International Peer Review Conference

The workload of applicants and reviewers, and the duration of peer review

Jose Labastida
Head Scientific Department

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Introduction

Introduction

Peer review:

A process by which something proposed (as for research or publication) is evaluated by a group of experts in the appropriate field (*Merriam-Webster*)

The evaluation of work by one or more people of similar competences to the providers of the work (peers) (*Wikipedia*)

The process of evaluating research applications (proposals) by experts in the field of the proposed research (*ESF European Peer Review Guide (2011)*)
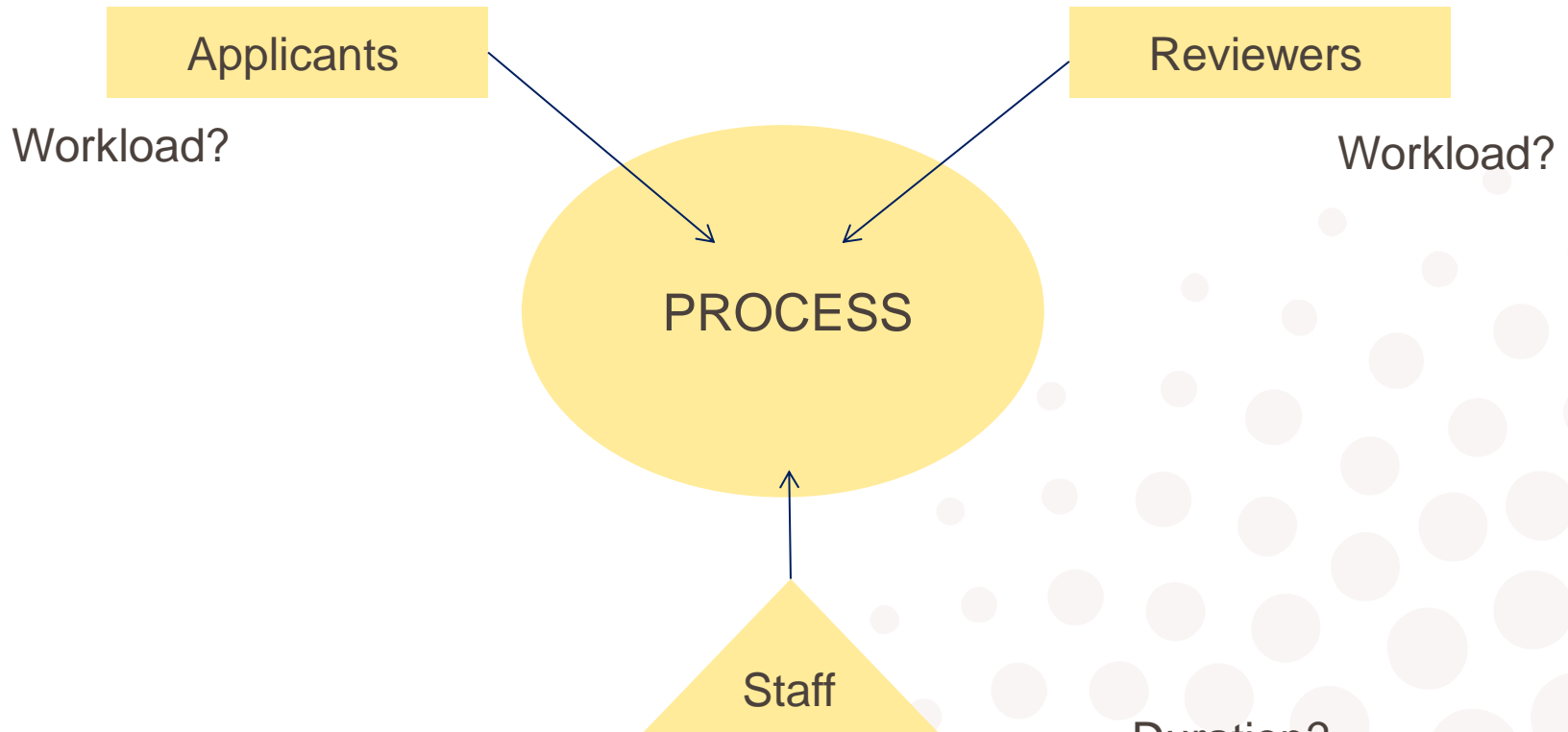
Introduction
Peer review

Applicants

Workload?

