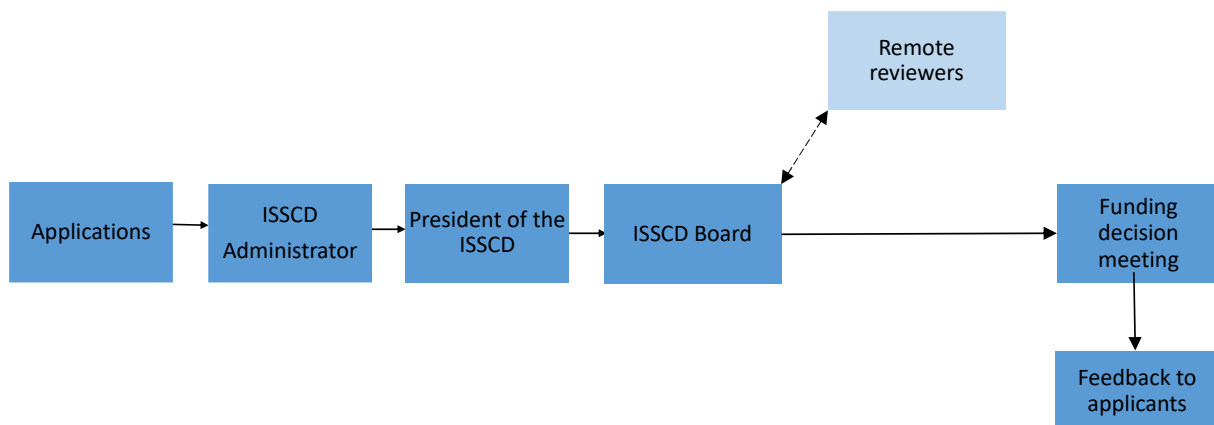


ISSCD Global Mentee-in-Mentorship (*M-in-M*) Programme

Guide for reviewers – the review framework

Governance structure: Review framework for ISSCD grant awards:



1. Introduction

The selection of mentees for funding by ISSCD's M-in-M programme is based strictly on evaluation of the application's potential for impact on the field of coeliac disease through collaboration, innovation, excellence, and originality. The ISSCD Board comprises of experts who make recommendations for funding, either autonomously or based on the feedback of expert external reviewers.

This document outlines the review framework, its inputs and outputs, and it defines the responsibilities of the participants in the process. It details a number of important issues, such as practical guidelines for the management of conflict of interest.

2. ISSCD Board

The ISSCD Board consists of a President, Secretary, Treasurer, five other members and two ex-officio members, the presidents of the Society for the Study of Celiac Disease (SSCD) and the European Society for the Study of Celiac Disease (ESSCD). The Board members were nominated for their expertise and reputation within the field of coeliac disease and elected by formal voting by the ISSCD members at a General Assembly meeting of the ISSCD.

The ISSCD Board makes a significant commitment to the review evaluation process, performing the following tasks:

- Familiarisation with applications
- Triaging of applications where necessary
- Individual remote review - by electronic means

- Sourcing and engaging reviewers external to the Board, where required – remote reviewers
- Participation in the funding decision meetings

The President of the ISSCD has additional tasks and responsibilities:

- To chair funding decision meetings.
- To assign applications to ISSCD Board members for individual reviewing. The Chair will pay particular attention to any conflicts of interest
- To appoint a deputy Chair at the beginning of the evaluation process
- To ensure the ISSCD Board produces all necessary deliverables of the required quality standards by the end of decision meetings, including recommendations for funding and feedback to applicants.

The President and ISSCD Board members are listed on the ISSCD website.

3. The remote reviewers

In addition to the ISSCD Board members, the ISSCD may also rely on input from remote reviewers. They are individuals who bring in the necessary specialised expertise. Remote reviewers work remotely and deliver their individual assessments by electronic means. They do not participate in funding decision meetings.

