RESEARCH & INNOVATION FOUNDATION

2016-2020 RESTART SEARCH

THE RESEARCH AND INNOVATION FOUNDATION PROGRAMMES FOR RESEARCH, TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT AND INNOVATION "RESTART 2016 – 2020"

GUIDE FOR EVALUATORS
(Two-stage Evaluation)

PROPOSAL DETAILS	
PILLAR	II. SUSTAINABLE RTDI SYSTEM
PROGRAMME	FAST TRACK INNOVATION CYBERSECURITY
CALL IDENTIFIER	NCC-CY-FTI/1026

Co-funded by the European Union

Republic of Cyprus

RESEARCH & INNOVATION FOUNDATION

NCC CYBERSECURITY NATIONAL COORDINATION CENTRE CYPRUS

COMMISSIONER OF COMMUNICATIONS

Office of the Commissioner for Electronic Communications and Postal Regulation

The Programme is co-financed by the Republic of Cyprus and the Digital Europe Programme of the European Union

GUIDELINES AND GENERAL INFORMATION FOR EVALUATORS

1. The Proposals, which the Evaluators are called upon to evaluate, were submitted under the **«Fast Track Innovation - Cybersecurity» Programme** within the framework of the «RESTART 2016-2020» Programmes for Research, Technological Development and Innovation for the period May 2022 - December 2026 of the Research and Innovation Foundation.
2. The objectives of the Programme and all necessary definitions and procedures are described in the relevant **Call for Proposal**.
3. Before producing the Evaluation Report, Evaluators are expected to study the relevant Proposal thoroughly. These consist of:
    - Proposal Part A – General Information & Budget,
    - Proposal Part B – Technical Annex, and
    - Annex I – Curricula Vitae
4. The Evaluation Procedure is carried out on the Research and Innovation Foundation's (RIF) IRIS (**Innovation Research Information System**) Portal (https://iris.research.org.cy/#!/). Evaluators should first register on the Portal in order to be granted access to the Proposal and the relevant documents.
5. The Evaluation Procedure for the «Fast Track Innovation Cybersecurity» Programme is carried out in two (2) Stages:
    - In Stage I of the Evaluation Procedure each proposal is evaluated remotely by **two (2) Experts**, which: (a) are specialists in the proposal topic, and/or (b) have good knowledge of the business environment in the proposal field. Proposals securing a score that equals or exceeds the set threshold (12.00/15.00) qualify for Stage II.
    - Stage II Evaluation is carried out by an **Independent Evaluation Committee,** comprising Experts with business background.

Stage I – Remote Evaluation by 2 Experts:

6. In Stage I of the Evaluation Procedure, each Evaluator fills his / her own Evaluation Report Form, which consists of 3 Parts.
7. In Part I, the Evaluator should provide a fully justified assessment on whether:

a. A fully justified assessment on whether the Proposal is **compatible with:**

i. the objectives of the selected Programme, and
ii. the objectives of the specific Call of Proposals, and
iii. the types of activities allowed by the Call for Proposals, and
iv. the «Do No Significant Harm» Principle.

b. A score on each of the **3 evaluation criteria (assigning marks between 0,00 and 5,00 with an accuracy of 0,25 marks)** as well as relevant comments and detailed justification. It is noted that each criterion carries a **different weight**, as shown on the respective part of the Evaluation Report Form.

The Evaluator should not proceed with the scientific evaluation of the 3 criteria should a Proposal fail the compatibility assessment, in any of the above compatibility criteria.

8. The Evaluation of all Research and Innovation Proposals submitted to the RIF, under the RESTART 2016-2020 Programmes, is based on the following criteria:
    - Excellence,
    - Added Value and Benefit, and
    - Implementation.

    The content of the criteria is specified in each **Call for Proposals** so that it expresses each Programme's philosophy and aims, and differences pertaining to the interpretation, analysis and specialisation of each criterion and its weight over the total evaluation score. The description of each criterion **is available in Part I of the present document**. Evaluators are kindly requested to **read the description of each Criterion thoroughly** before assigning their scores.

    It is noted that, **Evaluation Criteria are different to the ones used by the EIC Accelerator Programme of the European Commission**.
9. The **Evaluation Score** will be automatically calculated (in the relevant Table in Part III) by adding the scores assigned to each of the three criteria following the application of the relevant weights.
10. The table below provides an interpretation of the scores and should be applied for the evaluation of all Proposals:

Score	Evaluation Interpretation
0	The proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.
< 0.99	The criterion is addressed in an inadequate manner or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
1.00 – 1.99	The proposal addresses the criterion to a limited degree and there are significant weaknesses.
2.00 – 2.99	The proposal addresses the criterion partly and a number of shortcomings/weaknesses are observed.
3.00 – 3.99	The proposal addresses the criterion quite sufficiently, but a small number of shortcomings/weaknesses are observed.
4.00 – 5.00	The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

