



rePLANT
Guide for Evaluators
2nd call-July 2023



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1. INTRODUCTION

The rePLANT guide for evaluators describes the general principles and procedures that will be used in the evaluation and selection of proposals of the rePLANT Programme. Applicants may use the guide and evaluation criteria as a checklist to ensure the quality of their proposal.

2. THE rePLANT PROGRAMME

The **rePLANT (Reconstruction Biology in Plant Sciences) Doctoral Training Programme** is an ambitious research and training initiative coordinated by the Centre for Research in Agricultural Genomics (Crag; Barcelona, Spain) together with the Max Planck Institute for Plant Breeding Research (MIPZ; Cologne, Germany) and the John Innes Centre (JIC; Norwich, UK).

Reconstruction biology leverages current knowledge on plant traits and their underlying genes and molecules to understand trait diversification and innovation in a phylogenetic framework, i.e. within and between related species. rePLANT will conduct reconstruction biology at three levels of biological organisation: cell-free systems, whole organisms and ecosystems. With rePLANT, it is expected to define quantitative trait models and uncover emergent properties, i.e. system features that the individual components do not have, as well as insights into how far a given trait can be diversified without pleiotropic effects.

The rePLANT Programme relay on **6 thematic areas**:

- (1) Plant development and interaction with the environment;
- (2) Plant responses to stress and plant-microbe interactions;
- (3) Plant metabolism and physiology;
- (4) Synthetic and systems biology;
- (5) Computational biology and mathematical modelling; and
- (6) Plant genomics, genetics and breeding.

rePLANT is designed to conduct, and train in, interdisciplinary and intersectoral collaborative research projects between the three participating institutions, with the additional collaboration and support of associated partner organisations (private companies, and research centres and academic institutions), both national and international.

rePLANT is an international, interdisciplinary, and intersectoral programme that will offer **fourteen (14) four-year doctoral fellowships**. This second call will offer **4 fellowships at MIPZ**.

3. EVALUATION PRINCIPLES

While performing the evaluation work, you are expected to comply with the following principles, as stated in Annex 1 of the Code of Conduct of the expert contract signed under the rePLANT programme, based on the Horizon Europe model contract for independent experts:

1. INDEPENDENCE
You are appointed in your personal capacity and act independently and in the public interest, not in your country or employer's interest
2. IMPARTIALITY
You treat all proposal equally and evaluate them impartially on their merits, irrespective of their origin or the identity of the applicants.
3. OBJECTIVITY

You evaluate each proposal as submitted and not based on its potential if certain changes were to be made.

4. ACCURACY

You base your judgement on the official evaluation criteria the proposal addresses, and nothing else.

5. CONSISTENCY

You apply the same standard of judgement to all proposals

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

- You discuss evaluation matters, such as the content of the proposal, evaluation results or opinions of fellow experience, only with the other experts involved in evaluating the same proposal.
- You do not contact applicants or any third parties in any case
- You do not disclose the names of other experts
- You maintain the confidentiality of documents, paper or electronic, at all times and wherever you do your evaluation work, and you must return, destroy or delete all confidential documents, paper or electronic, upon completing your work.


7. CONFLICT OF INTEREST RULES (CoI)

You have a CoI and are excluded from the evaluation session if you:

- Are involved in a competing proposal, or were involved in the preparation of the proposal (including pre-proposal checks)
- Benefit directly or indirectly if a proposal is accepted or rejected
- Have a close family or personal relationship with any person involved in the preparation of any proposal submitted to this call
- Are a director, trustee or partner or are in any way involved in the management of an organization involved in the preparation of any proposal submitted to this call
- Are employed or contracted by one of the Partner Organisations

4. OVERVIEW OF THE WORKFLOW

Selection process



Duration		8 weeks	1 week	5 weeks		1 week	10 Days	Up to 3 months
Action	Call Publication	Application	Administrative Eligibility check	Assessment Process	Interviews	Final Ranking	Appointment of Selected Applicants	Recruitment
Outcome	Announcements in different websites, social media, etc.	Nº proposals submitted	Nº eligible proposals	- Evaluation reports - Ranking of applicants - Applicants recommended for Interview	- Evaluation reports - Ranking of applicants	- Final Ranking - Applicants recommended for funding and reserve list	- Invitation letters - Acceptance letters	Hired researchers
Actors	Crag	Applicants	MPIPZ	Selection Committee	Interview Committee	Interview Committee	MPIPZ/Applicants	MPIPZ

5. ROLE OF THE EVALUATORS

The evaluators conduct the evaluations on a personal basis, not as representatives of their employer, their country or any other entity. They are expected to be independent, impartial and objective, and to behave throughout in a professional manner. These individuals must have a high level of professional experience in the public or private sector in one or more of the areas being evaluated. Evaluators must also have the appropriate language skills required for the proposals to be evaluated.