The assignment of remote reviewers to applications is carried out under the responsibility of the ISSCD President in collaboration with the ISSCD Board members. Any member of the international community with recognised expertise in coeliac disease can act as a remote reviewer, subject to the approval and accreditation of the person in question and their acceptance of the conditions regarding confidentiality and conflict of interest.

To take advantage of the best spectrum of specialised expertise, in addition to ISSCD Board members, reviews may be requested from remote reviewers. All the reviews will then form the basis for the funding decisions.

4. Allocation of funding

The ISSCD Board may elect to fund more or less than the advertised number of M-in-M awards depending on available funds and the quality of applications. This may be in collaboration with a third party in co-funding arrangements. The ISSCD Board is responsible for selecting which applications to fund from any funding call based on the review process and the budget available.

5. The individual reviews

Individual reviews are carried out prior to funding decision meetings. ISSCD Board members and remote reviewers participate in the individual review stage.

Minimum requirements:

Each application shall be reviewed by at least two peer reviewers. All applications are reviewed by at least one member of the ISSCD Board and a further reviewer either on the ISSCD Board or remote reviewers. On occasion a third reviewer may be requested when an application is borderline for funding.

Each application may be assigned to a 'lead reviewer' on the ISSCD Board who introduces the application for discussion at the funding decision meeting and is responsible for drafting the comments for feedback to the applicant.

The 'lead reviewer' is an ISSCD Board member selected from those assigned to evaluate the application. A 'lead reviewer' may be assigned to each application during the evaluation process. The lead reviewer's role is to briefly introduce the proposal to their peers during the funding decision meeting and draft the comments in order to reflect the main points of the review discussion. The comments drafted by the 'lead reviewer' are agreed upon by all ISSCD Board members.

The interpretation of 'individual' review

During the individual reviewing/remote evaluation process, there shall be no discussions of the proposals between reviewers. When an ISSCD Board member considers that they have insufficient expertise to evaluate any of the assigned applications, they should immediately inform the ISSCD President, so that the application can be reassigned to another member.

Scores and comments

Individual reviewing consists of:

- Providing a succinct explanatory comment on the overall excellence of the application, ensuring the criteria of the call has been met.
- Awarding scores for mentee accomplishment and demonstrated commitment to the field of coeliac disease, trans-regional collaboration, feasibility, potential for impact on the field of coeliac disease, and mentor standing in the field of coeliac disease.
- Providing a comment on whether the application supports the objectives of the ISSCD

The importance of scores and comments

Both scores and comments are critically important. The individual review scores determine the relative position on the initial ranking list and serve as a starting point for the funding decision meetings. These scores are not communicated to the applicant only the anonymised comments. Reviewers should therefore take care about the formulation of comments in their individual assessments.

The nature of the comments

Comments should be provided by each reviewer of the application. They should be of good quality, genuine, succinct but substantial. They should also be impeccably polite. Comments should take the form of a statement and explanation of key strengths and key weaknesses of the proposal, in light of the evaluation criteria.

Reviewers are obliged to observe the following guidelines:

- Use dispassionate, analytical and unambiguous language.
- Use grammatically correct, complete, clear sentences with no jargon.
- Critical comments should be constructive.
- Avoid self-declaration of insufficient expertise (personal or Board level) or non-confidence in the proposal.
- Avoid reference to the applicant age, nationality, gender, or personal matters.
- Avoid making reference to scores in the comments.

- Avoid any direct comparison with any other proposals.
- Avoid any reference or comparison with previous assessments.
- Avoid comments that give a description or a summary of the proposal.
- Avoid dismissive statements about the applicant or the application.

Individual reviews must be submitted in due time to the ISSCD Board and at the latest prior to the funding decision meeting.