Reviewers

Workload?

PROCESS

Staff

Duration?

- Workload of reviewers
- Anxiety of applicants

Introduction
Proportionality

The answer to the three questions depends very much of the objectives of the program where peer review is used.

A program where the potential funds allocated to each proposal and the duration of the grants are limited cannot demand the same amount of commitment to applicants and reviewers than a program where a substantial amount of funding is provided and the grants last for a significant number of years.

There must be proportionality between workload of applicants and reviewers and the level of funding foreseen in the program.

In the case of peer reviewers this proportionality principle should also apply to their honorarium

Workload of applicants

Workload of applicants

The information requested must be commensurate to what is needed to carry out the evaluation.

The information must be linked to the evaluation criteria. This facilitates the work of peer reviewers.

Applicants tend to write much so it is convenient to impose a limitation in the number of pages. Both, applicants and reviewers will benefit. Of course, this limit must be adequate to avoid missing important content.

Is it appropriate to ask for information that might not be read if early rejection in a multistep evaluation process?

Workload of applicants
ERC proposal structure

PART A – online forms

Info on Proposal, PI, HI and overall budget

Annexes – submitted as .pdf

- Statement of support of HI
- If applicable: explanatory information on ethical issues; copy of PhD (StG, CoG); document for extension of eligibility window (StG, CoG)

PART B1 – submitted as .pdf

- Extended Synopsis   5 p.
- CV   2 p.
- Track Record   2 p.

Funding ID beyond the 2 page limit for the CV
Explanatory comment if interdisciplinary
Optional template for the CV

PART B2 – submitted as .pdf

- Scientific Proposal   15 p.
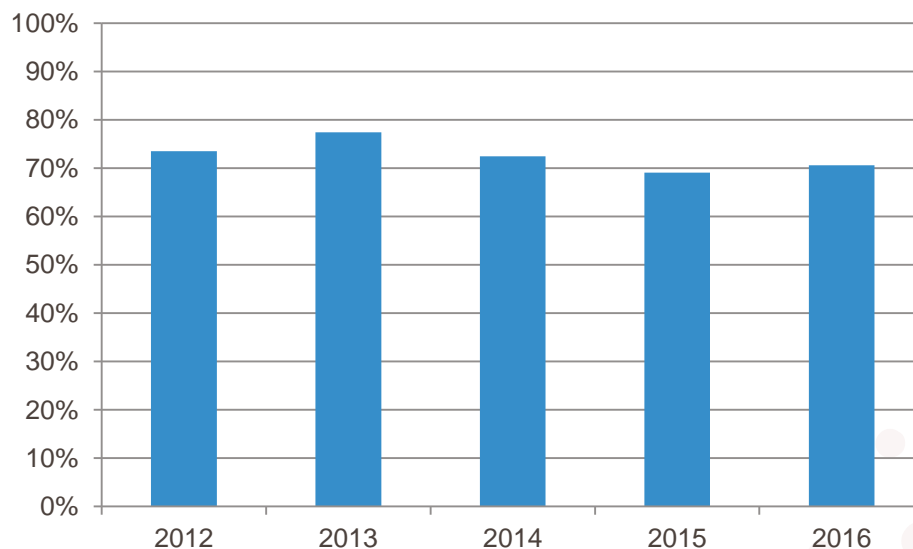
Template for the budget

Workload of applicants
Percentage of proposals rejected at step 1

StG, CoG and AdG calls in the period 2012-2016

Workload of applicants
Requesting full proposals

Advantages of requesting a complete application:

- The number of proposals is not so large
- Proposals have a higher quality

Disadvantage of requesting a complete application:

- Part B2 is not read by evaluators in around 70% of the applications

    However:

    - We have not received negative feedback from applicants
    - Many argue that it is very helpful for them to write the full proposal
    - To write Part B2 is also very helpful to improve the quality of the synopsis in Part B1

Workload of applicants
Two-stage submission

Advantages of two-stage evaluation:

- The overall workload of applicants decreases

Disadvantage of two-stage evaluation:

- The number of step 1 proposals increases (not an issue in itself but…)
- The average quality of the proposals is lower

Workload of peer reviewers

Workload of peer reviewers
Adequate workload

The success of a peer review process depends strongly on the quality of the evaluators involved.

