"la Caixa" Foundation

Postgraduate
Fellowships Abroad

Code of conduct for evaluators

lacaixafoundation.org

Fellowships

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1. Introduction

This document contains the general principles to be followed by evaluators when assessing and scoring the applications within the selection process of the "la Caixa" Foundation Fellowships Programme. It presents common sense considerations that are widely applied in comparable evaluation and selection procedures.

These principles are intended to ensure compliance with key requirements such as transparency, impartiality and equal treatment of all applicants. Accordingly, this document serves a dual purpose:

» First to provide evaluators with a formal compilation and a practical a reminder of the principles governing the assessment process.

» Second to make the principles governing the assessment process publicly available to applicants, therefore reinforcing transparency and trust in the process.

In addition, the document includes a dedicated section outlining situations in which a conflict of interest may arise, and the corresponding obligations of evaluators in such cases.

2. General principles

PERFORMING THE WORK

1. Evaluators must complete the tasks assigned in a confidential and fair way, in accordance with the evaluation guidelines provided by the" la Caixa" Foundation.
2. Evaluators shall perform their tasks to the best of their abilities, professional skills and knowledge while applying the highest ethical and professional standards. They shall comply with the instructions and timelines set by the "la Caixa" Foundation. By accepting the assignment, experts commit to remaining engaged throughout the process. Failure to meet deadlines or late withdrawal may seriously compromise the timeline of the evaluation, except in duly justified cases of force majeure.
3. Evaluators must carry out their tasks independently, in a personal capacity. They do not represent any organization, region, country, group or discipline.
4. Evaluators may not delegate the work to another person or be replaced by another person. The use of AI tools by the Evaluators in the drafting of his/her findings is not allowed, except for those used for translation or grammar correction purposes, provided that such tools do not jeopardize the confidentiality of the information. In any case, the content of the report must be original and of the Evaluator's authorship.
5. Evaluators should be extremely careful with their wording and respectful with the presented applications. In any case, observations should have a strictly professional tone and a constructive spirit.
6. If a person or entity involved in application approaches the Evaluator before or during the evaluation, s/he must immediately inform the Program Office.
7. A "la Caixa" fellowships programme assessment process affects thousands of candidates and mobilises hundreds of evaluators. It is an exercise of respect and responsibility for all parties to comply with the commitments taken on in regard to a call.

IMPARTIALITY

1. Evaluators must perform their work impartially and take all measures to prevent any situation where the impartial and objective implementation of the work could be compromised for reasons involving family, emotional life, political or national affinity, economic interest or any other direct or indirect interest (see 'conflict of interests').
2. If an Evaluator were to have a direct or indirect interest in the evaluated application or project accompanied, or any personal or professional connection to the applicant(s), the Program Office must be notified immediately.

CONFIDENTIALITY

1. During implementation of the evaluation and for five years after the date of the last payment, the Evaluator must keep confidential all data, documents or other material (in any form) that is disclosed (in writing or orally) and that concerns the evaluation and selection process.
2. Evaluators must maintain the confidentiality of the process and avoid contact, with regards to the applications examined. Evaluators must not discuss the contents of the application with anyone, let alone the applicant(s) himself.
3. Evaluators who participate in the remote evaluation processes (pre-selection of applications) and evaluating the same must avoid contact with each other in regard to the applications examined.
4. Similarly, evaluators must maintain the confidentiality of the process and avoid contact, in relation to the applications examined, with people who have written letters of support for applicants assessed, or the doctoral advisors who guided their thesis or research project
5. Evaluators should not tell anyone the names of the evaluators who have participated on the examining boards or panels until the selection process has concluded and/or the names of the selected participants have been made public.
6. Evaluators should ensure the integrity and confidentiality of the documents to which they are given access via technological channels and make certain that this is inaccessible to third parties, whether these are interested or not in how the assessment process is progressing.
7. The sole purpose of the documentation provided is to enable assessment of the candidates. Therefore, it must not be used for any other purpose.
8. If "la Caixa" Foundation makes documents or information available electronically, evaluators are responsible for ensuring adequate protection and for erasing or destroying all sensitive information after the end of the evaluation.
9. If evaluators work on la Caixa" Foundation premises, they:

   a) shall not remove from the premises any documents, material or information on the proposals, applications or on the evaluation process.

   (b) are responsible for ensuring adequate protection of the electronic documents and information and for erasing or destroying all sensitive information after the end of the evaluation.

