

# EVALUATION GUIDELINES FOR THE APPLICATIONS TO PLURIANNUAL BASE FUNDING FOR INTERFACE CENTRES

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This document outlines the reviewing process of the applications for pluriannual base funding and defines the responsibilities of the participants in the process. It details a number of important issues, such as: ANI's mission, objectives of the present Call and application components, evaluation criteria, scoring system, evaluation process, feedback, confidentiality and conflict of interest.

## 1. ANI's Mission

ANI is the Portuguese National Innovation Agency.

Our mission is to promote knowledge transfer through greater and better collaboration and cooperation between enterprises and the research & knowledge production institutions.

The ANI mandate is to promote innovation through research funding.

ANI is assumed as “THE INNOVATION HUB” that embodies the growing alignment of the R&D, Innovation and technology-based entrepreneurship policies in the areas of science and economy, with the main function to promote knowledge transfer, in particular through more and better cooperation and coordination between companies and the R&I institutions. As part of a new repositioning, ANI pursues a wide range of activities:

1. Enhances collaborative innovation
2. Leverages knowledge transfer to companies
3. Increases the participation of the National S&T System and of national companies in the Research & Innovation international networks
4. Strengthens business investment in R&I
5. Fosters a social environment which favours technological entrepreneurship

Therefore, it is endowed with a model of governance which allows it to take a central position in the science-economy relation, partnering with relevant stakeholders. There are three Directorates managing different work areas:

1. Funding incentives
2. Projects & International Cooperation
3. Policy and Innovation Promotion

In this context, ANI's responsibility is to recommend the final decision on the evaluation process to FITEC's Executive Commission.

## 2. Call for capacitation of Interface Centers

Increasing public and private investment in R&D and innovation is a critical priority in the growth strategy of the Portuguese economy, which justifies a renewed impulse through related policies, such as the Programme Interface. This Programme aims to promote innovation in the Portuguese economic actors through the reinforcement of the so-called intermediate organizations of the innovation system. For this purpose, beyond public support to R&D investment, there is a need to reinforce articulation between scientific and technological institutions and private companies.

The frail relation between companies and higher education institutions has been the target of international institutions criticism, as it is seen as a blockage to the development of the Portuguese economy, stopping the creation of higher value added by national companies and, consequently, more frequently than not, also hampering their access to external markets. Intermediate organizations, here designated *Interface Centres*<sup>1</sup>, have been playing a key role in the articulation between scientific institutions and companies in diverse areas and sectors, through certification processes, quality control, efficiency increment support, support to innovation activities, access to developing technologies and human resource training. Nevertheless, this support has been fragmented and, in many cases, with room for increasing the level of technological complexity offered, due to lack of human resources, financial resources and a coherent strategy underpinning sustained organizational and service betterment. This aspect is central as the Interface Centres are supposed to play a key role also in the diffusion of knowledge through companies, mostly SME. In this context, this programme has been created with the goal of helping these institutions overcoming a funding and human resource deficit and offering these entities the possibility to concentrate themselves in their own development, valorization and transfer of new technologies to companies, making available increasing innovative solutions and, as a consequence, reinforcing their competitiveness in the international scene.

The Interface Programme has as a goal to guarantee to the Interface Centers the conditions to work more and better with and for the companies, demanding in return high levels of quality in its activity, which should be reflected in their action plans and corresponding short, medium and long term-goals.

This call will, therefore, be directed to the pursuit of six fundamental areas:

1. provide entities with sustainability and budgetary predictability, so that these can position themselves better in response to the non-covered needs by already commercialized services and available in the market. In other words, to respond to market failures: services (including access to knowledge and equipment) that would be excessively expensive for one company or a group of companies to acquire, because of their (the services) frontier knowledge and technology. To this end, it is also important that Interface Centers develop and keep high quality standards and gender equality principles, namely when pursuing the following activities: innovation management, development of projects co-funded by structural funds and Horizon 2020, follow-up of research results, institutional and corporate communication.

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<sup>1</sup> The flagship programme created to fund this initiative is called the Interface Programme. The intermediate organizations that applied and have been selected, are now certified as Interface Centres.