ISSCD Board members and remote reviewers will evaluate and score the applications according to:

- Mentee accomplishment
- Demonstrated commitment to the field of coeliac disease
- Feasibility
- Inter-regional collaboration with highest scores for inter-regional relationships that would be impractical without financial support such as that from the M-in-M programme
- Mentor standing in the field of coeliac disease
- Potential for impact on the field of coeliac disease

Each proposal receives a score on a scale from 1 to 5 for each of the above areas. Scores are awarded in integers or halves. Marks range from 1 (least/non-competitive) to 5 (most/outstanding). As a general recommendation, it seems reasonable to reserve the highest mark, ie 5.0 (outstanding), for the top 10% of proposals, marks 4.0 or 4.5 only for the top 20%, and mark 3.0 only for the top 30% of proposals. In all cases, reviewers are requested to base their assessment strictly on the evaluation criteria. Ranking of applications will initially be based on the sum of the individual category scores, but final decisions should emphasise "Potential for impact on the field of coeliac disease".

6. Declaration of conflicts of interest and confidentiality

Remote reviewers must sign a declaration of conflicts of interest and confidentiality having read and accepted the ISSCD's policy on conflicts of interest, confidentiality and processing of personal data.

The ISSCD cannot make applications available to a reviewer who has not signed and returned a conflicts of interest and confidentiality declaration.

Reviewers should not be put in a situation in which their impartiality might be questioned, or where the suspicion could arise that recommendations are affected by elements that lie outside the scope of the review.

On the basis of the information available, the ISSCD President shall avoid making conflicting assignments of proposals to reviewers.

Consequences of conflicts of interest

If a conflict of interest is reported by the remote reviewer or established by the ISSCD Board, or becomes apparent at any stage of the evaluation, the reviewer must not evaluate the application. Any comments and scores already given by the reviewer will be discounted. If necessary, the reviewer will be replaced.

If there is a conflict of interest for an ISSCD Board member they must not evaluate the given application or take part in any discussion or scoring of it. The ISSCD Board member must leave the room or the electronic forum when the proposal is discussed ('out of the room' rule).

If it is revealed during an evaluation that a reviewer has knowingly concealed a conflict of interest, the reviewer will be immediately excluded and sanctions applied. Any Funding decision meeting in which s/he has participated will be declared null. The funding decision meeting will be reconvened and the application(s) concerned will be re-evaluated.

7. The eligibility and evaluation criteria

There are two types of criteria:

- Eligibility criteria
- Evaluation criteria

Eligibility criteria

Eligibility criteria are simple, factual and legally binding. Their interpretation does not involve scientific judgement. Hence, eligibility is not part of the review evaluation process. Instead, it may be carried out by an administrator working for the ISSCD or a member of the ISSCD Board. Nevertheless, if a reviewer considers a proposal to be potentially ineligible during the evaluation process they should clarify the case immediately with the President of the ISSCD.

Evaluation criteria

Meeting the requirements of the ISSCD's objectives and scoring received by applications are the criteria of evaluation and is at the core of the review evaluation process. All assessments of applications must be made against the evaluation criteria and its detailed elements alone.

8. Preparation and organisation of the Funding Decision Meetings

Autonomy of the ISSCD President, Chair of the meeting

The Chair has a high degree of autonomy in the conduct of the funding decision meetings; which proposals to discuss in detail, in which order, when to resort to voting and how to vote, etc. The conduct of the meetings will also be influenced by the number of proposals to be reviewed by the ISSCD Board.

The efficiency of meetings and preparation

Funding decision meetings should be efficient. For this reason, preparatory work is carried out in advance of the meeting by electronic means:

- ISSCD Board members should familiarise themselves with proposals in order to be able to make high quality recommendations.
- ISSCD Board members, individually and remotely, review allocated applications.
- Remote reviewers contribute to the evaluation process with individual reviews prepared remotely.

The individual reviewing stage increases the efficiency of evaluation in two ways:

- By creating a preliminary ranking of proposals; this allows funding discussions to focus on those applications that merit substantial discussions and an early elimination of the low ranked applications.
- By gathering elements of the feedback to applicants; particularly for the low ranked applications, the comments obtained by their individual reviewing may sufficiently capture substantial reasons for the rejection.

