

Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment

CoARA Boost Cascade Funding Programme

Guidelines for Reviewers – Second Round

Opening: 21 February 2025

Closing: 21 April 2025 at 17:00 CEST

Funding Call information, documents and templates:

<https://coara.eu/second-call-for-cascade-funding/>

Funding Call Application Platform:

https://esf.smartsimple.ie/s_signup.jsp?token=XVtQC1oGYV5ZSxtZXxJXR1JWYUIIH3Rt



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Introduction

The aim of the document “Guidelines for Reviewers” is to provide support materials and instructions to reviewers evaluating proposals for the second Cascade Funding Call under the CoARA Boost project. Reviewers’ contributions are essential to the success of the Call, and your reflections and review experience in the first call positively impacted the design of the second call.

Key figures

Total funding	Up to 1.22 M €
Funding per project	30,000 EUR to 60,000 EUR: a lump sum, depending on the type of project
Number of projects to be funded	20–25 projects
Target applicants	Legal entities interested in reforming research assessment practices in their institutions
2nd call opens	21 February 2025 – 15 April 2025
Duration of the projects	Implementation within 12 months after signature of a Third-Party Project Agreement – TPPA
Start of the projects	Within 3 months from TPPA signature

Context of the call

Over 800 research organisations, funders, assessment authorities, professional societies, and their associations have agreed on a common direction and principles for reforming the assessment of research, researchers and research organisations, outlined in the [Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment](#). They have also committed to implement changes within their organisations.



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The [Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment](#), CoARA, offers a platform for collaboration and mutual learning. However, given the complexity of the reform process, **providing support for institutions to test, design, and carry out in-depth institutional changes** is crucial to implement the Agreement commitments.

The CoARA Boost project, funded by the European Union, strengthens CoARA's operational capacity. It provides a means to develop a critical mass for reforming research assessment, to generate gravitas for new members as well as to investigate and implement new models for research assessment. Find out more about the project here: [CoARA Boost Project](#)

The Cascade Funding Programme within CoARA Boost represents more than half of the project's overall budget. This programme will support a minimum of 50 organisations in tackling specific challenges related to reforming research assessment and implementing the Agreement commitments. By supporting different types of proposals, the programme will maintain a balanced portfolio of projects. The cascade funding programme consists of two rounds of open calls, the first one launched in April 2024 and second one in February 2025.

Summary of the call

CoARA Boost's Cascade Funding calls facilitate institutional change and targets pilot and exchange-of-knowledge initiatives. It will fund +20 projects facilitating knowledge-exchange, piloting new initiatives within institutions, and enabling lasting institutional change. As such, it encourages and supports research organisations to investigate and test what will efficiently work 'in real life'. More specifically, the Call aims to:

- Facilitate the exchange, transfer and adaptation of proven good practices and their adoption in research organisations.
- Catalyse the set-up or transformation of research assessment practices and tools in line with the commitments of the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment.
- Support the development and testing of new and innovative research assessment approaches, models and procedures.

Projects can be proposed by any of the organisation types specified below through a cascading grant mechanism. By the end of the programme, it is expected to have a **diverse portfolio of projects available that will translate the shared vision**



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outlined in the Agreement into tangible, lasting institutional changes in research assessment practices.

Types of projects

The CoARA Boost cascading grants are a tool for organisations to implement the 10 commitments that are enshrined in the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment (ARRA) and facilitate institutional change in the context of research assessment. The activities eligible for support must demonstrate the commitment to a systemic change with medium-term or long-term trajectories and impact. The grants will support organisations to develop, pilot and implement, assessment criteria, tools and processes; while avoiding contradictions across assessment systems, types and purposes, through continuous dialogue. There is room for diverse starting points and approaches. As part of the Call, three types of projects will be supported. These reflect different stages of an institution's reform journey, namely: 1. knowledge exchange (teaming projects), 2. piloting (institutional pilot projects), and 3. paving the way for a lasting change (institutional change projects). Their description is provided in DOCUMENT 1.

Relevant dates

Applications

Opening: 21.02.2025

Deadline for submission: 15.04.2025, 17:00h CEST

Rules and conditions

Rules and conditions

Eligible countries

As the call is meant to support institutions from across the European Research Area (ERA), only legal entities based in the EU Member States and [countries associated to the Horizon Europe Framework Programme for Research and Innovation](#) (see



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under the heading “Third countries associated to Horizon Europe”) are eligible to apply.

For more details on eligibility details, please consult [FAQ](#).