Evaluators must feel engaged with the process and for this their workload should be adequate. It is not realistic to expect top scientists evaluating proposals if the workload is inadequate. If this happens one should seriously doubt of their scientific level.

What is an adequate workload?

Difficult to say, but certainly it should not go beyond 12-15 days in a year.

Workload of peer reviewers
Types of workload

Remote workload:

 Keep the amount up to reasonable levels
 Provide sufficient time for evaluators to distribute the task

Panel discussions:

 Make it efficient
 Plan well ahead with the panel chair
 Brief the panel adequately
 No more than 15/16 panel members to avoid the silo effect
 No more than 5 days

Workload of peer reviewers
Workload manageable

Strategy to keep the workload manageable:

- Limit the size of the proposals
- Limit the number of proposals
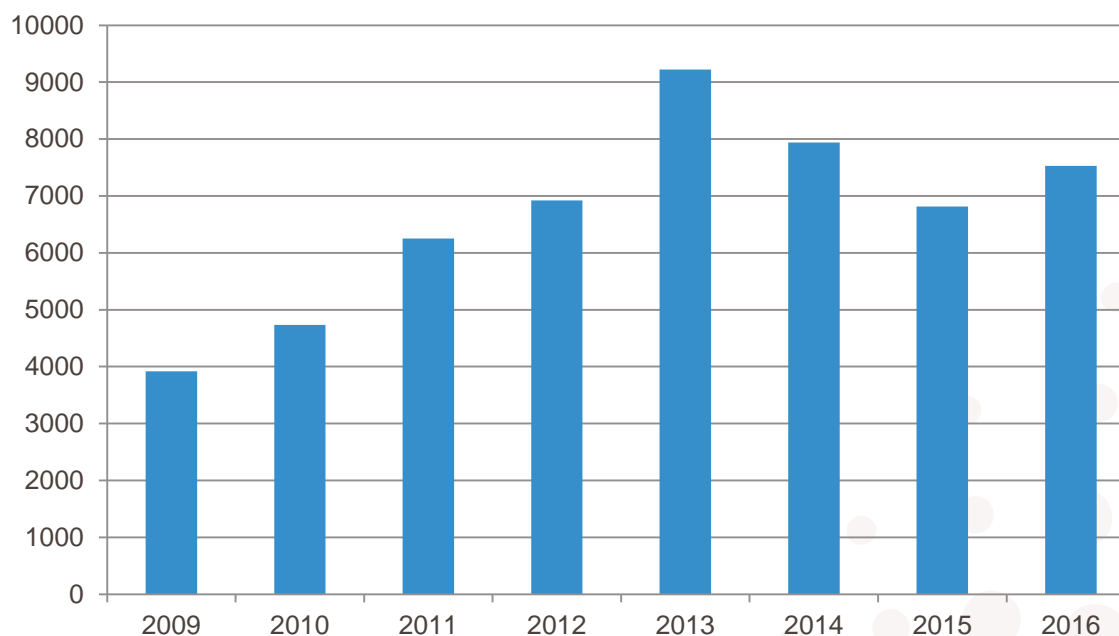- Organize the evaluation in several steps

Workload of peer reviewers
Limit the number of proposals

Strong resubmission rules introduced after 2013:

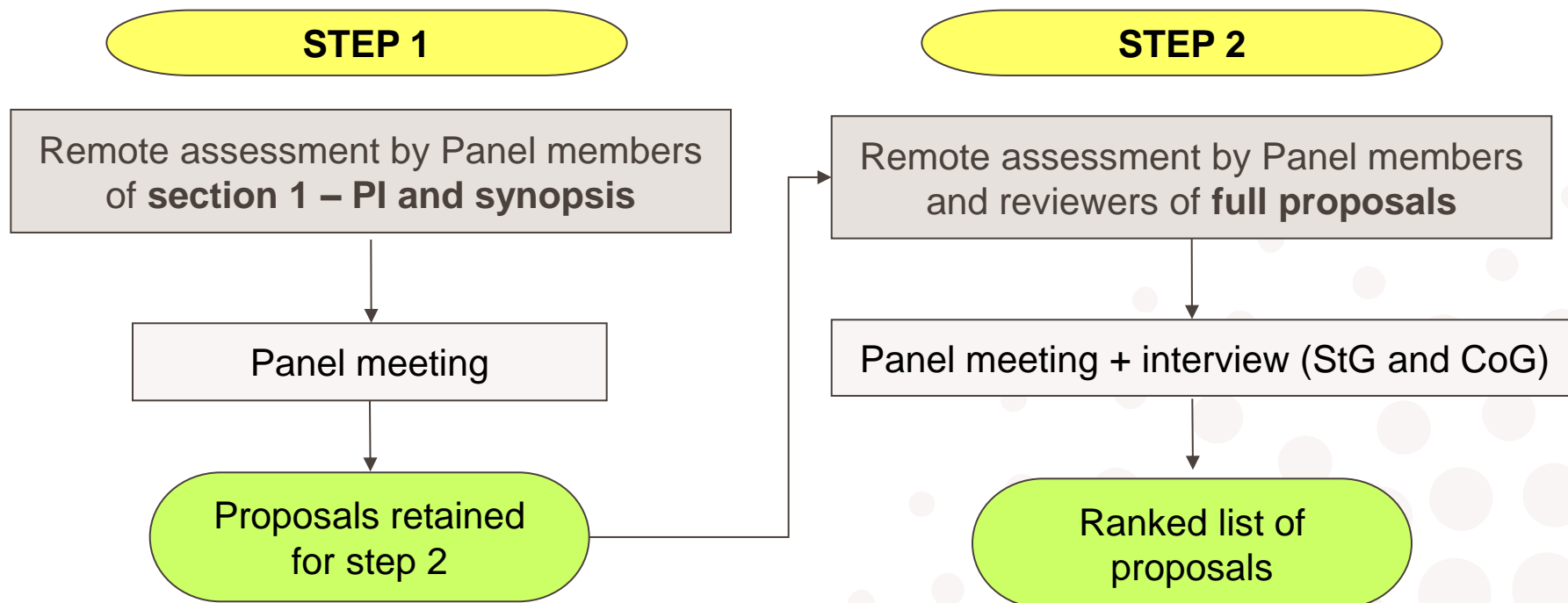Score C in step 1: 2 years ineligible
Score B in step 1: 1 year ineligible

Workload of peer reviewers
Two-step evaluation

STEP 1

Remote assessment by Panel members of **section 1 – PI and synopsis**

↓

Panel meeting

↓

Proposals retained for step 2

STEP 2

Remote assessment by Panel members and reviewers of **full proposals**

↓

Panel meeting + interview (StG and CoG)

↓

Ranked list of proposals

Workload per panel becomes manageable:
100-150 proposals in step 1
30-45 proposals in step 2

The duration of peer review

The duration of peer review

The duration of the peer review process depends on the quality we want to achieve. In general, quality work needs time and peer review is not an exception.

Nevertheless the duration must keep some proportionality with the length of the grant and the process has to be designed accordingly.

Reviewers need time to evaluate and imposing pressure might be detrimental to the quality of their work.

The duration of peer review
Duration at ERC

STEP 1

Remote assessment by Panel members of **section 1 – PI and synopsis**

Panel meeting

3 months

STEP 2

Remote assessment by Panel members and reviewers of **full proposals**

Panel meeting + interview (StG and CoG)

3/4 months

Reviewers need time to carry out the evaluations (not paid)

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