2. Stimulate collaboration with lecturers and researchers from higher education institutions: to promote links with knowledge producing institutions, namely higher education institutions and associated research entities, as a way to guarantee timely and smooth knowledge circulation, as well as its economic valorization and transfer to industry.
3. Reinforce scientific employment through hiring young doctors: building a highly qualified team is an essential part of the capacitation process and development of internal capacity to better create and consolidate bridges with research entities and higher education institutions, as well as increasing the degree of knowledge and technology intensity of technology transfer activities.
4. Internationalization: support to companies depends on the acquisition and development of frontier knowledge, to which is essential the integration in international value chains, participation in international collaborative R&D projects, inter-institutional collaboration (through job-shadowing, etc), active participation and relevant contribution in European technology platforms, among others.
5. Development of new competence areas in different industries, namely promoting:
  - a) Innovation in circular economy: contribute to the efficiency in the use of resources, based on circular economy principles, in association with new business models, production processes, new opportunities and value chains.
  - b) Implementation of energy efficiency measures: promote the optimization of the energy resources and the consumption rationalization in order to minimize the losses in processes and activities to achieve competitiveness gains.
  - c) Digital transformation: contribute to new production processes and organizational models through the so called Industry 4.0, to higher competitiveness in production, distribution and commercialization of the Portuguese products.

### 3. Eligibility

Eligibility is strictly restricted to the set of entities previously certified as Interface Centers.

### 4. Application components and criteria

The application is composed of two main parts:

1. Part A – Characterization and quantitative goals
2. Part B – Strategic Action Plan and Investment Plans

Below is a description of the information requested in each part of the application form. Further details are available in the Guide for Applicants, provided jointly with this Evaluation Guide to both the applicants and the evaluators.

### Part A: Characterization and quantitative goals

In this part of the application, the applicant is required to identify and characterize clearly and in detail the Interface Center as a whole, through a set of information that intends to provide an overview of its human and material current capacity.

As this is the basis for a three-year multi-annual exercise, the applicant is then required to provide foresight based on the quantitative characterization of its current capacity. The goal is to provide a clear picture of where it stands and demonstrate its vision and ambition for the next three years.

Each dimension of the quantitative characterization is, in this way, transformed into a future Key Performance Indicator. The qualitative justification, must be directly or indirectly justified in the SAP the applicant has to complete in Part B of the application.

For example:

The applicant is required to indicate the structure of human resources of the Interface Center and its level of qualifications (question 2.4.1.) and distribution per functional area (question 2.4.2.) along the past three years of activity (2015-2017). It will then be required to express how this will evolve in the following three years of activity (2018-2020).

The evaluator is required to analyze the current standpoint and evaluate the adequacy of the level of ambition in relation to the technological and innovation objectives and the Strategic Action Plan described thereafter by the applicant. Each of these indicators will be, not only, crucial for the current evaluation and the level of the funding the applicant will be granted, but also for a process of continuous evaluation, through bi-annual and annual reporting. These Key Performance Indicators (KPI) will be used as criteria for continuously assessing the good implementation of the Strategic Action Plan and, thus, if the level of funding will be kept, reduced or canceled.

The quantitative characterization (and the level of ambition of the applicant in the KPI he will define for himself and be evaluated against) will then be contextualized by a **SWOT – Strengths, Weaknesses,**

**Opportunities and Threats**, analysis. This is an opportunity to qualitatively start drawing the picture that corresponds to the KPI defined, provide extra information about the constraints and opportunities of its activity due to internal/organizational issues or sector, scientific/technology related ones.

The state of the art of the Interface Centre and the technology and innovation impact it aims to achieve in the next three years of activity must be described in the last section of Part A, designated **Innovation and Technology Goals**. This must be contextualized and made in reference to the industrial capacity existing in Portugal and which is/will be at the heart of the activity of the Interface Center as well as the international technology context and the capacity of the Interface Center to support the internationalization of national companies, through the increment of their innovation and technological profile.

### Part B – Description of the Strategic Action Plan and Investment Plans

This part of the application is where the Interface Center will describe how to achieve the goals defined in Part A, through its Strategic Action Plan.

The application requires ALL applicants to build their **Strategic Action Plan** for the next three years of activity (2018-2020). They must depart from the characterization made in Part A, including the quantitative description, the SWOT Analysis and the innovation and technology goals.