Eligible beneficiaries

The primary targets of the CoARA Boost Cascade Funding Programme are legal entities of the following types:

- Academies, learned societies that implement some form of research assessment,
- National/regional authorities or agencies that implement some form of research assessment,
- Public or private research funding organisations,
- Research centres, research infrastructures,
- Universities,
- Other relevant non-for-profit organisations that implement some form of research assessment.

Applications from faculties of universities are also eligible. However, the application needs to be formally in the name of the university (applicant), and not the faculty.

Consortium members of the CoARA Boost project are not eligible to participate in the call. In the case of beneficiaries that are umbrella organisations, their member organisations are eligible. Nominating organisations of the CoARA Steering Board members are also eligible, as the Steering Board does not directly participate in the evaluation of the proposals. The Steering Board will not have any role in both the evaluation and selection of winning applications.

To ensure diversity in the allocation of resources, [beneficiaries of the first round of the CoARA Boost Cascade Funding](#) are not eligible to apply.



Financial Support

CoARA Boost Cascade Funding will only provide financial support to entities (registered in Member States or associated countries) for the successful projects submitted to this open call.

The total budget available for this second call is 1.22M EUR

Types of projects	Maximum grant amount	Maximum project duration
1. Teaming projects	40 k€	1 year
2. Institutional pilot projects	30 k€	1 year
3. Institutional change projects	60 k€	1 year

Evaluation Procedure

Formal eligibility check: Performed by CoARA Secretariat. **End of April 2025**

Pre-assessment: All applications will be made available to the review panel prior to the panel meetings, for each application to be pre-assessed by two panel members and read by all panel members. Each submission will be reviewed by one Lead Reviewer panellist and one Secondary Reviewer panellist. They will have access to each other's reviews. **May 2025**

Review panels: During the review panel meetings (teleconference), each application will be presented by their reviewers and discussed by the full panel. Each application will be presented by Lead Reviewer panellists who will introduce both pre-assessments alongside the application. At the end of each panel, recommendations for funding allocation ('to be funded', 'to be funded if funding available', 'not to be funded') will be collectively agreed by the panellists. **June 2025**

Panel chairs' meeting: During the panel chairs meeting (teleconference), chairs of the topical panels bring results of their respective topical panels together. They



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agree on the overall funding recommendations and make final selection decisions.

End of June 2025

Results: The panel members will then produce a consensus report for each application, summarising the panel discussions. Narrative assessment from the consensus reports will be communicated to the applicants, together with information on which evaluation brackets/quadrant the project fell into:

- To be funded with strong consensus
- To be funded – close to the cut-off line
- Not to be funded – close to the cut-off line
- Not to be funded.

Mid-July 2025

Further information on diversity measures when compiling the pool of reviewers as well as a detailed description of the evaluation process can be found in document 2: EVALUATION GUIDELINES.

Evaluation Criteria

Panellists will evaluate the proposals considering three criteria. Criteria will bear an equal weight in the assessment and each criterion will be qualitatively assessed following the scales provided in the table below. Scoring is complemented by comments from reviewers (min. 80 words per criterion).

Reviewers will score each award criterion on a scale from 0 to 5:

Score	Definition
0	Proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.
1	Poor – criterion is inadequately addressed or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
2	Fair – proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses
3	Good – proposal addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present.
4	Very good- proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present.



5	The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.
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The total score will be calculated as the sum of the score of the three evaluation criteria. The threshold for each criterion will be three (3), while the overall score threshold will be ten (10). That means if a proposal receives less than 3 in one criterion or less than 10 overall score, will not be recommended for funding by the independent evaluators and will be automatically rejected.

The scoring sheet and detailed evaluation criteria can be found in Annex 3.

The reviewers shall complete their review via the SmartSimple platform (operated by [ESF](#)). The link to the SmartSimple Platform with technical Guidelines will be provided by email to the invited Reviewers.

Contact information

Any questions regarding the call can be directed to the CoARA Secretariat: funding@coara.org

In case of technical questions concerning the submission platform SmartSimple (operated by [ESF](#)) please reach out to: esf-panels@esf.org

An online information session for interested parties has been organised on the 30 of January 2025 at 14:00 CET, the materials presented during the session are available here: <https://zenodo.org/records/14794738>

Acknowledgement

We would like to extend our sincerest gratitude to all reviewers who have dedicated their time and expertise to enhance the quality of the first Cascade Funding Call under the CoARA Boost project. Thank you for your invaluable contributions in advancing research assessment.

