee members. International best practice shows that this function must be designed with the same rigour applied to the evaluation process itself. The following principles should govern anybody entrusted with this responsibility:

- **Independence and absence of conflicts of interest.** The members of the body responsible for defining criteria for reviewer selection and for maintaining reviewer pools must not themselves be active grant applicants, cannot be involved in the review itself, and there must be a rigorous procedure to avoid conflicts of interests (COI) –possibly including the avoidance of institutional affiliations that create systematic conflicts of interest with the research community they oversee. A composition exclusively or predominantly drawn from the national academic community creates structural conflicts of interest that undermine the impartiality of the entire evaluation chain. All members' appointment needs to be time-limited, and subject to the same COI disclosure requirements applicable to reviewers.
- **International and cross-sector composition.** To counteract the risks of parochialism, self-referentiality, and network capture, the body responsible for reviewer governance should include a significant proportion of international members—scientists of proven excellence, i.e. in our case working outside Italy—as well as, where appropriate, representatives of industry, the non-profit sector, civil society organisations and groups addressed by research itself (such as e.g. patients, farmers, service sector workers or vulnerable groups) This ensures that the criteria applied to the reviewer pool reflect international standards rather than domestic academic hierarchies.
- **Transparent, merit-based criteria for reviewer lists.** The criteria used to identify, select, and update lists of eligible reviewers should be publicly documented, based on scientific excellence and domain expertise, and free from reliance on institutional affiliation or quantitative bibliometric thresholds as primary filters. Criteria should be reviewed periodically and updated to reflect evolving scientific practice and the recommendations emerging from the field of responsible research assessment (see Section 3).
- **Rotation and term limits.** To prevent the formation of entrenched networks and to ensure regular renewal of perspectives, membership of any reviewer governance body should be subject to defined term limits and staggered rotation. No individual should serve in a

manner that creates ongoing influence over the evaluation of proposals from their own scientific community or institution.

- **Separation of governance from operational management.** The body responsible for defining reviewer criteria and pools should be distinct from the operational staff (Research Programme Officers) who manage individual review sessions and assign reviewers to proposals. This separation ensures that the strategic governance of the reviewer function remains independent from day-to-day operational pressures.
- **Public accountability and reporting.** The activities, membership, criteria, and decisions of the reviewer governance body should be published annually. This transparency enables external scrutiny and builds public and scientific community confidence in the fairness of the system.

Interaction with Politics and Policy

A critical design challenge for any public research funding system is the appropriate separation between political oversight and scientific decision-making. Political actors—Parliament, Ministers, Government—have a legitimate role in setting the overall budget and broad priority areas, and in holding funding bodies to account for the outcomes of their investments. They should not, however, have any role in the selection of individual grantees or reviewers, nor in influencing evaluation outcomes. This principle is enshrined in the governance structures of the NIH, NSF, ERC, and DFG.

Italy has historically struggled with the permeability of its research funding system to political influence, in terms of both the composition of evaluation commissions and the design of calls. Establishing clear statutory firewalls—analogueous to the ERC Scientific Council’s independence from the Commission—between political authority and scientific selection is a foundational prerequisite for a credible system. Where MUR establishes an internal service or delegates to a dedicated public governmental agency, the mandate, governance rules, and safeguards against political interference should be codified in legislation.

1.3 How: From Call Design to Project Selection

Types and Objectives of Calls

A mature research funding portfolio distinguishes among at least four categories of calls: (1) investigator-initiated basic research grants (e.g., NIH R01, ERC Frontier Research Grants, DFG Research Grants), which are purely bottom-up and excellence-driven; (2) thematic or challenge-oriented grants that address specific societal or technological priorities while retaining scientific excellence among the selection criterion; (3) career development and mobility grants, which support early-career researchers and tackle brain drain; and (4) collaborative or network grants for large interdisciplinary consortia.

Italy’s PRIN programme has historically served as the principal vehicle for investigator-initiated research. Recent additions—including the FIS (Fondo Italiano per la Scienza) for frontier science and the newly announced PRIN Hybrid and Synergy Grant schemes—represent important diversification steps. The call portfolio should be designed to address the full scientific ecosystem, with particular attention to (a) adequate support for early-career researchers, (b) instruments for individual excellence not just for collaborative projects, and (c) bridge instruments between basic and applied research.

Budget Allocation and Expected Success Rates

Success rates in competitive grant schemes are a critical signal of the health of the system. Success rates that are too low (below approximately 15%) create systemic inefficiencies: they discourage the best applicants, overburden reviewers, and make it statistically impossible to distinguish between worthy and exceptional proposals. At NIH, success rates declined from approximately 33% in the 1970s to 20–25% in the late 1990s before declining further (the mid teens), a trend identified as a major concern. At the ERC, success rates for Starting, Consolidator and Advanced Grants typically range between 10% and 15% (and at times even lower than 10%, especially for Synergy Calls)—making the competition extremely tough.

Budget allocation decisions should be transparently linked to: the expected number of fundable proposals at the desired quality threshold; an explicit target success rate; and an analysis of the average grant size needed to enable meaningful research. Publishing the call budget in advance, as Italy's 2026 Piano Triennale now requires (with PRIN annual allocations exceeding EUR 260 million in 2026), is an important step that allows applicants and institutions to plan appropriately.

Eligibility Criteria and Call Design

Eligibility criteria should be simple, transparent, and genuinely related to the call's objectives. They should be published well in advance and should not change during the review process. Good practice (e.g., ERC Work Programme) also requires that career breaks and non-traditional career paths be accommodated, preventing systematic disadvantage for researchers who have taken parental leave, experienced hardship (e.g. serious illness) or followed non-linear career trajectories.

