



Co-Lap
AcceiBio

Open Call 2025 for Drug Discovery
Projects

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Guidelines for evaluation

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Introduction

AccelBio is the Collaborative Laboratory to foster translation and drug discovery ("AccelBio") whose main purpose is to accelerate biomedical innovation in Portugal. Its primary objective is to foster the successful transfer of scientific knowledge to the economy through the development of products and businesses in drug discovery.

The AccelBio Open Call ("Open Call") is an initiative that will select projects with the most promising prospects of transitioning from research into pre-clinical and clinical product candidates. The ultimate goal of the Open Call is to capitalize on the best Portuguese discoveries, transforming them into innovative drug assets.

The purpose of this guide is to describe in detail the selection process for proposals to the AccelBio Open Call, which is governed by the following principles:

EXCELLENCE: The ultimate goal of the selection process is to ensure that the projects selected are not only the best of those presented (in accordance with the programme's principles and selection criteria), but also that they exhibit excellence within their respective areas and sectors. Consequently, it is conceivable that if proposals fail to meet the requisite standards of excellence, positions within the programme may remain unfilled. The quality of proposals will be evaluated by designated experts according to objective rubrics designed to prevent the application of personal biases and mitigate potential conflicts of interest.

IMPARTIALITY: All proposals presented will undergo evaluation following identical processes, criteria, and based solely on their individual merits, irrespective of any extraneous factors. Evaluation procedures will ensure that evaluators have access to the requisite information for impartial assessment and are able to identify potential conflicts of interest. Evaluators engaged in the process are required to formally disclose any existing conflicts of interest pertaining to the proposals under consideration or the program as a whole. Furthermore, evaluators are prohibited from assessing any proposal in which they possess any form of conflict of interest.

CONFIDENTIALITY: All proposals, data, and related documents will be treated with confidentiality by all parties involved in the selection process. Evaluators will be required to sign an agreement with AccelBio, encompassing aspects pertinent to the selection process and criteria. This agreement will obligate evaluators to disclose any existing conflicts of interest, uphold confidentiality, and refrain from utilizing provided information for any other purposes. The evaluation process will operate under a single-blind system, where evaluators will be informed of the applicant's identity to identify potential conflicts of interest. Applicants will not be made aware of the identities of those evaluating their proposals.

QUALITY: The processes, procedures and selection criteria will be documented and communicated to all interested parties. Evaluators will receive a Code of Conduct which defines the relevant ethical aspects that govern the evaluation and selection process. This Code of Conduct will govern the execution of the activities carried out by the evaluator in the framework of the Open Call.

Eligibility check

For each proposal presented, the Management and the Translational Team of AccelBio shall verify its compliance with the requirements specified in the Rules of Participation. Proposals that fail to comply with any of the said rules will be excluded from the process. In case multiple applications are submitted for the same project proposal, only the latest submitted proposal will be considered for evaluation. Applicants will be informed of the exclusion and the reasons for it. Therefore, evaluators must formally consider all proposals assigned to them for evaluation as being eligible.

CLASSIFICATION OF THE PROPOSAL: Proposals will be classified by selected suitable evaluators from both scientific and business area. Applicants will select, on the proposal form, the area that best suits the subject of their project. This self-classification will be respected as much as possible. However, AccelBio may reclassify a proposal into a different disciplinary field if deemed necessary.

The list of therapeutic areas are as follows:

- ONCOLOGY
- NEUROSCIENCES
- INFECTIOUS DISEASES
- IMMUNOLOGY
- METABOLISM
- CARDIOVASCULAR

Evaluation process

The procedure for evaluating external proposals consists of two phases:

1. Pre-selection is based on remote assessment by three external and independent reviewers.
2. Selection is carried out by a proper Evaluation Committee, a member of AccelBio Translational or Management Teams and includes an online interview.

To take part in the process, evaluators are required to read and follow this Guidelines for Evaluation and act according to the Code of Conduct. AccelBio will hold a registry of experts that can participate as evaluators. These evaluators have expressed both their willingness to be part of the evaluation process, as well as their expertise and suitability in the disciplinary field to which they are assigned.

