

The Palaeontological Association - Research Grant Applications

Grading Criteria

Grant review process

Grants are reviewed by a subcommittee appointed by Council. This subcommittee typically includes ~5 members of Council (including the President and other senior members such as Vice-Presidents) and should be assembled with considerations of the diversity of its membership and an appropriate range of subject expertise. Council should also identify a Chair for this subcommittee who will be responsible for overseeing the review and decision-making process and have the casting vote in the event of tie breaks. Each grant proposal will be graded using the criteria detailed below by each member of the research grant subcommittee – these reviews should be conducted independently. Overall scores for each proposal are then compiled by the Chair, averaged and ranked.

Full details of eligibility and terms and conditions are available on the Association's website and should be consulted prior to assessment. Any proposals that fail any aspect of the eligibility criteria should not progress to the next stage. Proposals must fit to the charitable aims of the Association and will be ranked on the following criteria:

- Scientific quality of research, novelty and timeliness, likely outputs (15 points)
- Feasibility (5 points)
- Value for money and cost effectiveness (5 points)
- Investigator's ability to deliver the research project (5 points)

A detailed rubric for how each of these should be scored is given below.

We expect applicants to work in meaningful and mutually beneficial ways with local collaborators as appropriate to the project, and to consider relevant ethical aspects. The committee should satisfy itself that this is the case for highly scored proposals considered as potentially fundable.

Following the review process, the Chair should organise a wash-up meeting at which recommendations are reached as to which proposals should be funded. These recommendations should be based upon the ranked list of proposals considering the available budget. In the event of proposals receiving equal scores and equal support from the subcommittee, the Chair has the flexibility to decide between these proposals either using a lottery system or by the Chair using a casting vote. Recommendations are then presented to Council at a Council Meeting for formal approval.

The review scores should be input by each subcommittee member onto the Excel spreadsheet and forwarded to the Chair, who should compile them and provide them to the Secretary along with the recommendations. It is important that some comments are given for each proposal by each subcommittee member – these comments provide justification for the gradings, and also provide some text that can be edited by the Secretary to be used as feedback to unsuccessful applicants. Please note that the compiled spreadsheet of scores and comments will be shared with the whole of Council.

Conflicts of interest

Members of the grant review subcommittee should declare any conflicts of interest that they have with any of the proposals. Conflicts of interest should be declared to the Chair, and subcommittee members should abstain from scoring any proposals for which they have a conflict of interest or advocating for those proposals in the wash-up meeting. Examples of conflicts of interest include:

- You are an applicant on one of the submitted proposals [in this case you should remove yourself from the grant subcommittee]
- You share a formal affiliation with the research organisation of the applicant
- You are directly involved in the work proposed and would benefit from it being funded and/or have assisted the applicant with their proposal for funding
- You are a close relative of the applicant
- You are a close personal friend of the applicant and think that friendship might affect your judgement or be seen as doing so by a neutral observer familiar with the relationship
- You are in close regular collaboration with the applicant to an extent where you feel uncomfortable being involved in the review process or you feel unable to give an unbiased opinion
- You were involved in the development of the proposal, at any stage of its preparation, including providing comments or advice to the applicant

Scientific quality, novelty and timeliness, likely outputs:

Score	Description
15	Outstanding: exceptional scientific merit and originality; highly novel and timely; expected to make a major impact on the field; within top 5% of work in the field
12	Excellent: at or near the forefront of the field and likely to advance its understanding significantly; novel and timely; within top 5-20% of work in the field
9	Very good: nationally or internationally competitive science; within top 20-35% of work in the field
6	Good: quality science but not at the leading edge
3	Of merit: offering at most a modest advance in the field and some useful knowledge
0	Flawed in scientific approach or subject to serious technical deficiencies

Feasibility:

		Reward		
		Low	Medium	High
Risk	Low	1	3	5
	Medium	1	2	4
	High	1	1	3

Value for money:

Score	Description
5	Excellent value for money; costs fully justified
4	Very good value for money; costs fully justified
3	Good value for money; costs fully justified
2	Satisfactory value for money; costs fully justified
1	Poor value for money and/or costs not fully justified

Investigator's ability to deliver the research project:

Score	Description
5	Excellent; applicant is the ideal candidate to deliver the research project based upon previous research experience and collaborative networks
4	Very good; applicant is a strong candidate to deliver the research project based upon previous research experience and collaborative networks
3	Good; applicant is a good candidate to deliver the research project, based upon previous research experience and collaborative networks, but there may be some gaps in expertise
2	Satisfactory; applicant has majority of expertise required to deliver the research project, based upon previous research experience and collaborative networks, but there may be some substantial gaps in expertise which place potential limitations on the project
1	Poor; applicant has major gaps in the expertise required to deliver the research project, based upon previous research experience and collaborative networks, and their ability to complete the project is questionable