6. APPOINTMENT OF EVALUATORS

CRAG has a worldwide network of collaborators, many of them with ample experience in research personnel and project evaluation at international level. CRAG will create a database of potential experts from universities, research centers and industry specific for the rePLANT program. In order to be selected, experts must have a high level of expertise in the relevant field (e.g., plant development, plant responses to stress, plant metabolism, plant and animal genomics, computational biology, among others), be available for remote evaluation and have a good knowledge of English. Depending on the field and number of applications, experts needed for each call will be selected, excluding evaluators with possible conflict of interest and keeping a gender balance in the composition of the Selection Committee.

7. THE EVALUATION PHASES IN DETAIL

The evaluation process will be divided into five stages:

1) Administrative Eligibility check (1 week): once the call has closed, a team with representatives from CRAG and MPIPZ will check that applicants a) fulfil the eligibility rules; and b) have submitted all obligatory documentation and that it respects the formatting rules. Applicants will be informed about the results of the eligibility check, and those who failed in submitting documentation or the reference letters will have one week from the rePLANT notification to amend the missing documentation, except for the statement of research, summary of the key paper and CV that cannot be amended after the administrative eligibility check. Ineligible applications will not be evaluated.

2) Assessment Process (4 weeks). A gender-balanced Selection Committee, formed of external independent experts from recognized national and international universities, research centres, and industry will remotely evaluate the applications. The Selection Committee will include experts from the main thematic areas that reflect the scientific scope of rePLANT. The number of experts participating in the Selection Committee will depend on the number of applications. In all cases, each proposal will be evaluated by at least 3 experts.

Conflict of interest between applicants and experts will be avoided. If evaluations are significantly divergent in scores for a given application (e.g., > 33% difference between the experts), an additional evaluation by a fourth expert to resolve the discrepancy will be requested.

The Assessment Process will take into consideration the education and previous training of applicants, their motivation, the research project analysis and the potential of students by examination of the writing and logical thinking, as inferred from the review of the key publication.

All applicants will be informed about the results of the evaluation. The evaluation report will include the score and feedback to the applicant about the strengths and weaknesses of the application.

Following the ranking list, it is expected that at least the top 3 candidates for each research group will be invited to an interview.

3) Interviews (1 weeks): Selected applicants will be invited to present an example of a previous research experience, setting out their knowledge and skills to the Interview Committee. The Committee will include experts from the main thematic areas of the Assessment Process. Each interview panel will be formed by at least 1 international external expert, 2 senior researchers from the institution recruiting with no conflict of interest in the call, and a representative from a gender/equality committee of Crag.

All interviews will be conducted in English by videoconference.

Applicants will be asked to give a 10-minute presentation of themselves and their proposal, followed by 20 minutes of questions and answers, based on a catalogue of questions that will be made available to the Interview Committees to increase objectivity during the interviews. This evaluation stage puts more emphasis on the potential of the applicant. All applicants will be informed about the results of the interview. The final evaluation report will include the score and feedback to the applicant about the strengths and weaknesses of the application with regard to the evaluation criteria.

4) Final ranking of applicants: After the interviews are completed, the final score for each applicant will be calculated, taking into account the results of both the assessment process and the interview. The final ranking list will be produced, identifying the awardees and those to be considered as reserve list. The final ranking list will be publicly available at the website.

5) Ethical evaluation: the projects selected for funding will be reviewed by the Ethical Committee to ensure that the projects comply with the EU's ethical principles, Spanish, British, German and international legislation applicable in this field, as well as the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

6) Appointment of selected applicants: the selected applicants will be invited to initiate the appointment process. Selected applicants will be required to confirm acceptance of the offered position within 10 days. If an offer is rejected or the applicant does not reply to the offer in the allotted time, the reserve list will be activated by order of ranking. In case of some vacancy is not covered after the evaluation process or the appointment process, candidates in the reserve list will be invited (in rank order) to join an available vacancy, if any, even if the vacancy corresponds to a different research group than the one the candidate applied to. The Selection Committee will evaluate the suitability for the candidate to join a different research group than the original one. Selected applicants will have up to 3 months to join the recruiting institution with deadline January 2024.