11. The **Final Evaluation Score** for each Proposal will be equal to the **average** of the Evaluation Scores assigned by the two independent Evaluators. In case the difference between the scores of the two evaluations is **greater than 3,00 marks**, then the Proposal will be sent for evaluation to a third Evaluator and the Final Evaluation Score will be determined as the average of the two closest evaluation scores. If both initial scores are lower than 12.00/15.00 then the proposal shall be considered ineligible and shall not be forwarded to a third evaluator, even if there is a bigger difference than 3.00/15.00 between the two scores.
12. The best ranked applications according to their **Final Evaluation Score**, starting with the highest scoring proposal and in descending order requesting an aggregated financial support equal to the double of the Call budget available, and provided that they secure a Final Evaluation Score of at least 12.00/15.00, qualify to Stage II of the Evaluation.
13. **Comments provided by the Evaluators should be written in a manner that justifies and explains the specific score provided for each criterion**. **Proposals should be judged on merit and scored as they were submitted**, rather than on their potential if certain changes were to be made. If significant shortcomings are identified (including budget issues such as size, structure, allocation, aid intensity etc.), this must be reflected by awarding a lower score for the criterion concerned. **No recommendations for improving Proposals should be provided.**
14. Please note that:
    - Proposal Part B – Technical Annex has a **max page limit of 20 pages** (the Cover Page, the Instructions Page, the S3Cy Table, and the Checklist do not count towards this page limit). Any excess pages must be disregarded and not taken into consideration when carrying out the evaluation.
    - Annexes should only include the information described in the Call for Proposals (e.g. Annex I should only include Curricula Vitae). Any extra information that might be included must be disregarded and not taken into consideration when carrying out the evaluation.
    - If any inconsistencies between “Proposal Part A – General Information and Budget” and “Proposal Part B – Technical Annex” are observed, Part A should be the one considered as valid for evaluation purposes.
    - Any hyperlinks that direct to information beyond what is provided in the proposal, should not be considered by the evaluators for the evaluation of the proposal.
15. In Part II of the Evaluation Report, Evaluators are asked to provide supplementary comments (but no scores) with regards to:
    - the need for an Ethics Review for the Proposal under evaluation,

- any potential negative impacts and/or risks to the environment stemming from the implementation of the proposed activities or the delivery of the Project's expected results/products, and
- the degree to which the Proposal under evaluation is gender balanced.

16. A positive reply to the first question would mean that the Proposal should undergo an Ethics Review before a funding decision can be reached, whereas a positive reply to the second question should be mirrored in the comments and scores provided for individual criteria, if applicable.
17. Information relevant to both the evaluation criteria and the issues for which supplementary comments are requested (please refer to point 15 above) can be found throughout the Proposal and, thus, Evaluators are advised to study the Proposal thoroughly before starting their work. References to the most relevant Sections of the Proposal (Part B) for each criterion / supplementary issue can be found in the next section of this document.
18. Once finalized, the Evaluator submits his / her Individual Evaluation Report through the IRIS Portal.

Stage II - Evaluation by an Independent Evaluation Committee:

19. In Stage II of the Evaluation Procedure, proposals are evaluated by the Independent Evaluation Committee.

    The Members of the Committee should discuss the content of each Proposal, and judge each Proposal on its own merit, **based on the evaluation criteria** and reach a consensual decision and funding recommendation as follows:

    - Proposal recommended for funding (GO),
    - Proposal not recommended for funding (NO-GO).

20. Evaluators are requested to provide detailed comments for each one of the Evaluation Criteria without Evaluation Scores in the Consensus Evaluation Report. Comments provided by the Evaluators should be written in a manner that would justify and explain the Evaluators' decision. Significant shortcomings must be reflected in the Evaluator's comments on the appropriate criteria. No recommendations for improving Proposals should be provided. Evaluators are also asked to provide supplementary comments (but no scores) with regards to any ethical and/or environmental issues arising from the implementation of the proposed Project.
21. The committee will have allocated time for calibration. The committee will need to ensure that at the end of the evaluation period, the committed budget does not exceed the call

allocated budget. The final decision on the funding of a proposal by the Research and Innovation Foundation (RIF) is at the discretion of the Committee.

22. Following the completion of each Stage of the Evaluation Procedure, and in the context of transparency, the RIF will provide all applicants with their respective Evaluation Reports (without disclosing Stage I Evaluators' identification) and publicly announce the official results. The Committee's decision is final and without the possibility for a redress procedure.

PART I – EVALUATION

OBJECTIVES OF THE CALL:

The Programme aims to support existing enterprises that invest in the rapid development and market deployment of competitive and innovative cybersecurity products and services, specifically through:

- **The development of innovative cybersecurity software solutions;**
- **The development of innovative cybersecurity hardware solutions;**
- **The development of innovative cybersecurity educational and training materials, for example for critical infrastructures, SMEs, students, and other target groups.**

The Programme supports the enhancement of existing products, services, and processes through research and development (R&D) activities, as well as the development of new products and services that can generate new revenue streams for the enterprise within a short period of time.

Please make sure that you have consulted the relevant Call for Proposal before proceeding with the evaluation of the proposal.