Guidelines for Applicants

Clear, comprehensive, and stable applicant guidelines are a hallmark of high-quality funding programmes. The ERC published the Guide for Peer Reviewers associated to each annual Workprogramme and explaining the evaluation procedure and their steps (e.g. remote, on site, interviews), criteria (related to the proposal itself and to the proponents), forms to be used, and panel structure (covering all fields of science and allowing for cross-panel reviews for interdisciplinary applications). Similarly NSF and NIH provide detailed instructions for every aspect of the application, including specific templates, section-by-section guidance, and explicit evaluation criteria. Italy's PRIN calls have at times been criticised for ambiguity and for generating many appeals/redress cases; improving the clarity and completeness of call documentation would reduce this risk. Guidelines should also address the use of generative AI tools by applicants—based on the European Guidelines on the responsible use of generative AI in research²

Guidelines for Peer Reviewers

Reviewers should receive detailed, possibly field-specific, guidelines that clearly explain: the evaluation criteria and scoring rubrics; the meaning of each score; how to distinguish excellent from very good proposals; confidentiality obligations; conflict-of-interest declaration requirements; and the restrictions on using generative AI tools. Guidelines could be accompanied by scored worked examples or calibration exercises. Some funding bodies such as the DFG, also provide discipline-specific review guidelines in addition to a general framework.

Redress Procedures

² https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/news/all-research-and-innovation-news/guidelines-responsible-use-generative-ai-research-developed-european-research-area-forum-2024-03-20_en

A clear, accessible, and time-bound redress procedure is an essential element of a transparent and legitimate system. Applicants should have the right to appeal on procedural grounds (breach of process, undisclosed conflict of interest, administrative error), but not on grounds of disagreement with the scientific evaluation itself. The redress procedure should be managed by an independent body, separate from the evaluation team. Decisions should be communicated in writing with clear reasoning. In addition, arbitration procedures in case an applicant wants to challenge the result of a redress should be considered, such as Article 22 of the EU Regulation and related Rules of Procedure³ or the CSR Division of Receipt and Referral of the NIH⁴.

1.4 Who: The Actors

A well-functioning research funding system involves multiple categories of actors, each with distinct roles and responsibilities.

- **Research Managers** (Research Programme Officers / Scientific Review Officers). Professional staff who manage the process without entering into the scientific evaluation itself. They select reviewers, manage conflicts of interest, organise panels, and prepare relevant documents. The ERC Scientific Officers and the NIH's Scientific Review Officers are the paradigmatic model: highly skilled professionals with deep domain knowledge who ensure the integrity of the process while remaining strictly separate from the scientific judgements of reviewers. Such roles should be performed by career professionals who work either for the ministry or for an agency which handles review for the ministry, and cannot be current academics who are actively submitting grants.
- **Independent Scientific Experts / Peer Reviewers.** The scientists who evaluate proposals, serving as individual remote reviewers, panel members, or panel chairs. Their selection should be based solely on scientific expertise and independence and with due attention to including in the panels a plurality of approaches and backgrounds to avoid gender and other biases in peer review
- **National and International Experts.** A consistent theme in international best practice is the importance of involving international reviewers, as a way to guarantee diverse perspectives and minimize the risk of conflict of interests, especially in smaller countries where the scientific community is numerically limited; while Italy is a rather large country, a strong involvement of international reviewers can enhance the breadth of expertise and limit the risk COI. The body of review experts should reflect an international composition, ensuring broad geographical and scientific representation. The presence of reviewers affiliated with Italian institutions should be limited in order to minimize potential national bias and to strengthen the independence, impartiality, and international credibility of the evaluation process.
- **Applicants and Beneficiaries.** Applicants have a right to clear, timely, and actionable information about the call, the evaluation process, and the outcome of their submission—including a written summary statement. In principle, they should be informed of the results

³ COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING DECISION (EU) 2022/219 of 11 February 2022 establishing rules of procedure for the review, pursuant to Article 22(1) of Council Regulation (EC) No 58/2003, of the legality of acts of executive agencies which injure a third party and have been referred to the Commission by any person directly or individually concerned - [Complaints about proposal rejection - Online Manual - Funding Tenders Opportunities](#)

⁴ [DRR Appeal Policy | NIH Center for Scientific Review](#)

of the outcomes of their application before the deadline for submitting new ones. For applicants, information webinars or other ways of facilitating access should be organised at central and/or decentralised levels, in order to reduce entry barriers and allow selection based on merit only.

- **Other Actors.** Media, civil society, patient and other stakeholders organisations play important roles in building public trust. Parliamentary oversight provides democratic legitimacy.

1.5 When: Planning, Timeliness, and Predictability

One of the most consistently cited weaknesses of Italy's research funding system has been the unpredictability and irregularity of call publication. Most funding agencies maintain a regular, predictable call calendar. The ERC publishes its Workprogramme yearly with a significant level of predictability in terms of funding instruments and deadlines. Italy's Piano Triennale della Ricerca 2026–2028 now mandates that PRIN calls be published annually by April—a welcome structural change that should be enshrined in law and accompanied by multi-year budget certainty.

International standards suggest that a well-managed evaluation cycle should not exceed 6–9 months from call closure to notification. Long and unpredictable evaluation periods impose real costs and disproportionately disadvantage younger researchers and smaller institutions.

Section 2. Evaluating Research Proposals

2.1 Why: The Role of Peer Review

Peer review is the foundational mechanism for quality assurance in the evaluation of research proposals. For example, the introduction of peer review for research funding—attested with the National Advisory Cancer Council in the United States in 1937 and subsequently formalised by NIH—has been identified by successive independent reviews as the primary factor explaining the excellence of American biomedical research.

Peer review is mainly based on reviewing publications. This has arguably led to the so called “publish or perish” culture, where there is an extreme pressure to publish academic work in order to succeed in an academic career

While incentivizing productivity, the “publish or perish” ethos has been considered responsible for creating a crisis marked by rewarding quantity over quality, rising retraction rates, hyper-competition, mental health strain, and questionable research practices.