8. EVALUATION CRITERIA

A transparent, merit-based selection procedure has been established with the participation of international external experts.

The assessment will be based on the documents submitted with the application. The Assessment Process will be focused on the education and previous research experience, the research project proposed and the writing and logical thinking of the candidate:

CRITERION 1: Education and training (40/100)

1.1 Education: education, level and grades achieved, suitability for the project proposed (Score: 0-20).

1.2 Research experience: research skills acquired, ability for scientific analysis, scientific production in terms of publications, patents, and attendance to international conferences, etc. (Score: 0-20).

CRITERION 2: Statement of Research (30/100)

2.1 Motivation for applying for rePLANT (Score 0-10)

2.2 Quality, originality, innovative nature of the project analysis, including international, interdisciplinary and intersectoral aspects (Score: 0-10).

2.3 Coherence and feasibility of the research plan (Score: 0-10).

CRITERION 3: Writing and logical thinking (20/100)

3.1 Ability to analyse, summarise and explain a research paper (Score: 0-20).

CRITERION 4: Support of referees (10/100)

4.1 Theoretical knowledge and technical proficiency of the candidate, overall performance, strengths, areas of improvement or skill development, ability to work independently and as part of a team should be addressed and will be evaluated. Assessment of the reference letters should take into account the suitability and aptness of the person who writes the letter with regard to the candidate's project (Score: 0-10)

The overall threshold for applicants to be ranked for interviews will be 70/100. In case of ex aequo, priority is given to the score for Criterion 1.

8.3 Evaluation criteria for the Interview

This phase puts more emphasis on the future potential of the applicant (rather than their past success) and will be based on the following criteria:

CRITERION 1: Scientific knowledge and research skills (Score: 0-50);

CRITERION 2: Presentation and communication skills, defence of the project and ability to take part in scientific discussions (Score: 0-20);

CRITERION 3: Motivation for applying for rePLANT fellowship (Score: 0-15); and,

CRITERION 4: International and/or multicultural experience (Score: 0-15).

The overall threshold for applicants to advance to the final ranking step will be 70/100. In case of ex aequo, priority is given to the score for Criterion 1.

8.4 Final ranking

The final score will be calculated based on the score of the Assessment Process (weight 60%) and the score of the Interview (weight 40%). The threshold for selection will be 75/100.

PHASE	CRITERIA	SCORE	TOTAL SCORE	THRESHOLD	WEIGHT
1. Administrative eligibility check	CRITERION 1: Eligibility rules	n/a	n/a	Eligible / not eligible	n/a
	CRITERION 2: Documents requested				
2. Assessment Process	CRITERION 1: Education and training	0-40	0-100	70	60
	CRITERION 2: Statement of Research	0-30			
	CRITERION 3: Writing and logical thinking	0-20			
	CRITERION 4: Quality and support of referees	0-10			
3. Interview	CRITERION 1: Scientific knowledge and skills in the area of research	0-50	0-100	70	40
	CRITERION 2: Presentation and communication skills, defence of the project and ability to take part in scientific discussions	0-20			
	CRITERION 3: Motivation for applying for rePLANT	0-15			
	CRITERION 4: International and/or multicultural exp.	0-15			
FINAL SCORE = Total Score from phase 2 * 60% + Total Score phase 3 * 40%				75	

9. EVALUATION REPORTS

9.1 ASSESSMENT PROCESSES

Individual Evaluation Report

The Evaluator is responsible for drafting the Individual Evaluation Report. Please form an opinion based on your own expertise. Please do not consult with other evaluators and do not, under any circumstances, contact the applicant.

If you are asked to evaluate more than one application, you are advised to evaluate all applications finalising your grades and comments as this will enable you to see the full spectrum of applications allocated to you.

Many evaluators find it useful to make comments highlighting what they perceive as weak and strong points for each criterion and then use this to form their judgement and assign the grade.

When evaluating a proposal, please note that the grade alone is not enough for your evaluation to be well understood and that the evaluation panel must also write a consensus report to be submitted to the applicant.