The objectives detailed in Point 2 of this Guide are compulsory dimensions to be addresses in the SAP, in accordance to the legislation at the origin of this call. These do not necessarily need to be addresses in equal footing and the evaluators are required to analyze the quality and pertinence of the SAP in relation to each of the them, taking in consideration the specificities of the candidate center and of their sector or technology area(s) of activity. Evaluators will be provided with a checklist of the goals the Interface Center SAP must address and be asked to:

1. Check if the goal is clearly addressed;
2. Evaluate the quality of the strategy proposed to address each of the goals;
3. Make specific recommendations to the Interface Center.

The applicant may indicate that one of the goals is not attainable within the three years and justify why. The evaluator is asked to consider whether this is a pertinent statement on the part of the applicant. The applicant must provide information allowing the evaluator to analyze this. If this is not done, this must clearly be reflected in an “insufficient” score level.

Example:
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The Interface Center might already have an organizational structure that is characterized by gender balance but requires a high degree of investment in skills towards digitalization of the economy.

The Funding Plan is called this way as it requires an overview of the sources that will fund the activity of the Interface Center in the following three years and NOT ONLY a budgetary exercise for the part of the activity eventually financed by the current call. The goal is to start paving the way towards a model of funding these type of institutions corresponding to: 1/3 Basic funding / 1/3 Competitive Funding / 1/3 Services. Naturally, the reality among the very diverse group of eligible Interface Centers will be very different and impact will be much higher in smaller centers. Moreover, this also aims to promoting an integrated perspective and financial/management strategy, considering the need to get funding from different sources and, in this way, promoting economic sustainability of the Center.

In this way, applicants are required to complete two investment plan tables. A global investment plan table (corresponding to Point 7. of the application form), where the broad investment strategy of the Interface Center including:

1. The budget for the total activities defined in the SAP, per year, with clear information of the investment expectations for the reference period (2018-2020);
2. Indication of the funding sources per year, including the multiannual base funding, in which the total investment must correspond to the total funding.

Evaluators are required to analyze if the base funding plan is sound and reasonable and reflect this analysis in the final score. Evaluators are also specifically asked to analyze if the financial evolution of the Interface Center in the last three years (2015-2017) has substantially changed and make funding recommendations in accordance.

## 5. Scoring System

Evaluators will analyze entire applications and provide autonomous scores, in a 9-point scale:

Potential Impact	Score		Additional Guidance on Strengths/Weaknesses
Very High	Excellent	9	Exceptionally strong with essentially no weaknesses
		8	Extremely strong with negligible weaknesses

High	Very Good	7	Very strong with only some minor weaknesses
		6	Strong but with numerous minor weaknesses
Medium	Good	5	Strong but with at least one moderate weakness
		4	Some strengths but also some moderate weaknesses
<i>Threshold for funding</i>			
Low	Insufficient	3	Some strengths but with at least one major weakness
		2	A few strengths and a few major weaknesses
		1	Very few strengths and numerous major weaknesses

A score of 9 indicates an exceptionally strong application with essentially no weaknesses. A score of 1 indicates an application with serious and substantive weaknesses with very few strengths.

The score<sup>2</sup> is translated into an overall classification directly related with the funding level<sup>3</sup> attained by the Interface Center:

1. Excellent – 100%
2. Very Good – 80%
3. Good – 60%
4. Insufficient – No funding.

The applications evaluation will be weighed as follows:

1. Part A – Characterization and Prospects – 20%
2. Part B – Strategic Action Plan – 80%

The quantitative evaluation is summarized by the following key performance indicators:

1. Evolution of sales and services
2. Evolution of participation in competitive application projects (nationally and internationally)
3. Evolution of hired human resources (by degree and activity)
4. Evolution of interactions with higher education institutions and research institutes (namely with expert hiring and exchange programmes)

<sup>2</sup> As this is evaluation is the basis for a continuous monitoring process of the Strategic Action Plan Implementation and related KPIs, the maximum score during the first year will be Very Good (80%). From the second year onwards, implementation performance/results will be taken into account and the maximum score will be Excellent (100%).

<sup>3</sup> Each Interface Center may apply to a maximum of 33% of their average level of sales and services for 2013-2015, which allows each entity to know before applying how much is the maximum funding they can get from this call.