Pre-selection of proposals (remote evaluation)

Each proposal will be evaluated by at least three experts who will independently examine and rate the proposal without any type of contact or discussion among themselves. If there is a significant discrepancy, the proposal will be sent to a fourth expert. Each expert will have access only to the information and documentation of the proposals assigned to them. The proposals in the pre-selection process will be evaluated based on the evaluation table described in Annex 1 which includes the criteria to be rated and the percentual weight of each criterion and sub-criterion for the calculation of the final score. In the pre-selection phase, experts will assign a score to each of the blocks into which the application form is divided, namely: i) asset/project; ii) team; iii) finance; and v) business case and impact. Each expert will also provide a rationale, along with a brief written explanation, of the reasons for the score of each proposal evaluated, as well as its strengths and weaknesses.

SCORING SCALE

For each section of the proposal, experts will assign a score to each evaluation criterion using a number with two decimal places from 0.00 to 8.00 based on the following scale of values.

RATING	Excellent	Good	Poor
Score	6.50 – 8.00	4.00 – 6.49	0.00 – 3.99

These scores will be weighed accordingly and added up to obtain a final score for each proposal, rounded to two decimal places. Once the total score for each proposal is established by each of the experts, results are received by AccelBio and an average score will be calculated for each project. If there are any significant discrepancies in the scores assigned to a proposal that reaches the threshold to pass to the next evaluation phase, AccelBio will send the proposal to an additional expert for evaluation. The average score will then be created considering all scores. The average score will be calculated using two decimal places.

Once the pre-selection is completed, applicants will be notified as to whether or not they have been pre-selected for the interview evaluation stage. The five (5) projects with the highest score and with a minimum score of 6 will be selected for the interview stage. If less than 5 projects have a minimum rating of 6, only those will proceed for the interview. If no project is rated equal or above 6, a new call may be open within six months.

Selection of proposals (online interview)

Proposals that have been shortlisted will then proceed to the final stage of the process, consisting of a remote interview in which the Project Leader must present the project to a second Evaluation Committee, which will be composed of investment and business experts, and members from AccelBio. The general aim of the interview is to assess more precisely the consistency and soundness of the projects proposed by the shortlisted candidates and the suitability of the proposal with regards to the objectives of the programme.

INTERVIEW PROCESS

The interview will be held in English. Typically, the interview will last no more than 60 minutes and is carried out following this format:

1. The AccelBio representative welcomes the applicant and will ensure that the interviews are carried out according to the scheduled planning;
2. The applicant presents, with maximum brevity (no more than 5 minutes), a summary of their statement of purpose;
3. The members of the Evaluation Committee pose the questions they deem appropriate to evaluate the excellence of the statement of purpose and the application as a whole (around 45 minutes);
4. At the end of each interview, the members of the Evaluation Committee will have time for a brief discussion and will separately enter the specific comments of the projects considering the evaluation criteria (see Annex 1). Each member of the Evaluation Committee will score each proposal with Go or No Go if they consider that it should or should not be awarded, respectively. Each expert will also provide a rationale, along with a brief written explanation, of the reasons for the score of each proposal evaluated, as well as its strengths and weaknesses.

The members of the Evaluation Committee will have the opportunity to provide further assessment on the provisional classification, the need to rearrange the budget or to change the stage of the proposals put forward for selection. After the final discussions, the proposals will be ranked according to the number of GOs

each proposal receives combined with the score from the pre-selection. AccelBio will support a maximum of two proposals. If two or more proposals have the same final score, the project to be supported will be the one with the best score in the criteria “asset”.

Annex 1

Criteria	Weight	Description	Correspondence with application template
Asset (project)	35	- Novelty of the scientific approach (15) - Quality and robustness of the experimental support (10) - Relevance and feasibility of the milestones to be achieved (5) - Soundness of the development plan (5)	- Brief description of your project/asset - Scientific rationale - Supporting data - Goals and milestones to be achieved - Mitigation plan - Gantt chart
Team	10	- Suitability and complementarity of the capabilities of the team to carry out the proposed project	- Project leader's experience and expertise - Complementarity of the team members
Finance	25	- Financial and infrastructure capability to support the development of the project (10) - Capability to generate new IP (15)	- Financial resources - Available infrastructure - Intellectual property
Business Case and Impact	30	- Attractiveness of the project to the market (15) - Evaluation of the medical need the project addresses (10) - Potential contribution of the asset to improving people's quality of life (5)	- Innovation - Need or problem to be solved - Anticipated societal impact