“Do’s and Don’ts”

- Do write your comments using full and clear sentences for each criterion.
- Do avoid summarising the application. The applicant and the evaluators know what the application is about.
- Do focalise on strong and weak points based on the given criteria. Do avoid general statements such as: *“The research could have been described better”*.
- Do avoid statements such as *“the candidate has few publications for his/her age”*. If you believe the track record of any participant to be inadequate then, include a comment such as *“It has not been demonstrated in the application that the proposed fellow has a strong*

enough track record to carry out this project". Please consider the possibility that the applicant has resumed a research career and assess the total time spent on research.

- Above all, do avoid writing personal comments and insults.
- Do only consider the material included in the application.
- Ethical issues are of considerable concern and you should make a note of those raised by the proposed project. Ethical issues should not affect your evaluation but will need to be managed by the applicant and his/her supervisor.

Consensus Report

The comments of all evaluators will be unified in a single document that will be discussed during the Consensus meeting in order to elaborate the Consensus Report for each applicant.

Feedback to applicants

The consensus report is sent to the applicant together with the final decision on his/her application. This will help candidates in the future applications. The names of the evaluators are not provided.

9.2 INTERVIEW

Final Report

After the interviews are completed, the Interview Committee will agree on the final score for each applicant, considering the results of both the Assessment process and the Interview. The Interview Committee will produce the **final ranking list** that will determine the awardees, and those to be considered as **reserve list**.

Feedback to applicants

The **final evaluation report** will include the score and feedback to the applicant about the strengths and weaknesses of the application with regard to the evaluation criteria and including the results of the interview.

10. RePLANT CONTACT

By e-mail: replant@cragenomica.es

By phone: (+34) 935 636 600 (Ext. 3025)

CRAG Building - Campus UAB
08193 Cerdanyola del Vallès
Barcelona, Spain

Annex 1 – TEMPLATE FOR THE ASSESSMENT PROCESSES

ASSESSMENT PROCESS			
CRITERION 1: Education and training (Score: 0-40)			
Sub-criteria	Documents/sections related to the criteria	Score	Comments
1.1. Education: education, level and grades achieved, suitability for the project proposed (Score: 0-20).	CV		
1.2 Research experience: research skills acquired, ability for scientific analysis, scientific production in terms of publications, patents, and attendance to international conferences, etc. (Score: 0-20).	CV		

ASSESSMENT PROCESS			
CRITERION 2: Statement of Research (0-30)			
Sub-criteria	Documents/sections related to the criteria	Score	Comments
2.1 Motivation for applying for rePLANT (Score 0-10)	<i>Statement of Research/ motivation letter</i>		
2.2 Quality, originality, innovative nature of the project analysis, including international, interdisciplinary and intersectoral aspects (Score: 0-10).	<i>Statement of Research/ short comment of the research project proposed by the Host Group of interest</i>		

2.3 Coherence and feasibility of the research plan (Score: 0-10).	<i>Statement of Research/ short comment of the research project proposed by the Host Group of interest</i>		
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ASSESSMENT PROCESS			
CRITERION 3: Writing and logical thinking (0-20)			
Sub-criteria	Documents/sections related to the criteria	Score	Comments
3.1 Ability to analyse, summarise and explain a research paper (Score: 0-20).	<i>Statement of Research/ short review of one key publication</i>		

ASSESSMENT PROCESS			
CRITERION 4: Support of referees (0-10)			
Sub-criteria	Documents/sections related to the criteria	Score	Comments
4.1 Theoretical knowledge and technical proficiency of the candidate, overall performance, strengths, areas of improvement or skill development, ability to work independently and as part of a team should be addressed and will be evaluated. Assessment of the reference letters should take into account the suitability and aptness of the person who writes the letter with regard to the candidate's project (Score: 0-10)	<i>Reference letters</i>		

Annex 2 – TEMPLATE FOR THE INTERVIEW

INTERVIEW			
CRITERIA	Documents/sections related to the criteria	Score	Comments
CRITERION 1: Scientific knowledge and research skills (Score: 0-50);	Presentation		
CRITERION 2: Presentation and communication skills, defence of the project and ability to take part in scientific discussions (Score: 0-20);	Presentation		
CRITERION 3: Motivation for applying for rePLANT fellowship (Score: 0-15)	Presentation		
CRITERION 4: International and/or multicultural experience (Score: 0-15).	Presentation		