

EXPERT REVIEWER GUIDE

Website:	Social Networks:
https://postdoc-aristos.com/	https://twitter.com/postdocAristos
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This Expert Reviewer Guide contains evaluation criteria, evaluators' Code of Conduct (unbiased merit-based evaluation ensuring equal opportunities), list of conflict of interests to be avoided, interview criteria and the evaluation template.

1. ABOUT ARISTOS PROGRAM

ARISTOS is a strategic Program in Biomedicine and Health Sciences, led by CIBER (Consorcio Centro de Investigación Biomédica en Red) in Spain, that offers 27 postdoctoral positions for three years each. Fellows will be able to freely choose a research topic and the appropriate host group that best fits their scientific interest and training purposes, from the wide CIBER offer which will be organized in 13 panels.

13 Thematic Areas in CIBER		
Bioengineering, Biomaterials and Nanomedicine	Cardiovascular Diseases (CIBERCV)	
(CIBER-BBN): <u>https://www.ciber-bbn.es/en</u>	<u>https://www.cibercv.es/en</u>	
Diabetes and Metabolic Diseases	Liver and Digestive Diseases (CIBEREHD)	
(CIBERDEM) <u>https://www.ciberdem.org/en</u>	<u>https://www.ciberehd.org/en</u>	
Rare Diseases (CIBERER)	Respiratory Diseases (CIBERES)	
https://www.ciberer.es/en	<u>https://www.ciberes.org/en</u>	
Epidemiology and Public Health (CIBERESP)	Frailty and Healthy Ageing (CIBERFES)	
<u>https://www.ciberesp.es/en</u>	<u>https://www.ciberfes.es/en</u>	
Infectious Diseases (CIBERINFEC)	Neurodegenerative Diseases (CIBERNED)	
https://www.ciberinfec.es/	<u>https://www.ciberned.es/en</u>	
Physiopathology of Obesity and Nutrition	Oncology (CIBERONC)	
(CIBEROBN): <u>https://www.ciberobn.es/en</u>	https://www.ciberonc.es/en	
Mental Health (CIBERSAM): https://www.cibersam.es/en		

The Program's goal is to provide highly qualified postdoctoral researchers with opportunities for international, intersectoral, and interdisciplinary research through a competitive recruitment process.

Fellows participating in the ARISTOS Program will have the opportunity to carry out a research project on a topic related with disease prevention, diagnosis, monitoring, and treatment and come closer to the private sector by collaborating with medical and healthcare companies during their secondments or special events with the final aim to



promote knowledge exchange and the mobility among the academic, clinical and private sectors.

The Program will have one main call and a reserve call if needed, and it will offer excellent and competitive working conditions for Fellows in line with the European Charter for Researchers and Code of Conduct.

ARISTOS Program website https://postdoc-aristos.com/

Objectives of the ARISTOS Program

The main objectives of the ARISTOS Program are:

- To provide training and career development to 27 postdoctoral researchers according to the individual-driven mobility and equal opportunities principles in order to enable sustainable career paths.

- To accelerate the scientific progress and excellence of Europe by attracting top-class researchers of any nationality to work on innovative research projects in emerging fields of biomedicine and health sciences.

- To enhance international cooperation and transfer of knowledge in research related with disease prevention, diagnosis, monitoring and treatment as well as reinforce the transfer of knowledge among research and clinical networks in these fields.

- To promote knowledge transfer by the collaboration with medical and healthcare industry and policy stakeholders.

- To encourage the multidisciplinary attitude among professionals to boost the adaptation capacity to new arising challenges, instilling a sense of "collective science" among professionals and society.

2. EVALUATION PRINCIPLES

While performing the evaluation work, reviewers are expected to comply with the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers, ensuring equal opportunities for candidates regardless of gender, age, ethnic, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, language, disability or socioeconomic status.

Selection should be based exclusively on the candidate's merits and on the other criteria set out in these evaluation guidelines.

One of the ARISTOS Program goals is to improve women's career perspectives and help them reach leading positions. For the evaluation process, reviewers are expected to follow the well-developed policy of CIBER, which implements a Gender Equality Plan.



The selection process should take into consideration the whole range of experience of the candidates, and merit should be judged focusing on outstanding results within a diversified perspective and not only on the number of scientific outcomes or the use of journal-based metrics, as highlighted in the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment. While focusing on their overall potential as researchers, their creativity and level of independence will also be considered.