In order to mitigate these risks, many individual researchers and organisations have called for the reform of current research assessment practices, not departing from peer review but adjusting it to improve quality, integrity and relevance of research by enhancing its transparency, reproducibility and reusability.

Assessment reform proposals

There is growing academic and policy debate about the use of other and new methods of assessment, among which randomisation is included as a component of selection processes. It has already been implemented by some funders when proposals cluster in a zone of indistinguishable merit—i.e. where peer review only is not able to resolve ties with a reasonable degree of confidence. Randomisation has gained support as tie-breaking device for proposals that have already passed a high absolute quality threshold, and when introducing further criteria for evaluation would also likely introduce biases or other undesired effects. For more assessment strategies see Sec. 2.3 and Section 3.

2.2 Who: Composition of Review Panels

Generalists and Specialists

Best practice combines two categories of reviewers. Panel members act as generalists within a broad scientific domain, while remote expert reviewers are specifically selected for their competence in the narrow sub-field of the proposal. This two-tier model is used by both the NIH and the ERC. In both cases, each proposal receives a minimum of three assigned reviewers/remote referees in addition to some of the generalist panel members, with targeted instructions for the specialised reviewers on how to provide their input and to panel members (especially panel chairs) to ensure such specialist input is integrated in the final assessment.

Number of Reviewers per Proposal

A minimum of three reviewers per proposal is the standard in high-quality systems.

2.3 How: Evaluation Methodology

Whole Science Approach and Disciplinary Specificities

Evaluation frameworks should recognise that science is not monolithic. Good practice avoids applying a single bibliometric or methodological template across all disciplines—a lesson re-learned painfully in Italy's experience with uncritical reliance on journal impact factors as proxies for individual research quality. The ERC's (multi)disciplinary panels and the DFG's subject-specific review boards both illustrate how a single evaluation framework can accommodate disciplinary diversity without sacrificing methodological coherence.

Evaluation Criteria and Scoring

Evaluation criteria should be: pre-specified in the call; well-defined with illustrative descriptions of what constitutes each score; transparent to applicants; and consistently applied. Standard evaluation dimensions include: scientific excellence and novelty; quality and feasibility of the research plan; excellence and track record of the PI and team; adequacy of resources; and, where relevant, broader societal and scientific impact. Scoring systems should be designed to produce score differentiation.

Tackling Ex Aequo Proposals

When proposals receive identical average scores, secondary differentiation criteria should be pre-specified and applied consistently. These may include: relative strength on specific sub-criteria; career stage of the PI (favouring the younger researcher); geographic diversity; or—in extremis and only above the absolute quality threshold—a transparent random selection mechanism.

Metrics and Reform of Research Assessment

The widespread misuse of bibliometric indicators—particularly journal impact factors—as proxies for the quality of individual research outputs is a well-documented problem in research evaluation. As reiterated in the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA, 2012), impact factors assess journals not individual papers, and bibliometric indicators are inappropriate for evaluating individual grant proposals. In Italy, over-reliance on bibliometric indicators for ex ante evaluation has been identified as particularly problematic, partly because it serves as a proxy when peer review processes are weak or absent.

The guiding principle is that the proposal itself—its scientific merit, originality, and feasibility—should carry the dominant weight, with the applicant's track record as supporting context rather than primary criterion.

Managing Conflict of Interest and Bias

Conflict of interest (COI) management is one of the most technically demanding aspects of peer review administration. International best practice distinguishes between: (a) financial conflicts; (b) professional conflicts (collaboration, co-authorship, mentorship within 3–5 years); (c) institutional conflicts; and (d) competitive conflicts, both at professional and personal level. Best practices require a well-documented two-tier COI management system: 'out of the evaluation' for COI that would apply at the level of a given Call for Proposals (e.g. applicants or experts with family ties with applicants cannot be peer reviewers for the overall Call) and 'out of the room' (peer reviewers cannot evaluate a proposal by someone else in their own institution, even if they had no contact or knowledge of it, but can evaluate other applications based in different institutions).

In a relatively small scientific community such as Italy's, COI management is particularly challenging. This is a strong argument for systematic internationalisation of panels. All reviewers should be required to sign a COI declaration in advance of each review session, electronically timestamped and retained. Breaches of the COI policy should be subject to defined consequences.

Individual Review vs. Panel Deliberation

Individual written reviews, prepared independently before any group discussion, are the foundation of any robust evaluation system. The subsequent collective deliberation adds value by allowing reviewers to identify strengths and weaknesses of applications and arrive at a consensus view. The panel session should culminate in a final score that reflects the group's considered judgment after discussion, not merely the mechanical average of pre-session individual scores.

Online vs. On-Site Meetings

Good practice suggests that on site discussions are usually more productive, but this needs to be put on balance with the time and budget needed for the evaluation as well as environmental (carbon footprint) considerations. Preliminary or triage-level evaluation may be conducted online, while final panel discussions (including, when relevant, with interviews of applicants) for high-stakes decisions should be held in person when feasible, or via high-quality videoconference with clear deliberation protocols.

Triage and Managing Large Numbers of Applications

As call volumes grow—Italy's FIS 3 in 2025 received over 5,000 applications—triage mechanisms become operationally necessary. Two-stage evaluation processes (e.g., ERC's first-step outline

review followed by full proposal review for shortlisted applicants) are effective in managing large volumes of applications.

Feedback to applicants

Applicants need to receive meaningful feedback to understand the reasons for the approval or rejection of their proposal and, when relevant, improve the proposal for a future submission. ERC provides applicants with both the synthesis of the consensus by the evaluation panel and the individual reviews (with the exception of rejected applications at triage stage due to the need to manage the overload of evaluators).