The possible use of a voting system

At the funding decision meeting, the ISSCD Board may expedite its ranking process by the use of a voting system (e.g. a majority vote on one or more applications, with each ISSCD Board member having one vote per application being considered). The Chair or an ISSCD Board member cannot vote for an application if there is a conflict of interest, and in such case, an appropriate adjustment is applied. Voting can be an effective way of finalising a ranking list.

Outputs of the funding decision meetings

The output of any funding decision meeting, to be provided at the end of the meeting, consists of the following elements:

- The ranked list of applications
- A proposal for funding
- The feedback to applicants
- A meeting report/minutes

The report

In addition to the ranked list of proposals, the report (prepared by the Chair or assigned administrator) briefly documents the evaluation methodology followed by the ISSCD Board. It may also contain, as deemed appropriate, reflections on issues such as the quality of applications in relation to the budget. It may furthermore contain recommendations to be taken into account by ISSCD in future review sessions.

9. The tasks of the funding decision meetings

The ISSCD Board makes three types of recommendations:

1. Those applications which are highest scoring through the evaluation process and are suitable for funding, they will also be ranked within this grade – **Grade A**
2. Those applications which meet some but not all elements of the criteria and therefore will not be funded. Those recommended for possible resubmission will be highlighted – **Grade B**
3. Those applications which are lowest scoring and would not be consider for funding – **Grade C**

10. Feedback to applicants

Apart from recommendations on fundable applications and their ranking, the other most important output of the funding decision meetings is the feedback to applicants. ISSCD will provide an Evaluation Report to each applicant, which documents the results of the evaluation. Especially in the case of rejection, the Evaluation Report needs to convey a concise explanation of the fate of the application and the position of the ISSCD Board with regard to it. The principle applied is that the Evaluation Report of each application

contains a documentation of all comments and observations it received from both ISSCD Board members and the remote reviewers who have carried out individual assessments of the application.

Elements of the Evaluation Report

The Evaluation Report of any application comprises three components:

1. The recommendation of the ISSCD Board (A, B or C grade plus ranking range).
2. A comment by the ISSCD Board, written by the 'lead reviewer' or another ISSCD Board member, and approved by the ISSCD Board.
3. The comments from the individual assessments given by remote reviewers and ISSCD Board members prior to the funding decision meeting.

The comments by individual reviewers

The comments by reviewers (ISSCD Board members and remote reviewers) are included in the Evaluation Report as received. They may be subject to mild editing by the President/Administrator, without altering their intended message, in order to enhance clarity, remove any inappropriate, irrelevant or polemic remarks, remove revelation of the remote reviewers' identity, misleading recommendations, etc. These individual comments may not necessarily be convergent - differences of opinion about the merits of an application proposal are legitimate among evaluators, and it is potentially useful for an applicant to be informed of the various views.

The overall summary comment from the funding decision meeting

In many cases the comments by the individual reviewers provide a sufficient explanation of the ISSCD Board's. In such cases, the summary comment simply acknowledges the weaknesses or strengths pointed out by the individual reviewers without containing observations that substantially deviate from the views expressed by the individual reviewers.

In other cases, the summary comment may take a position that is different from what could be inferred from the comments/scores of the individual reviewers. For example, if the ISSCD Board discussion reveals an important weakness in a proposal, the ISSCD Board shall document its reasons in a substantial comment.

A number of applications of reasonable/good quality but ranking below the budgetary cut-off level may be rejected. Such proposals may typically have positive comments from individual reviewers. However, they do not gather enough support from the ISSCD Board when taking into account the budgetary constraint. In such cases, the summary comment may be expressed in these terms.

The summary comment is the key element of the information provided to the applicants at the end of the evaluation. It should clearly explain the decision adopted by the ISSCD Board substantiating the reasons which led to the ISSCD Board decision.

11. The role of independent observers

A representative of a co-Funder, may observe funding decision meetings to examine the review evaluation process from the point of view of its working and execution.



Observers have no role in the outcome of the funding decision meeting.