There is no age limitation, and career breaks or variations in the chronological order of CVs should not be penalized but regarded as an evolution of a career, and consequently, as a potentially valuable contribution to the professional development of researchers towards a multidimensional career track.

Moreover, the ARISTOS Program is open to any experienced researcher around the world provided that they comply with the mobility rule, following the Guidelines for Inclusion of Researchers at Risk.

ARISTOS complies with the initiative Science4Refugees that the EC launched to help refugee scientists to find suitable jobs that both improve their own situation and put their skills and experience to good use in Europe's research system.

Conflict of interest

Conflict of interest exists if the reviewer:

- is involved in the preparation of a proposal or benefits directly or indirectly if a proposal is accepted,

- has common publications, or collaborates with the host group in a proposal under evaluation,

- has close family, professional or personal relationship with an applicant,

- is or has been a director, trustee, partner or employer of one of the applicants in the last three years,

- is or has been involved in a contract or grant agreement, grant decision, membership of management structures (e.g. advisory board) or research collaboration with an applicant (or in the last three years),

- is found in a situation that could cast doubt on their ability to participate impartially in the evaluation of the proposal.

Each reviewer will have to sign of a Non-Disclosure Agreement and a declaration of absence of any potential conflict of interest.



3. PROCESS OVERVIEW: SUBMISSION AND SELECTION





4. ROLE OF THE REVIEWERS

While performing the evaluation work, reviewers are expected to act independently and in the public interest. They are expected to be impartial, objective, accurate and consistent. Reviewers will score and rank proposals/candidates according to the ARISTOS assessment criteria. Reviewers must maintain the confidentiality of the evaluation process and documents. Reviewers can only discuss evaluation matters with the other experts involved in evaluating the same proposal.

Since all applicants will receive their individual evaluation report, comments should not negatively criticize the candidate's proposal but rather be constructive recommendations on how to improve the shortcomings or weaknesses.

5. APPOINTMENT OF REVIEWERS

The admitted and eligible research project proposals along with the applicants' CVs and motivation letters will be sent via secure file transfer for evaluation to a Spanish external evaluation agency. Each proposal will be evaluated by three independent reviewers (at least one of them non based in Spain not from Spanish nationality), gender and internationally balanced and with cross-sectoral origin: industry, clinicians, academia.

In order to assign the proposals to the most suitable evaluators, each proposal contains a set of keywords chosen by the candidate either from the MSCA list of key words or free.



6. THE EVALUATION PHASES IN DETAIL

The evaluation process is divided into the following stages:

Stage 1: Review of applications: eligibility check

The eligibility check of the submitted applications will be made by the program manager and validated by the Recruitment Committee. A provisional list of all valid applications will be notified, followed by a 10-days period to fix any missing or incomplete documents.

Incomplete and ineligible applications will also be discarded at this stage. Non-eligible applicants will be notified of the results of the eligibility check within the first month after the call deadline. Eligible applicants will receive confirmation that they have passed the eligibility check and will be informed if their application undergoes an in-depth review.

Stage 2: External Evaluation and Ethical Issues Check

The admitted and eligible research project proposals along with the applicants' CVs and motivation letters will then be sent for evaluation to an external evaluation agency. Each proposal will be evaluated by **three independent reviewers** (at least one of them non based in Spain not from Spanish nationality). Each reviewer will indicate their personal evaluation in a template (see Appendix 1).

The **final score** for every criterion will be the **average of three individual scores**. In case of a score discrepancy above 15%, a fourth evaluator will be called in. Each reviewer will evaluate a maximum of ten proposals (and not less than three, depending on the scientific scope, in order to have a sample of reference).

After the evaluation, CIBER will be provided with a summary report containing the ranked files according to the final score, scores for each criterion and individual reports for each candidate.

Evaluation re<mark>sults and propo</mark>sals rankings will be announced in February/March 2024 (January 2025 in case of a second call), followed by a 15-days redress period.

Following the evaluation of all the eligible project proposals by the external peer-reviewers, the shortlisted projects will be screened by the ARISTOS **Ethics Committee** in order to check their compliance with the European and National ethics principle and practices. Proposals that raise ethics concerns will be flagged and if some aspects are incomplete, clarification will be sought. The ethical issues will be also addressed during the interviews with the candidates.