Use and Misuse of Artificial Intelligence

The EU developed guidelines of the responsible use of generative AI in research, including in proposals submission. The main notion is that scientists must be accountable for what they submit; for example, ‘allucinations’ leading to the quoting of non-existing articles are responsibility of the researcher, and obviously an indicator of the quality of the submission.

Different funders took different approaches to how strict should be the guidelines on the use of generative AI –from clear guidelines with focus on the responsibility of applicants and their host institutions, to full prohibition of use. They all involve difficulties in implementation and ‘policing’.

For example, the NIH has explicitly prohibited the use of any generative AI tool—including large language models—for analysing or critiquing grant applications, noting that uploading application content to commercial AI platforms violates confidentiality obligations and risks exposing sensitive unpublished scientific information (NIH Notice NOT-OD-23-149). Also the Australian Research Council have issued formal prohibitions. The ERC clarified that AI tools may not be used to summarise proposals, assess their scientific merit or generate draft evaluations; uploading proposals, or any part of them, to external AI systems is prohibited, as this would disclose sensitive information to third parties. Limited uses are permitted. Reviewers may use AI tools to improve the language of their reports or to search for general information, provided no proposal content or personal data is shared and no assessment is delegated⁵. Regarding applicants: AI tools may legitimately assist with tasks such as language editing or formatting, but the scientific ideas, hypotheses, and research design must be the original work of the PI. For example, the NIH has clarified that applications substantially developed by AI will not be considered original and may be rejected or referred for misconduct investigation.

2.4 When: Planning Cycle and Adapting to Emergencies

The regular planning cycle should be published around six months in advance of each call opening. The COVID-19 pandemic offered important lessons: digital submission platforms, remote panel meetings, and asynchronous review became essential tools. These capabilities should now be built as permanent features of any evaluation infrastructure.

⁵ [ERC clarifies limits on AI use in grant evaluation](#)|ERC

Section 3. International Trends in Research Assessment Reform

3.1 The Evolving International Debate

Research funders, by defining their way of assessing research and researchers, play a crucial role in shaping research cultures and research outcomes. Most assessments rely on structured peer-review systems intended to ensure fairness, scientific rigour, and public value. In the 1990s, the use of quantitative, objective metrics—particularly those related to publications—was gradually introduced and became standard practice in the 2000s. Many funders adopted this approach because it accelerated assessments and appeared to minimise subjectivity and bias. However, this methodology is increasingly questioned.

Since 2013, following the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA), concerns have grown about whether the current system is adequate to address modern challenges. New approaches to assessing research and researchers are now seen as necessary. As Sylvia Schwaag Serger, President of the Royal Swedish Academy of Engineering Sciences, noted in July 2025: “EU countries are lagging behind somewhat in adopting or understanding or applying novel approaches to science funding⁶. In 2024, the Heitor Report (“Act, Align, Accelerate”)⁷, produced by a group of 15 experts advising the European Commission on the next Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, recommended establishing “an experimental unit to test new programmes, evaluation procedures and instruments.” The report argued that disruptive, paradigm-shifting research is unlikely to thrive under conventional EU procedures and suggested introducing programmes modelled after the U.S. Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA)—a recommendation also present in the Draghi Report on European Competitiveness.

3.2 The “You Get What You Measure” Principle

This principle, rooted in Goodhart’s Law⁸, underscores that evaluation metrics—once tied to funding or career advancement—shape behaviours rather than merely reflecting performance. In research proposal evaluations, assessment criteria act as powerful incentives, influencing how researchers design projects, frame contributions, and advance their careers. Differences in evaluation systems among funding organisations produce distinct research cultures:

- Systems prioritising feasibility and academic track records tend to encourage conservative, low-risk proposals.
- Systems emphasising originality and scientific vision—rather than past achievements—and not penalising unconventional career paths are more conducive to exploratory, high-risk research.

⁶ [EU 'lagging behind' on new approaches to research funding | Science|Business](#)

⁷ [Align, act, accelerate - High Level Group presents recommendations on the future Framework Programme | European Research Area Platform](#)

[The Draghi report on EU competitiveness](#)

⁸ [What Is Goodhart's Law? When Metrics Backfire - ScienceInsights](#)

3.3 Issues Related to the Use of Bibliometrics

There is currently broad consensus that evaluating researchers based mostly on publications has produced serious unintended consequences:

- Publication metrics are not a good proxy for publication quality, as the metrics are not linked to it and they can be gamed, especially when there is so much at stake.
- Using publication metrics in evaluations has resulted in non-transparent processes, as the metrics used are produced by private companies that do not disclose most of their methodologies. For this reason, some research agencies like the French National Council of Research (CNRS) have decided to limit providing data to private companies.
- The rapid increase in the number of submitted and published articles, combined with a relatively stable pool of reviewers, has led to reviewer fatigue, resulting in higher refusal rates, delays, and sometimes lower-quality peer review reports.
- The incentives to increase the number of publications produced no longer accomplish the service of distributing knowledge, as the number of publications is so high that even very good research results find it difficult to get noticed.
- The replication crisis—a direct consequence of pressure to publish quickly—has produced inaccurate results that have polluted even reputable scientific journals.
- There is also a link between how the leading researcher is assessed and funding outcomes: sometimes the way the PI is assessed has a heavier weight in the granting process than how proposals are formally scored and thus the use of metrics reverberates on the whole evaluation.

3.4 International Position Papers and Policy Frameworks

International discussions on reforming research assessment started in 2013 with DORA, which rejects journal impact factor as a key metric and promotes research quality, data sharing, and broader contributions to science beyond mere publications. It was followed by the Leiden Manifesto, which states 10 principles for responsible research evaluation emphasising context, transparency, and real qualitative judgment.