DATA PROTECTION

Evaluators will be duly informed, within the framework of the application process, about the processing of their personal data, as well as about the exercise of their rights regarding the protection of personal data in accordance with the provisions of Article 13 and following of the General European Data Protection Regulation ("**GDPR**").

- Evaluators are entitled to comply with data protection legislation, in particular the GDPR, concerning the processing of personal data of the "la Caixa" Foundation Fellowships Programme' applicants. In this regard, Evaluators must comply, including without limitation, the following: The processing of personal data by Evaluators may take place only for the duration specified in their contract.
- Evaluators must not use the personal data for any purpose other than fulfilling their obligations under the contract. Evaluators must not perform any commercial activity with regards to the applicants (e.g. distributing business cards). Direct contact with the applicants must be made through the Program Office or with the latter's consent and knowledge (e.g. CC in all email contact).
- Evaluators must not disclose personal data directly or indirectly to third parties and ensure the protection of personal data with the same level of protection they use to protect their own data, and in no case with less reasonable care.
- At the end of the contract, Evaluators must delete all personal data processed.

3. Conflicts of interest

A conflict of interest is a situation in which financial, personal or professional considerations can compromise or bias the neutrality, impartiality and objectivity of an individual whose position is likely to affect, directly or indirectly, the result of a selection process or project development.

The existence of such a conflict may result in a misuse or abuse (whether real, apparent, perceived or potential) of the confidence that the general public, applicants and the "la Caixa" Foundation place in the evaluators who have to score applications and whose decision will determine which candidates finally receive a fellowship.

Evaluators are obliged to carry out their duties objectively and independently, without any form of pressure or influence, and to withdraw from decision-making whenever any of the following circumstances arise.

Any evaluator who identifies a potential conflict must report it immediately via the online evaluation platform. "la Caixa" Foundation will review each case and determine whether a conflict exists. If a conflict of interest is confirmed, "la Caixa" Foundation will reassign the proposal to another evaluator. If no conflict of interest is identified following this review, and once this has been confirmed through the platform, the evaluator may proceed with the assessment.

If the Programme Office and the Evaluator conclude that the potential conflict of interest does not compromise the task of the latter, this conclusion shall be documented to ensure traceability and transparency of the evaluation process.

In particular, a conflict of interest must be reported if the Evaluator:

- has close family ties (spouse, domestic or non-domestic partner, child, sibling, parent etc.) or other close personal relationship with any applicant and/or any advisor/referee to the application(s).
- has actively participated in the preparation of any application submitted to the same call;
- is in any way involved in the direct management of an applicant(s) (i.e the Evaluator will be the advisor of the applicant requesting the fellowship);
- the Evaluator has (or has had during the last five years) a scientific collaboration with the applicant(s);
- has written a letter of support for the candidate's application he or she is evaluating.
- has (or has had), a mentor/mentee relationship (i.e. PhD supervisor) with the applicant(s) in the last ten years;
- the Evaluator has (or has had) a relationship of scientific rivalry or professional hostility with any of the applicant(s);
- is (or was during the last three years) employed or contracted by the host institution in which the applicant will conduct their research.

  In exceptional cases, the Evaluator may still be involved, provided that they work in a different department/laboratory/institute from the one where the activity is to be carried out and the departments/laboratories/institutes within the organisation concerned operate with a high degree of autonomy. Nevertheless, such situations must be reported to the Programme Office, to verify compliance with these conditions.
- the Evaluator holds intellectual property rights that might be affected by the outcome of the work of the application.
- the Evaluator currently invests (>10,000 euros) in legal entities with interests in the field of the application.
- finds himself in regard to the application or the candidate, in any other situation that, both in its own opinion or in the opinion of a third party, could compromise its neutrality when examining the application.

Please note that this list is not exhaustive and includes only some of the most common types of conflicts of interests. Therefore, other types of conflict of interest might be considered.

The existence or possibility of a conflict of interest does not necessarily imply that the Evaluator is unable to complete the examination of the application. The Programme Office will determine, based on the circumstances of each case, whether the conflict compromises an Evaluator's activity.

Importantly, if a non-reported conflict of interest arises after or during the evaluation of an application, the “la Caixa” Foundation will take appropriate measures. Nevertheless, under no circumstances will the disclosure of an unknown conflict-of-interest after the evaluation imply the repetition of the project evaluation.