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Among proposals with equal total score, those with better evaluation results in the section of Excellence (followed by the section of Impact) will be prioritized (see Evaluation Criteria). All applicants in this ranking list with a score over 70% threshold will be called to an interview.

Stage 3: Interview of the candidates

The Interview Panel will be formed by four examiners: a CIBER PI with no direct benefit from the ARISTOS Program, a non-Spanish member of the Scientific Advisory Board (not based in Spain) of one of the CIBER Thematic Areas with expertise in the same research field with the proposal (among 75 people who will be committed to this task upon the start of the Program), a representative of the private sector (belonging to one of the associated partners) and a representative of CIBER Human Resources Department. The panel will be gender balanced and particular attention will be given to avoid unconscious gender bias towards any of the applications under evaluation. This will be assured by a briefing given by the Program Manager.

Interviews will be held in English, via videoconference during an eight-week period, provided the availability of the candidates and the Interview Panel. Candidates will be called by the interview panel through an online secured platform. All interviews will last 45 minutes, starting with a 10 minutes' presentation of the project and followed by a scientific discussion. An overall assessment of the non-scientific personal skills will also be performed.

Each evaluator will indicate their personal evaluation in a template (see Appendix 2) to subsequently arrive to a global consensus for the interview phase.

The **resulting evaluations will be sent to the Recruitment Committee**, which will be responsible for the merging of the interview and peer-review scores.

Redress Committee. Applicants will have the opportunity to submit an appeal in the 10 or 15 calendar-days (depending on the stage) following the three selection stages (see Fig. 1). The appeal document, of max. two pages, should follow a provided template which will include information about the application and a section detailing the grounds of the redress. The redress will only evaluate the evaluation procedure and perceived incorrect application of the eligibility criteria and not the scientific judgement of the peer reviewers and Interview Panel members.

All interviews must have been completed by the end of April 2024 (March 2025 in the case of the reserve call) and the resulting evaluations will be sent to the Recruitment Committee. The list of Admitted Fellows will be ratified by the Recruitment Committee and later, by the Steering Committee.

Each applicant's **final mark** will be based on the evaluation of the **submitted proposal (70%) and the interview assessment (30%)**. Candidates should again **exceed a threshold of 70%** in the total score **to be appointed**.



Candidates will be finally ranked according to their total evaluation scores in 13 ranking lists (one per panel – <u>CIBER Thematic Areas</u>) and will be granted in descending order, provided they are above the threshold. If equal scores, priority will be given to parity, so that the men / women employed by the program will be circa 50%, followed by a priority to returnees from parental or sick leave. If the number of candidates exceeding the threshold is higher than the number of foreseen positions in each panel, reserve lists will be created.

All applicants will receive their individual evaluation report (also available through the website Personal Area) and will have a 10-day period to file a complaint.

Stage 4: Publication of the shortlist

The shortlist will become public in the website (May 2024, April 2025 in the case of a second call). Admitted Fellows will then be contacted by ARISTOS program manager for the initiation of the hiring process. The selected Fellows will have to communicate the acceptance of the fellowship through a Researcher Declaration within a **maximum period of 2 weeks**, counting from the date of notification, and **must be available to join the program within the following 5 months**.

Stage 5: Fellows' Appointment

Reserve List

If an appointed researcher refuses the position, it will be offered to the first candidate on the reserve list of the same panel, and so on. Vacancies not filled in the first call for proposals will be included in the second call (open July-September 2024).

Appointments

It is expected that successful candidates start the fellowship at their earliest convenience in May or June 2024. It is possible that Fellows from non-European countries take longer to process permits to reside and work in Spain.

<u>Support</u>

CIBER will offer personalized assistance to all appointed candidates in order to get their work permits, visa and other required documents.

The list of Admitted Fellows will be ratified by the Recruitment Committee and later, by the Steering Committee. The list will then become public on the website (May 2024). Admitted Fellows will be then contacted by the Program Manager for the initiation of the hiring process, to be continued by the Human Resources Department of CIBER. The selected Fellows will have to communicate the acceptance of the fellowship through a Researcher Declaration within a maximum period of 2 weeks, counting from the date of notification, and must be available to join the Program within the following 5 months. If an appointed researcher refuses the offer, the position will be offered to the first candidate on the reserve



list for the same panel, and so on. Vacancies not filled in the 1st call for proposals will be included in the 2nd call.