Major organisations including Science Europe, the European University Association (EUA), the League of European Research Universities (LERU), and the Dutch Research Council (NWO) have since published their positions. The Global Research Council has issued results of a survey on Responsible Research Assessment. A very important push toward reform was given by the European Commission, which organised the Coalition for the Assessment of Research (CoARA). The Danish EU Presidency organised a high-level conference on this subject in December 2025.

Proposed corrective actions being explored internationally include:⁹

- Narrative CVs, i.e. resumes that give applicants space to explain their track record, highlighting context and background not capturable in a traditional CV. Several major funders (ERC, UKRI, DFG, NWO, NSF, NIH) have adopted variants of this approach.

⁹ [EU Presidency High-Level Conference on Reforming Research Assessment - Aalborg Universitet](#)

- Broader CV formats that give increased emphasis to other contributions to science in addition to publications, such as maintaining databases, producing software, mentoring, and open science practices.
- Partial randomness in selection, especially to resolve ties or scores that are too close to discriminate with reasonable confidence.
- Two-stage evaluation processes and involving applicants in peer review of competing proposals.

3.5 Comparative Overview of Major International Funders

The following tables provide a structured overview of the research funding landscape and the assessment approaches of major international funders.

Table 1. Public Research Funding Organisations

Country	Agency / Programme	Research Sector	Annual Budget (Approx.)	Role in Ecosystem
EU	Horizon Europe / including ERC	All disciplines	€95.5 bn (2021–2027)	Largest multinational research funding programme; ERC focuses on frontier excellence.
UK	UKRI	All disciplines	~£8 bn	Umbrella for 9 research councils (MRC, EPSRC, AHRC, etc.).
FR	ANR	All disciplines	~€1 bn	Primary competitive funding agency in France.
DE	DFG	All disciplines	~€3.5 bn	Largest research funding organisation in Germany; community-elected review boards.
ES	AEI	All disciplines	~€1.2 bn	Manages national R&D competitive programmes.
IT	MUR	All disciplines	~€200 mn	Main research funding organisation; PRIN, FIS, and Synergy schemes.
NL	NWO	All disciplines	~€1 bn	Pioneer of responsible research assessment reform (Recognition & Rewards).
SE	VR	All disciplines	~€900 mn	Strong alignment with DORA; emphasis on fairness, diversity, and open science.
US	NSF	Science & engineering	~\$9.5 bn	Funds ~25% of federally supported basic research in the U.S.
US	NIH	Biomedical & health	~\$45 bn	Largest biomedical research funder globally; gold standard peer review model.
JP	JSPS	All disciplines	~€1.55 bn	Funds international collaborations and fellowships.

CN	NSFC	All disciplines	~€18.6 bn	Largest basic research funder in China; evolving reform of metric reliance.
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Table 2. Selected Private Research Funders

Organisation	Primary Sector	Annual Budget	Notes
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation	Global Health, Development	~\$5 bn	Large-scale global health initiatives and individual grants.
Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI)	Biomedical Research	~€930 mn	Long-term funding for exceptional individual scientists.
Wellcome Trust	Biomedical Sciences	~€1.4 bn	Funds large initiatives and fellowships; leading DORA signatory.
Chan Zuckerberg Initiative	Science, Education, Social Justice	~\$500 mn	Focus on collaborative projects and early-career fellowships.

Table 3. Assessment Approaches and Reform Alignment of Major Funders

Agency	Alignment & Policy Goals	Changes / Action Areas	Review Structure	Metric Role
ERC / Horizon Europe	Strong alignment: DORA, CoARA, Open Science; excellence only for ERC	Narrative CV (max 10 publications/research outputs); shift to impact-based criteria in non-ERC programmes	Multi-stage; remote reviewers + expert panels; international evaluators	Minimal
UKRI (UK)	Explicit commitment to responsible assessment; reducing metric reliance	Narrative CVs (R4RI); diverse outputs beyond publications; partial randomisation experiments	2–3 external reviewers → applicant response → panel ranking	Low
ANR (FR)	Aligned with Open Science Plan; reduced administrative burden; interdisciplinarity	Two-stage calls; simplified proposals; limits on publication lists	External reviewers + international panels	Moderate
DFG (DE)	Quality over quantity; long-standing critique of metric misuse	Limits on publication lists; focus on content quality	Elected review boards + ad hoc reviewers; panel deliberation central	Low
NWO (NL)	Leading reformer; Recognition & Rewards; CoARA alignment	Narrative CVs; banning journal metrics; emphasis on team science	Multi-stage; external reviewers + panels; rebuttal phase	Minimal

VR (SE)	Strong DORA alignment; fairness and diversity; open science	Broader CV formats; gender equality measures; open science practices	Panel-based; structured scoring; expert selection by competence	Low
NSF (US)	Longstanding holistic criteria (intellectual merit + broader impacts)	Narrative-style biosketch; limits on publication lists	External reviewers + panels; programme officer oversight	Low (formal); moderate (informal)
NIH (US)	Focus on rigour, reproducibility, transparency; internal reform ongoing	Biosketch (narrative CV); quality over quantity; AI prohibition in review	Two-stage: study sections + council review	Low (formal); moderate (informal)
MUR / ANVUR (IT)	Formally engaged in reform; joined CoARA; structurally still metric-driven	Attempts to introduce CoARA principles did not yet succeed systemically	Combination of bibliometric thresholds + peer review panels	High
NSFC (CN)	Strong policy push against 'publish or perish' metrics; top-down reform	Policies discouraging overreliance on journal indicators; promoting originality	Panel + reviewer system; large reviewer pools; evolving reforms	Declining (formally)

3.6 Comparative Analysis: How “Excellence” is Operationalised

Even if all systems say “we fund excellence”, they operationalise “excellence” very differently. The table below compares four European systems in detail, illustrating how evaluation principles shape research cultures.

