

How Do Innovation Agencies Evaluate and Select Projects?

A Comparison of 12 European Agencies

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Innovation Agencies Evaluate Proposals

- Evaluation happens not only on the policy level, it is also an important function of applied research funding organisations (i.e. innovation agencies)
- Research funding agencies have to evaluate project proposals in order to select the most promising proposals for funding
- Ample research on peer reviewing in basic research funding agencies
- Barely any research on other issues, especially regarding innovation agencies

Questions

- Do European innovation agencies select projects in similar ways?
- The key points of interest:
 - selection and role of evaluators
 - selection criteria
 - ranking and selection procedures
- Can we identify a best practice of project selection?

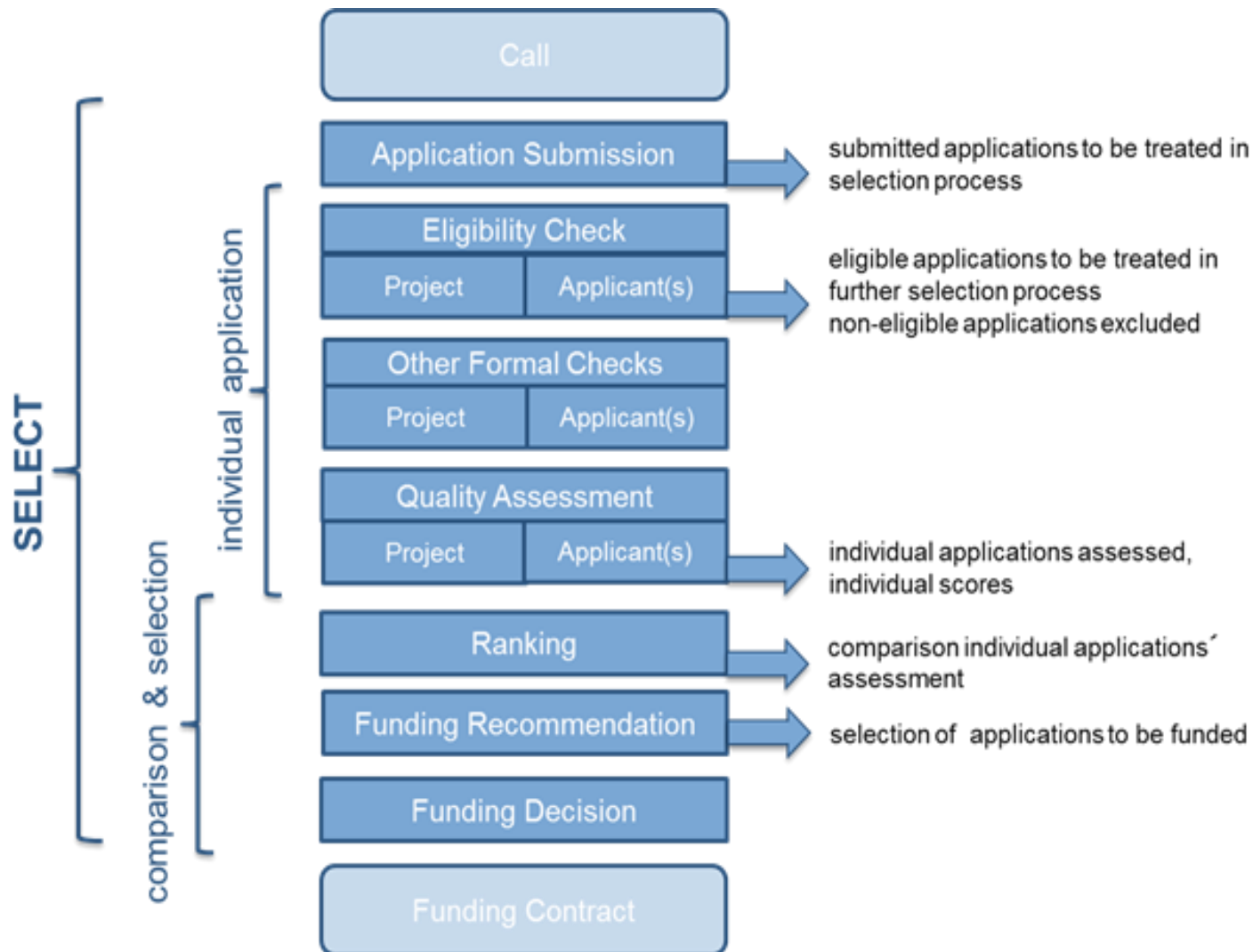


Methodology

- TAFTIE Taskforce on Selection Procedures (Select), consisting of 12 European innovation agencies, from early 2014 to mid 2016, led by Sabine Mayer (FFG) and supported by Peter Biegelbauer and Thomas Palfinger (AIT), from 2015 to 2016
- Two types of schemes chosen:
 - Grant/loan schemes for R&D with business as beneficiaries
 - Grant schemes for collaborative R&D with business and research institutions as beneficiaries
- Interviews with experts of partaking innovation agencies
- Document analysis of agency descriptions and missions, programme documents, guidelines for evaluators and documentation on indicators
- Datasets filed by agency experts, based on questionnaires focussing on a number of key issues regarding project selection; continuous data validation with agency experts in workshop series



Backbone Structure for Selection Processes



Choices and Potential Trade-Offs I

- Form of calls: closed or open
- Form of expertise: internal or external experts
 - Confidentiality/conflict of interest (internal) vs. externally perceived trust (external experts)
 - Confidentiality of procedures/evaluators vs. public transparency
 - Experience (internal) vs. cutting edge expertise (external experts)
- Performance measurement
 - Cost per project evaluation vs. reliability (e.g. number of evaluators) of selection procedures

Choices and Potential Trade-Offs II

- Forms of innovation: middle of the road research vs. radical innovations
 - Crowding out of evaluators, which reason against the mainstream opinion (e.g. in panel discussions) vs. inviting them to contribute
- Selection principle: exclusively excellence vs. (also) portfolio considerations
 - exclusively research excellence vs. societal impact, programme portfolio, regional distribution of funding/cohesion (e.g. debates on FPs in 1990s vs. 2000s)

Learning From Experience: „Best Practices“

- **A „BEST PRACTICE“ BARELY MAKES ANY SENSE, GIVEN THE DIFFERENT FRAMEWORK CONDITIONS OF INNOVATION AGENCIES**



How to Learn From Experience

- Learning through supranational or international channels is possible (e.g. EU/OMC, OECD)
- Learning in the framework of associations/networks such as TAFTIE is more direct (TAFTIE Taskforces, Academy)
- Preconditions:
 - dedicated and interested people
 - shared responsibility in the group
 - an active group leadership (motor and moderator)
 - time, patience and socialising (babylon vs common understanding)
 - regular two-day meetings
 - atmosphere of openness and trust
 - external support

Further Reading

- Biegelbauer, Peter, Sabine Mayer, Thomas Palfinger (2016). Final Report Task Force SELECT. Vienna.
- Link: www.taftie.org/sites/default/files/Taskforce_SELECT_final_report_0.pdf