Besides, **researchers with disabilities** will be truly supported by ARISTOS. In the case that researchers with long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments disabilities are to be recruited, they will be informed about the additional financial support provided by the **MSCA (Special Needs Allowance)**.

7. EVALUATION CRITERIA

The 27 Fellows will be selected through an open, transparent, merit-based, international and peer-review procedure.

Table 1 summarizes the criteria for the applications' evaluation. The applicants do not need to justify the quality of the host group in their application, as the ARISTOS Program is a monobeneficiary action and CIBER groups are not in competition with each other. The candidates need, however, to point out the capacity of the group they wish to join, in supporting their research project, e.g. that it has the required infrastructure.

Priority in case of proposals with the same score (ex aequo) will be considered as defined in **Table 1.**



Table 1. Evaluation criteria for the proposals' evaluation by the external evaluators.

Scoring of ARISTOS research project proposal will be according to **Table 2**. Each criterion (Excellence, Impact and Implementation) will be scored out of 5 but intermediate, decimal points may be given where proposals lie between definitions points.



1	Poor. The criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious				
L	inherent weaknesses.				
n	Weak. Proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are				
2	significant weaknesses.				
	Good. Proposal addresses the criterion well, but a number of				
3	shortcomings are present.				
-	Very Good. Proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small				
4	4				
	number of shortcomings are present.				
_	Excellent. Proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the				
5					
	criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.				

Table 2. Scoring

A weighted total score will be calculated based on the scores of the three criteria and converted into a percentage. An overall threshold of 70% must be met for the application to be placed in the ranking lists and be invited to interview. All interviews will last 45 minutes, starting with a 10 minutes presentation of the project, followed by a scientific discussion, for the overall assessment of the nonscientific personal skills.

Assessment criteria and their corresponding weights are shown in Table 3. Scores may be awarded according to Table 2.

Interview award criteria	Weight
Capacity to defend the project	40
Communication and presentation skills	30
Motivation and enthusiasm for interdisciplinary research	15
Attitude, autonomous thinking, teamwork capacity and	15
leading abilities	

Table 3. Interview award criteria

Each applicant's **final mark** will be based on the evaluation of the **submitted proposal (70%) and the interview assessment (30%)**. Candidates should again exceed a threshold of 70% in the total score to be appointed.

If alas situations of gender imbalance were to arise during the ARISTOS selection procedure, actions would be taken to correct this imbalance, for instance, equally scored candidates will be ranked in such a way so that men to women parity can be achieved.

In a similar manner, priority will be given to **returnees from parental or sick leave**.

8. EVALUATION REPORTS

ARISTOS webpage Personal Area will be regularly updated with information related to the selection process, including the corresponding lists at each selection stage. Moreover, all the applicants will be informed via email when every stage of the selection process is finished,



and they will be able to download their individual evaluation reports through the Personal Area of the website.

Ethics review will be performed on the basis of information available in the proposal and an individual ethics assessment report will be emitted by the Ethics Committee and attached to the evaluation report at the end of the evaluation process.

9. CONTACT

Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions. We will be glad to answer them for you from <u>aristos@ciberisciii.es</u>

The Frequently Asked Questions can be consulted on the Program website at: https://postdoc-aristos.com/FAQ



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APPENDIX 1: EXTERNAL EVALUATION TEMPLATE