Table 4. Comparative Evaluation Cultures in Four European Systems

Dimension	Germany (DFG)	Sweden (VR)	France (ANR)	Italy (MUR+ANVUR)
CV format	Short; 5–10 selected publications; key contributions & role	Narrative CV; selected outputs; open science sections	Traditional CV + publication list; increasing narrative elements	Full publication list; bibliometrics (h-index, citations); formal thresholds
Main driver of evaluation	Scientific idea	Quality + integrity	Strategy + quality	Track record
Role of bibliometrics	Low	Low	Moderate (implicit)	High
Risk tolerance	Medium–high	Medium	Medium–low	Low
Reviewer focus	Proposal content; idea quality; conceptual contribution	Holistic: idea + researcher + practices; reproducibility	Mixed: scientific judgment + alignment with national priorities	Applicant strength; institutional prestige; track record
What the system produces	Theory-driven; moderate-to-high risk tolerance	Robust, methodologically	Projects aligned with strategic	Safer proposals from established researchers;

		strong; open science emphasis	themes; moderate conservatism	limited space for high-risk science
Excellence means	Intellectual strength	Quality + integrity	Quality + relevance	Demonstrated performance

These differences have important implications for career incentives. There is still a general mismatch in career incentives, as universities still hire and promote based on publications and citations. While funding agencies move toward “quality over quantity”, universities still reward quantity. This misalignment creates a systemic tension that funding policy alone cannot resolve—requiring coordinated action by both funders and academic institutions.

Evaluation principles not only shape research outputs but also influence the careers—and may lead to burnout—of researchers. There is growing concern that research careers are becoming less attractive due to overwhelming performance pressures. A well-designed evaluation system is one that stimulates the best science while protecting the conditions under which outstanding scientists can flourish.

Section 4. Comparing International Models and Drawing Lessons

4.1 Governance Modalities for Independent and High-Quality Evaluation

European Research Council (ERC)

The ERC’s governance model is built on the ERC Scientific Council—22 eminent scientists elected by co-optation for their personal scientific excellence and acting in full independence. The Scientific Council sets all scientific priorities, adopts the Work Programme, and oversees the integrity of evaluation. The ERCEA (Executive Agency) provides administrative and operational support manage Calls, organise the scientific evaluation procedures as well as ethics review, and their follow up -from granting to analysis and communication of evaluation results and project results. Evaluation relies on 28 domain-specific panels of 10–16 generalist panel members, supplemented by discipline-specific remote referees. Turnover of evaluators is systematic, trying to prevent the formation of evaluation ‘clubs’. The ERC also monitors evaluation outcomes to detect possible systematic biases and introduces corrective measures accordingly.

National Institutes of Health (NIH)

In broad brush strokes, at NIH, historically, the Center for Scientific Review (CSR) manages the peer review for investigator-initiated research centrally, while Institute and Centers conduct peer review for their own specific initiatives. Recently, the CSR is taking a more central role than Institutes and Centers in conducting most of the peer review for the funding agency. Scientific Review Officers—former academics with deep domain expertise—organise and oversee study sections while maintaining strict separation from the scientific evaluation itself. Peer Review Oversight Groups conduct regular independent audits and report directly to the NIH Director.

This combination of operational professionalism and continuous oversight has allowed the NIH peer review system to evolve and self-correct over decades.

Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG)

The DFG is unique in that its review board members are elected by the scientific community itself—rather than appointed by the funder—which provides a democratic legitimacy that is rare internationally. A three-stage quality assurance process (individual reviewers → review boards → Joint Committee) separates the functions of expert opinion, comparative evaluation, and final funding decision. An independent Quality and Programme Management unit verifies procedural compliance before decisions reach the Joint Committee.

Key comparative highlights

Selecting the Scientifically Strongest Applications

The ERC's 'excellence only' principle—where scientific excellence is the sole criterion, no "impact" or "implementation" sections are included in the application, and no thematic or geographic quotas apply—has produced a grant portfolio with very high bibliometric impact and significant impacts beyond science ¹⁰.

However, "impact" and "implementation" criteria at application and evaluation stage may still be relevant for some research programmes.

A nuanced system may adopt excellence as the primary criterion while introducing secondary criteria (e.g. career stage, host institution category, geographic distribution, impact beyond science) as tie-breakers at the margin of fundability, provided these are pre-specified, transparent, and proportionate.

Supporting Early-Career Researchers and Combating Brain Drain

Italy's brain drain problem—the emigration of talented early-career researchers to better-funded and better-governed systems abroad—is both a symptom and a cause of systemic weakness. Dedicated career-stage grant schemes (equivalent to the ERC Starting/Consolidator model) are among the most effective tools available. The ERC portability mechanism, which allows a grant to follow an outstanding researcher to any European institution, is a powerful anti-brain drain tool that Italy should seek to emulate domestically.

Balance Between Collaborative and Individual Grants

A well-designed portfolio balances individual PI grants with collaborative or network grants that enable large-scale, interdisciplinary, or translational research. Italy's PRIN model has historically favoured coordinated multi-unit projects; recent reforms move towards strengthening PI-centric instruments. Both dimensions are needed.