COMPATIBILITY WITH THE OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAMME AND THE CALL FOR PROPOSALS
The following should be considered in the assessment of this criterion: • *Compatibility with the Objectives of the Programme and the Call for Proposals.* • *Compatibility of the proposed type(s) of activities and TRL with those allowed by the Programme/Call for Proposals (**As selected in "Proposal Part A – General Information and Budget" and analysed in "Proposal Part B – Technical Annex**).* • *Compatibility with the «Do No Significant Harm» principle as per Article 17 of Regulation (EU) No 2020/852[1] on the establishment of a framework to facilitate sustainable investment (EU Taxonomy Regulation). The proposed methodology must not include or support activities that could cause significant harm to any of the six environmental objectives of the Taxonomy Regulation.* ***The relevant information can be found in:*** ***1. Section "General Profile of the Project Proposal" in "Proposal Part A – General Information and Budget", and*** ***2. "Proposal Part B – Technical Annex".***

[1] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32020R0852&from=EN

EXCELLENCE (30%)

The following should be assessed:

- *Degree of Innovation and Originality*
  - *The proposed product/service/process is of high value. Emphasis on a high degree of innovation and diversity, relative to existing or competing solutions and practice at the an international level.*
  - *Ability to successfully enter the existing market or create a new market. Emphasis should be placed on clearly identifying the strengths and weaknesses of innovation, as well as opportunities and threats.*
- *Value Proposition and Competitive Advantage*
  - *A clear description of the product/service/process and its competitive advantage. Adequate explanation of the problem it solves, the needs it addresses, and the value it creates for the market.*
  - *Assessment of the market opportunity, including the size, specific segments, key geographical areas, and the projected growth over the next five years. The significance of the opportunity and the timing for its implementation.*
  - *Justification of the "Voice of the Customer," i.e., confirmation from customers, including the identification of key customers and whether interest or willingness to use the product/service/process has been demonstrated.*
  - *Analysis of the strategies of existing competitors offering similar products/services, and justification of how the proposed innovation can successfully compete.*
- *Technology and Product/Service/Process Development*
  - *Description of the technology underlying the product/service/process.*
  - *Assessment of how the technology creates a competitive advantage for the proposed product/service/process.*

The relevant information can be found in "Proposal Part B – Technical Annex".

ADDED VALUE AND BENEFIT (35%)

The following should be assessed:

- *Market Opportunity & Business Environment*
  - *Analysis of the business environment, including trends, driving forces, market entry barriers, and other dynamics that may affect the introduction of the product/service/process into the markets.*
  - *Analysis of the regulatory environment, including opportunities and potential barriers.*
- *Business Case*
  - *Clarity and adequacy of revenue and cost structure, including cash flows projections, Net Present Value (NPV), and Internal Rate of Return (IRR).*
  - *Estimation of the expected impact on the growth of the company from the use of funding.*
  - *Identification of all key resources required for the success of the innovation in the market.*

The relevant information can be found in "Proposal Part B – Technical Annex".

IMPLEMENTATION (35%)

The following should be assessed:

- *Implementation Plan*
  - *The completeness, credibility and appropriateness of the content of the project proposal, including the appropriateness of the schedule and the proposed budget.*
  - *The credibility of the risk management and mitigation plan, ensuring that the product/service/process will be delivered within the specified schedule.*
- *Market Penetration Plan*
  - *The Go-To-Market Plan, including the commercialization strategy and development timeline, is detailed, realistic, and feasible.*
  - *The detailed product/service/process development plan aligns with the market penetration strategy.*
  - *The suitability and reliability of the strategy for managing and protecting knowledge to ensure "freedom to operate" (unobstructed commercial exploitation). This includes intellectual property (IP) ownership in a manner that avoids infringing third-party IP rights, pending patent applications, and any related commercial licensing issues.*
- *Team*
  - *Completeness, Quality, and Capability of the Host Organization (at the organizational or individual level) to implement the project and achieve its objectives at all stages, including product development, value chain, and market entry.*
  - *The Host Organization and the team possess the necessary experience and capabilities for the development and commercialization of the product/service/process in a short period of time.*
  - *The main team members are already employed by the company and ready to implement the project.*

The relevant information can be found in "Proposal Part B – Technical Annex".

PART II - SUPPLEMENTARY COMMENTS

QUESTION
Do you believe that there are any Ethical and/or Environmental issues arising from the implementation of the proposed project? Are the proposed measures to address these issues adequate? ***The relevant information can be found in "Proposal Part B – Technical Annex".*** *Do you believe that gender or sex is a determining factor in the Proposal under evaluation, and if yes, do you believe that a gender/sex dimension has been sufficiently and appropriately integrated into the research (e.g in the proposed methodology)?* ***The relevant information can be found in "Proposal Part B – Technical Annex".***

Note:

The RIF recognizes that evaluators play a critical role in ensuring excellence in the funded research and, therefore, acknowledges the importance of integrating in the proposals gender and/or sex analysis. Please take a minute to consult the following informative videos (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hlceez1Dx5E) that have been developed by the Canadian Institute for Gender and Health to guide evaluators when assessing Health-related proposals. The information provided in the videos may also apply when assessing proposals in other thematic areas.