			scored or	eria (Excellence, Impact and Implementation) should b at of 5 but Intermediate, decimal points may be given oposals lie between definitions points
While performing the evaluation work, please be impartial, objective, accu- Please score and rank proposals/candidates according to the ARISTOS asse recommendations on how to improve the shortcomings or weaknesses.		ents should not negatively criticize the candidate's proposal but rather be constructive	1 2	Poor, The criterion is inadequately addressed, or there are serious inherent weaknesses. Weak, Proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses. Good, Proposal addresses the criterion well, but a number of
Project reference (23APL***)			3 4 5	shortcomings are present. Very Good. Proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present. Excellent. Proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.
Excellence Criteria (Welght: 40%)	Score ^e (1-5)	Comments		Proposal section instructions
Quality, creativity, innovative aspects and credibility of the research objectives (including multidisciplinary aspects benefiting from CIBER interdisciplinarity)			of the art	Section 1: Excellence tiction: background and context. Describe shortly the topic and sits of your proposal (introduction, challenge definition, topics bein addressed, etc.) t and objectives: Enumerate the main goal and specific objectiv research project and explain how they align with the topic being addressed by the proposal.
Intersectoral aspects of the research objective (academic, industry, societal) specific to the aims of the Program. Suitability of the selected seconding company.			overa procedure consid potential r	h methodology including multilisiplinary approach. Describe t II design of the research to address the objectives (strategies, s, methodologies, experiments, potential risk), including ethi- lerations such as participants' consents, confidentiality issues, risk). How is the multilisiplinarity of CIBER utilized/incorporat proposal? To what extent can the multilisiplinarity of CIBER
Quality of the academic track record of the applicant relative to the research proposed (e.g. patents, publications, research stays, projects)			I.4 Innovat I.5 Suitab your sec	enhance/enrich the proposal? ion and originality. Highlight the innovative and originality aspe of the proposal. ility of the selected company. Explain and justify the selection is onding company and why it would be beneficial for your projec and career development. Highlight the intersectoral approach
Compliance of the proposal with the Open Science principles				the proposal. Sciences practices. Explain how the open science principles are red in the proposal (e.g. data sharing, code sharing, open access publications, reproducibility and transparency).
Impact Criteria (Weight: 35%)	Score* (1-5)	Comments		Proposal section instructions
Consistency of the research project with the hosting research group, capacity to enhance candidates' skills, career perspectives Effectiveness of the proposed communication, exploitation and dissemination plan relative to the research field. Possibility of the research activity and grade distributed a database (Industria) /			Explain th your profe research	Section 2: Impact direct GIBEN hosting group and integration with the group are expected impact of the planned research and training future career prospects (e.g. new competences, skills, sional maturity). Discuss the expected impacts of your project on the research group (advancements in the file international network, knowledge transfer, etc.) cted outcomes: impact of your research. Explain how th 5's results are expected to make a difference in terms of
societal areas Fellows' potential to establish a leadership role in the proposal field, apt to their experience level, in Spain/internationally and in academia/ industry			impa II.3 Mea Ho dissemini In case a	ct at national and international level (social, scientific, industrial, etc.) sures for communication, exploitation and disseminatio w will new knowledge generated be communicated, ated and exploited to one similare the impact of your proje commercial application is envisaged, define de strategy f
Potential for increased impact of research via industry/clinical				agement of intellectual property and foreseen protection measures such as patents. otential industry/clinical collaborations. Benefits of the
collaboration			intersect	oral approach of the proposal. How can collaboration wi
	Score [®] (1-5)	Comments	intersect	oral approach of the proposal. How can collaboration wi clinical environments contribute to improve the researc Proposal section instructions
collaboration	Score* (1-5)	Comments	intersect industry, III.1 Wor 36 mon milestor prop Describ any oth HII.2 Mi	oral approach of the proposal. How can collaboration wi clinical environments contribute to improve the researc

Criteria	Score	%	Feedback (strengths, weaknesses, final justification)
Excellence			
Maximum weight: 40%	0	0,00	
Priority 1	0		
Impact			
Maximum weight: 35%	0	0,00	
Priority 2	Ů		
Implementation		0,00	
Maximum weight: 25%	0		
Priority 3	U		
WEIGHTED TOTAL SCO	RF (%)		7
(calculated based on the scores of the three criteria a		0,00	



APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW EVALUATION TEMPLATE



INTERVIEW EVALUATION TEMPLATE

All interviews will last 45 minutes, starting with a 10 minutes presentation of the project, followed by a scientific discussion, for the overall assessment of the nonscientific personal skills. The ethical issues will be also addressed during the interviews with the candidates. Each evaluator will indicate their personal evaluation to subsequently arrive to a global consensus for the interview phase.

Candidate's name

Interview award criteria	Score* (1-5)	Comments
Capacity to defend the project		
Communication and presentation skills		
Motivation and enthusiasm for interdisciplinary research		
Attitude, autonomous thinking, teamwork capacity and leading abilities		

Score	%
0	0,00
0	0,00
0	0,00
0	0,00
	0 0 0

WEIGHTED TOTAL SCORE (%) (calculated based on the scores of the three criteria and converted into a percentage) 0,00



Each criteria should be scored out of 5 but intermediate, decimal points may be given

1	Poor
2	Weak
3	Good
4	Very Good
5	Excellent