

Code of Conduct for Reviewers of Project Proposals

Czech Science Foundation

Preamble

The aim of this Code of Conduct is to set the basic rules for reviewers evaluating the grant projects submitted to the public tenders in research, experimental development and innovation according to Act No. 130/2002 Coll., on Support for Research, Experimental Development and Innovation from Public Funds and on the Amendment to Certain Related Acts (the Research and Development Act), as amended, for the Czech Science Foundation and to both support and outline the desirable standards of behaviour towards the public as well as towards their colleagues, the applicants, and the drafters of the grant project proposals. In addition, the professional public shall be informed of the behaviour that is expected from the reviewers.

The basic values each reviewer shall adhere to are legality, transparency, fair approach to all natural and legal persons, impartiality, professionalism, and tact. Respecting these values shall help to create a base on which confidence of the public in the public administration could be established and developed.

One of the foremost duties of the research community is to formulate the principles of research, to define the criteria for proper research behaviour, to maximise the quality of research, and to respond adequately to violations of research integrity. The primary purpose of this Code of Conduct is to help realise this responsibility and to serve the research community as a framework for self-regulation. It describes professional, legal and ethical responsibilities, and acknowledges the importance of the institutional settings in which research is organised.

The conduct of science rests on basic principles valid in all countries and in all scientific disciplines. The first among these is honesty towards oneself and towards others. The scientific professionalism shall be based on this approach.

A reviewer shall execute his work in accordance with highest possible standards, with tact and honesty, to his/her best knowledge and ability.

General Principles

The basic values each reviewer shall adhere to are legality, transparency, fair approach to all natural and legal persons, impartiality, professionalism, and tact.

Legality – a reviewer adheres to the Constitution and the valid legal rules of the Czech Republic and acts in accordance to the rules of the Czech Science Foundation as well as to those of this Code of Conduct.

Transparency – a researcher conducts his work as a reviewer in transparent and justifiable manner, not liable to any external pressures.

Fairness – a reviewer approaches all his colleagues, the research community, and the public with tact, honesty, and respect.

Impartiality – a reviewer does not consciously take side to harm or to benefit any natural or legal person; in any moment, he acts impartially and with whole objectivity.

Professionalism – a reviewer keeps his high moral and professional standards at any point of the conduct of his work, shows tact and understanding, but always acts to his best knowledge and ability.

Tact – a reviewer adheres to the rules of good manners, encourages ethical behaviour, and contributes to the development of fair and impartial environment.

Confidentiality

All the information, including personal data, provided or revealed to a researcher during the conduct of his work as a reviewer, are considered strictly confidential and therefore shall be kept in secret. Such information and documents may be used to the purposes of evaluation only and under no circumstances may be provided to a third party. Reviewers are bound to respect the intellectual property of the authors of the evaluated project proposals.

The confidential information is to be used and stored with all the care possible and all feasible provisions should be adopted in order to protect it.

The rule of confidentiality does not apply to violations of research integrity, corruption or deceptions. Such behaviour is to be reported to the chairman and vice-chairman of the respective panel or discipline committee and to the head of the respective department of the Czech Science Foundation Office.

Other Obligations of a Reviewer

A reviewer is especially obliged:

- to conduct the work assigned to him in person;
- to protect the intellectual property of the authors of reviewed manuscripts, project proposals, and reports, and not to use the information included in such materials to another purpose than writing the assessment including providing them to a third person;
- not to deliberately cause delays in order to obtain benefit for himself or for a third party;
- to decline a request for an expert assessment should he not be able to provide an impartial, objective evaluation due to personal interest, and to do his best to avoid any conflict of interest; should it not be possible, he is obliged to disclose it;
- to conduct his work with full responsibility, on grounds of profound knowledge of all relevant materials, not liable to any external pressure;
- to prove tact while writing a verbal assessment;
- to adhere the objective criteria set by the Czech Science Foundation as a base for evaluation, to follow the rules of the Czech Science Foundation, and to demand similar behaviour from the other reviewers.

As serious violations of these obligations are considered:

- to allow a provider of targeted aid / a sponsor to endanger the independency of research;
- to accuse a researcher of violating research integrity in order to cause a harm;
- to provide a misleading account of achievements of a drafter;
- to provide a misleading account of research results;
- to misuse one's superiority to disrupt the correctness of evaluation;
- to disregard alleged violation of research integrity or to keep such a behaviour in secret;
- to establish or to support periodicals endangering the quality of the control of research ("predatory journals").

Conflict of Interest

A reviewer is obliged to avoid acting in a manner that might lead to a conflict between public and his private interest. The latter is considered to concern any benefit for him, his family, relatives, close persons, as well as any natural or legal persons in past or present business, political, or other relation to him.

A researcher shall not use any information related to his work as a reviewer to his own advantage or to advantage of a third party.

Should a researcher find any personal interest within the scope of his work as a reviewer, he is obliged to disclose such circumstances to the chairman and vice-chairman of the respective discipline committee and to the head of the respective department of the Czech Science Foundation Office. A reviewer having conflict of interests shall be excluded from further evaluation.

A reviewer is obliged to disclose even his own doubts concerning possible conflict of interest. Should such doubts arise, the reviewer shall be excluded from the evaluation process, unless the Czech Science Foundation Board decides otherwise.

As a conflict of interest are considered in particular:

- a reviewer is in an employment or similar relationship with an institution of a drafter or a co-drafter on a level of a faculty or an institute;
- a reviewer is in a close personal relationship with a drafter or a co-drafter.

Should a reviewer be biased from the above or any other reasons, and the conflict of interest is disclosed (or known from open sources), he is not allowed to evaluate the project concerned.

Gifts and benefits

A reviewer shall not accept or require any gifts, favours or other benefits which may affect or seemingly affect the evaluation or violate the impartial approach to it.

A reviewer shall not offer or provide any benefits associated with the evaluation process.

A reviewer shall not allow to find himself obliged to return a favour or being accessible to inappropriate influence.

Should a researcher be offered any favour related to his work as a reviewer, he is obliged to report it to the chairman and vice-chairman of the respective discipline committee or panel and to the head of the respective department of the Czech Science Foundation Office.

Concluding Covenant

Each reviewer is obliged to become acquainted with this Code of Conduct and to act in accordance with it.

A reviewer is aware that any violation of the Code of Conduct has an impact on the Czech Science Foundation as a whole; more precisely, it causes a serious injury to the reputation of the Czech Science Foundation. Simultaneously, the whole evaluation process may be called into question, which may endanger the reputation of the Czech Science Foundation and result in considerable damage.

This Code of Conduct was approved by the Czech Science Foundation Board on 22 June 2018 and it shall become valid and come into force on the same day. It is obligatory to every reviewer of the Czech Science Foundation.

Prague, on June 22, 2018

RNDr. Alice Valkárová, DrSc
President of the Czech Science Foundation