5. Evolution of international activities (researchers exchange programmes, presence in technology platforms and collaborative projects)
6. Evolution in development of new technology areas in its clients, namely energy efficiency, circular economy and digitalization (through sales and services and competitive application projects, training, or other activities identified in part A)

## 6. Evaluation Process

The overall quality of the Interface Center will be evaluated by a mixed panel of experts, composed of both national and international experts. The panel will be subdivided in 5 sub-panels, and the applications will be distributed accordingly. One member of each sub-panel will be designated as the sub-panel coordinator. All panels will include a member of the National Innovation Agency as moderator and, at least, three external evaluators. All sub-panels will develop a preliminary remote reviewing. Remote panel members will produce individual evaluation reports for each application. A consensus report is drafted by one of the external readers and validated by all readers before being forwarded to the final Evaluation Panel Meeting, with the participation of the sub-panel coordinators.

Individual remote report includes:

1. The scores of each evaluation criterion;
2. A global average weighted score, based on the scores of each criterion;
3. A succinct but substantial explanatory global comment addressing the extent to which the proposal actually meets the criteria and that explains the evaluator's overall judgment on the proposal.

Consensus report includes:

1. The consensus scores for each evaluation criterion;
2. A global average weighted score, based on the scores of each criterion;
3. A succinct but substantial explanatory consensus global comment, based on the 3 individual reviews submitted beforehand;
1. An overall score that is not a direct result of the individual scores.
2. Members of the evaluation committee are encouraged to observe the following additional guidelines:
3. Avoid comments that give a description or a summary of the proposal.
4. Avoid the use of the first person or equivalent: "I think..." or "This reviewer finds...".
5. Always use dispassionate and analytical language: avoid dismissive statements about the applicant, the proposed science, or the scientific field concerned.
6. Avoid asking questions, as the applicant will not be able to answer them.

7. Evaluate the proposed work and not the work you consider should have been proposed.

## 7. Feedback to Applicants

Applicants will receive the final evaluation report, including panel comments and possible recommendations, positioning the Interface Center in one of the four categories referred in chapter 5.

## 8. Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest

### Confidentiality

The confidentiality of written proposals must be protected. All experts involved in the evaluation are asked not to copy, quote or otherwise use material from them. They are requested to sign a statement of confidentiality relative to the contents of the project proposals and to the results of the evaluation.

The text to be accepted is the following:

#### STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

Thank you for accepting to participate in the scientific evaluation of Interface Center proposals submitted to the National Innovation Agency (Agência Nacional de Inovação – ANI).

The reader of this message pledges, on his/her honor, not to quote or use in any way, the contents of the applications, nor to make available, other than to ANI or to the Evaluation Panel, the results of the evaluation.

### Conflict of Interest (Col)

Any Col must be declared prior to the evaluation process. No reviewer shall make an individual review of a proposal if in Col with it.

Circumstances that could be interpreted as a **disqualifying conflict of interest** are laid down in the following criteria:

1. First-degree relationship, marriage, life partnership, domestic partnership with the applicant(s);
2. Personal interest in the application's success or financial interest by persons listed under no.1;
3. Current or planned close scientific, technologic, innovation or business cooperation;

4. Dependent employment relationship or supervisory relationship (*e.g.* teacher-student relationship up to and including the postdoctoral phase) extending five years beyond the conclusion of the relationship with the applicant(s);
5. The affiliation or pending transfer to this or to a participating institution;
6. Researchers who are active in a council or similar supervisory board of the applying institution are excluded from participating in the review and decision-making process for applications originating from this institution;

**A potential conflict of interest** may exist, even in cases not covered by the clear disqualifying conflicts indicated above, in the following circumstances:

7. Relationships that do not fall under no. 1, other personal ties or conflicts with the applicant(s);
8. Financial interests of persons listed under no. 6;
9. Participation in university bodies other than those listed under no. 6, *e.g.* in scientific advisory committees in the greater research environment;
10. Research cooperation within the last three years, *e.g.* joint publications;
11. Preparation of an application or implementation of a project with a closely related research topic (competition);
12. Participating in an on-going inter-personal conflict with the applicant(s).

In the latter case, ANI will make a decision whether the situation in question constitutes an actual Col – or whether no Col exists.