Section 5. Key Findings and Recommendations

¹⁰ [Mapping ERC Frontier Research: An Overview](#); [New study reveals how frontier research spurs patented inventions|ERC](#)

5.1 Key Findings

Our analysis of international best practice, of Italy's specific context, and of recent international debates on research assessment reform yields the following key findings:

1. Peer review remains the gold standard for evaluating research proposals. Its limitations are real but addressable through careful design; no robust alternative has been demonstrated at scale. Independence of the peer reviewers, clarity of the evaluation criteria and their consistent use are among the key features to be safeguarded.
2. Professional peer review and programme management—the research programme officer scientific review officer functions—are the most important institutional investments a funding body can make. Without it, the integrity and quality of peer review cannot be sustained.
3. Internationalisation of review panels is essential in a relatively small scientific community to manage conflicts of interest and ensure internationally calibrated quality standards.
4. Predictability and regularity of calls are preconditions for effective researcher planning. Italy has made important structural improvements in this area; they must be sustained and deepened.
5. Bibliometric indicators are useful for post-hoc portfolio evaluation but should not drive ex-ante proposal evaluation, where they distort incentives and disadvantage interdisciplinary and high-risk science. International consensus—from DORA through CoARA—confirms this shift.
6. The body responsible for defining reviewer selection criteria and maintaining lists of eligible evaluators must be governed by principles of independence, international composition, and freedom from structural conflicts of interest that would arise from exclusive national academic membership.
7. The use of generative AI by peer reviewers poses an acute and immediate threat to confidentiality and review quality, requiring clear guidelines and focusing on the accountability of the researchers for the applications and reviews submitted.
8. Success rates below approximately 15% challenge the fairness of the selection and discard potentially excellent research; investing in increasing the amount of fundable research reduces this problem more effectively than refining the selection methodology.
9. Political independence of scientific governance is a non-negotiable prerequisite for a credible system, requiring clear statutory delineation of roles.
10. Early-career researchers' support and grant portability are among the most powerful anti-brain drain tools available and should be prioritised in Italy's portfolio design.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on our analysis, we present the following ten recommendations to the Italian Ministry of University and Research. These are addressed to MUR and to any agency to which MUR may delegate the management of research funding programmes. They are presented in priority order and should be considered as an integrated package rather than a menu of options.

R1. Establish a permanent, professional grant review infrastructure

MUR should establish, within its structure or through a dedicated agency, a permanent infrastructure of professionals Peer Review and Research Programme Officers (RPOs), modelled on ERC and NIH's Scientific Review and Program Officers. These officers should: (1) have deep scientific expertise in their areas; (2) be full-time civil servants with no grantee role; (3) be responsible for the process and management of review sessions without entering into scientific evaluation; (4) manage COI; (5) identify and help the scientific council or similar body to select; brief reviewers; and (6) generate systematic reporting and institutional memory. Career pathways, selection criteria, and training protocols for RPOs should be formally codified. Separate offices for different scientific domains should be created to ensure field-appropriate expertise while ensuring forms of reciprocal information and 'intercalibration' of procedures to foster 'whole science approaches' in Call Management and Evaluation.

R2. Ensure the scientific independence of governance from political authority

MUR should establish, in legislation, a Scientific Advisory Council analogous to the ERC Scientific Council, composed of eminent scientists and -as relevant- industry and civil society representatives acting in a personal capacity, with clear statutory independence from the Ministry and clear rules on avoidance of Conflict of Interest. This Council should have exclusive authority over: the design of evaluation criteria; the selection of panel chairs and members; the monitoring of evaluation integrity; and the identification of systemic biases and ways of addressing them. It should also develop a strategy related to the main types of grants and their purpose. Political authorities retain legitimate oversight over overall budgets, broad strategic priorities, and accountability for outcomes, but must have no role in individual grant or reviewer selection.

R3. Reform the governance of the reviewer selection and management function

The body responsible for defining criteria for the selection and maintenance of reviewer pools and evaluation committee lists should be reformed according to the following principles, which align with international best practice and the requirements of impartiality:

- Composition that guarantees independence: the membership of this body should not be drawn exclusively from the Italian national academic community, in order to avoid structural conflicts of interest with the applicant population it governs. A significant share of international members of recognised scientific standing should be included.
- Cross-sectoral representation: in addition to eminent scientists, the body should include – where appropriate – representatives from the non-profit sector, industry, and civil society (e.g. patient) organisations, reflecting the broader ecosystem of research users and stakeholders.
- Transparent, merit-based and DORA-aligned criteria: the criteria for inclusion of experts in reviewer lists should be based on demonstrated scientific excellence and domain expertise, not on bibliometric thresholds applied mechanically. Criteria should be published, regularly reviewed, and updated to reflect evolving responsible research assessment norms.
- Strict term limits and rotation: all members of the reviewer governance body should serve for defined, non-renewable terms, ensuring regular renewal and preventing the entrenchment of influence networks.
- Mandatory COI management: members of the reviewer governance body must be subject to the same conflict-of-interest disclosure and management regime as peer reviewers, with particular attention to conflicts arising from their institutional affiliations and scientific community memberships.

- Public accountability: the membership, criteria, and annual activities of this body should be published on the MUR website, enabling external scrutiny by the scientific community and the public.

R4. Internationalise review panels systematically

A minimum proportion of 50 % of panelists in review sessions should be scientists not based in Italy and of international standing. The same should apply to external specialist reviewers. Italian scientists working abroad should be actively recruited as reviewers, as their dual perspective—international scientific standing combined with understanding of the Italian context—adds particular value. Reviewer databases should be continuously maintained and expanded, targeting at least 5,000–10,000 international experts across all relevant scientific domains.

R5. Implement rigorous, codified conflict-of-interest management

MUR should adopt a formal COI policy based on the EC and NIH models, with explicit typologies of direct and indirect, factual and perceived conflicts, defined management mechanisms ('out of Call' vs. 'out of the room'), mandatory pre-session electronic certification by all reviewers, and defined consequences for undisclosed conflicts. The policy should cover financial, professional, competitive, and personal conflicts. RPOs should screen proposals for COIs before assigning reviewers, and reviewers must self-declare. Bi-annual review of the policy is recommended.

R6. Reform research assessment criteria in line with DORA and CoARA

MUR should formally adopt the principles of the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) and the Coalition for the Assessment of Research (CoARA) in all its competitive funding instruments. Concretely, this means: (a) eliminating the use of journal impact factors and aggregate bibliometric thresholds as formal eligibility or scoring criteria; (b) introducing narrative CV formats that allow applicants to describe their contributions in context; (c) recognising a broad range of research outputs beyond publications (datasets, software, patents, artistic exhibitions related to research discoveries, scientific contributions to policy developments and legislation, public engagement on scientific matters –including ethical aspects); and (d) explicitly accommodating non-standard career paths and career breaks in all eligibility and evaluation criteria.

R7. Design evaluation panels to combine generalist and specialist review

Each evaluation should deploy: (a) a panel of generalist reviewers within the broad scientific domain, who participate in collective deliberation; and (b) at least two or three specialist remote reviewers selected ad hoc for each proposal based on competence in its specific sub-field. . Panel sessions should be chaired by a scientist with proven leadership experience, identified by the RPO and selected by the Scientific Advisory Council.

R8. Provide detailed written feedback to all applicants

Every applicant should receive a final summary statement reflecting the consensus of the evaluation panel —prepared by the panel with the assistance of RPO —as well as the anonymised individual reviewer assessments, and the final scores and ranking. This document serves the dual function of ensuring transparency and serving as a formative instrument for researchers to improve future submissions. For triaged proposals, minimum-level written feedback should still be provided.

R9. Maintain regular, predictable call cycles with multi-year budget certainty and explicitly prohibit misuse of AI

Call calendars should be published at least twelve months in advance. Budget envelopes should be committed on a multi-year basis and publicly disclosed at the time of call publication. Success rates should be explicitly targeted (aiming for 15–25%) and published alongside outcome statistics. MUR should also adopt a formal policy endorsing the EU Guidelines on the responsible use of generative AI in science and emphasise the accountability of researchers for the content of their submissions –whether applications or reviews. It should also consider prohibiting peer reviewers from using generative AI tools for analysing, summarising, or critiquing grant proposals (following NIH Notice NOT-OD-23-149), and clarify that applications substantially generated by AI are not considered original submissions.

R10. Reinforce a dedicated early-career researcher grant scheme and establish a Peer Review Oversight Function

MUR should reinforce the dedicated grant scheme for early-career independent researchers— analogous to the ERC Starting Grant—of sufficient size to enable a meaningful independent research programme (indicatively EUR 1 –1.5 million over 4–5 years), open to researchers typically within 2–8 years of their PhD, with a portability clause allowing recipients to transfer their grant to a new host institution. Simultaneously, a standing Peer Review Oversight Group should be established within the Scientific Advisory Council's mandate to conduct regular independent reviews of the evaluation process, analyse outcomes for systematic biases, and report publicly to MUR with recommendations for improvement. Given the fast developments in the use of AI in science and more broadly, as well as concerns over its currently concentrated ownership structure, it is imperative to closely monitor developments also with regard to its use in research proposals applications and evaluation.

Principal Sources Consulted

Key Institutional Sources (online, consulted April 2026)

- Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC): <https://www.amrc.org.uk>
- CoARA – Coalition for the Assessment of Research: <https://coara.eu>
- CoARA Italia: <https://www.coara-italia.it>
- DFG Decision-Making Process for Individual Grants: <https://www.dfg.de/en/research-funding/proposal-funding-process/decision-making-process/individual-grants>
- DFG Review Criteria and Quality Assurance: <https://www.dfg.de/en/research-funding/proposal-funding-process/decision-making-process/review-criteria>
- DORA – San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment: <https://sfdora.org>
- ERC Advanced Grant Evaluation Process and Information for Applicants: <https://erc.europa.eu/apply-grant/advanced-grant>; European Research Council Frontier Research Grants – Information for Applicants to the Advanced Grant Call
- ERC Guide for Peer Reviewers 2025: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/experts/guide-for-peer-reviewers_he-erc-stg-cog_en.pdf

- ERC Rules on Conflict of Interest and Scientific Misconduct for Applicants and Reviewers: <https://erc.europa.eu/about-erc/erc-standing-committees/conflict-interests-scientific-misconduct-and-ethics>
- ERC Rules on Conflict of Interest for ERC Scientific Council Members: https://erc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/file/Rules_Procedure_and_Code_Conduct_ERC_Scientific_Council.pdf
- ERC Work Programme 2026: ERC Work Programme 2026 adopted | ERC
- EU Guidelines on the Responsible Use of Generative AI in Science: https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/news/all-research-and-innovation-news/guidelines-responsible-use-generative-ai-research-developed-european-research-area-forum-2024-03-20_en
- Global Research Council – Responsible Research Assessment Survey (2024)
- Heitor Report “Act, Align, Accelerate” (2024): European Commission expert group on the next Framework Programme
- Leiden Manifesto for Research Metrics: <http://www.leidenmanifesto.org>
- MUR Piano Triennale della Ricerca 2026–2028 (D.M. 150/2026): <https://www.mur.gov.it>
- MUR PRIN Portal: <https://prin.mur.gov.it/>
- NIH Center for Scientific Review: <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/peer/peer.htm>
- NIH Notice NOT-OD-23-149 (Prohibition of Generative AI in Peer Review): <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-23-149.html>
- NIH Notice NOT-OD-25-132 (AI Use in Applications and Application Caps): <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-25-132.html>
- NSF Overview of the NSF Proposal and Award Process: <https://www.nsf.gov/funding/overview>

Nota: NSF and other national funders in Europe look missing (to be listed in alphabetical order). Key Documents Provided by MUR Expert Group

- Comparative Analysis of International Research Funder Policies on Research Assessment (internal working document, April 2026)
- Expert Group Draft Outline and Recommendations (Expert_group_evaluation_Draft_outline.pdf)
- MUR Expert Group: Linee Guida draft (Linee_guida.docx)
- Pasinelli F. (2007), Valutare la ricerca per finanziarla: la proposta di un modello, *Economia dei Servizi*, 3/2007, pp. 483–500.