

EXPERT VADEMECUM

—
EUROPEAN RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE CONSORTIUM - ERIC

April 2019



1 - PRÉAMBULE

This booklet intends to inform the experts about the framework and the methodology for ERIC evaluation under the responsibility of the ERIEC consortium

The first tool, needed for the evaluation, complemented by the present booklet, is the Terms of References (ToR). This background document, to be formally endorsed by the ERIEC consortium, defines the evaluation perimeter through the definition of the 14 standards, which will be examined by the committee using three evaluation criteria.

The 14 standards are grouped in three main domains, which are :

- Positioning and strategy ;
- Governance and operation ;
- Activities.

The expert will find in this Vademecum booklet, information allowing to perform properly, according to expectations, all along the evaluation process, and doing so, to contribute to the quality of the evaluation report, taking into account the following requirements:

- Respect of deontology rules and evaluation methodology
- Preliminary study of the self-assessment outcome of the ERIC
- Objective analysis of the different issues, underlined by the self-assessment

The conduct of the evaluation is made by the president of the committee, with the help of the support team, provided by the ERIEC member, acting as EEL¹, The support team is made of a scientific adviser and a project officer. The support team may eventually rely on the EEL staff for any issue related to administrative or logistic problems, linked to the evaluation.

The final product of the external evaluation is a report, which analyses and assesses the implementation of the ERIC strategy to fulfil its missions. The report delivers a comprehensive set of strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities (SWOT analysis), and concludes with recommendations, which are the ultimate achievement of the evaluation process. This report aims to be an aid for the operation and the decision-making of the ERIC and its stakeholders and funders. Being made public, it contributes to the fair and transparent information of the scientific community.

The evaluation, based on peer-review principles is a collegial action performed by the expert committee, relying on the respect of proof-based principles. The committee bases its evaluation work on facts and self-assessment provided by the ERIC, builds a comprehensive analysis, tested and enriched during the on-site visit. The president elaborates a draft report based on all experts' contributions, and finalizes the report through collective exchanges between committee members, with the help of the support team.

¹ EEL : ERIC Evaluation Leader

2. ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Before the evaluation starts, the expert enters into a contact agreement with the Hcéres, which defines the commitment of the expert to perform the complete evaluation.

The contact gives all information about the expert fees and reimbursement rules.

The travel expenses are supported by the Hcéres, (travel tickets, accommodation costs, etc.) to avoid that experts must pay in advance for these expenses.

After the evaluation is completed, the experts will be asked to respond to a quality survey dealing with the documentation management system and the evaluation process itself.

3 – DOCUMENTATION

Documentation provided by the ERIC

- The self-assessment report (SAR), including a synthetic summary of the results obtained by the ERIC during the evaluation period
- A document presenting the development strategy of the ERIC for the next period
- Annex documents to the SAR, including
 - Characteristic features and figures that the ERIC will consider as relevant for the evaluation
 - Sketch of the governance and organization of the ERIC, from the top authority down to operational departments and services
 - Initial and corrected budgets and financial statements for the last 4 years
 - Annual activity reports for the last 4 years
 - Any other external evaluation reports whenever existing
 - Any other documentation that the ERIC would consider as useful for the evaluation

Documentation provided by the EEL

- Evaluation best practice document
- Expert statute
- Template for the declaration by the expert of absence of interest with the ERIC
- Terms of References for ERIC evaluation, as endorsed by the ERIEC consortium
- Guidelines for the self-assessment, as communicated to the ERIC, outlining the expectations from the self-assessment
- Main characteristic features and figures of the ERIC, available from external sources (funding authorities, Internet, users, partners, etc.)
- Particular expectations of the ERIC from the evaluation
- Expectations from the funding authorities of the ERIC (including the EC)
- Schedule of the evaluation
- Names and contact information of the experts and the support team
- Planning of the on-site visit
- Distribution of skills and competencies of experts
- Template for the evaluation report
- Template for the note support of the visit interviews

Documentation provided by the committee

- Statement of absence of link of interest for all experts
- Analysis of the self-assessment report by the committee, prior to the on-site visit
- Preparation notes for the interviews during the on-site visit.
- Evaluation report

Additional documentation

Any additional documentation, requested by the committee:

During the preparatory phase and the on-site visit, the committee will be allowed to ask for additional documentation about the ERIC. The ERIC provides the documentation, as close as possible of the request, providing that such documents exist at the request date. The ERIC has not to create or produce new documents to answer the request.

Recommendations to all committee members

Each expert must read and analyse the provided documentation, as soon as it is available, before participating to the preparatory meeting. The deep analysis of the self-assessment report, the documentation of the ERIC activities, together with the announced development strategy is of primary importance and priority for performing the evaluation, consistent with the present methodology.

4 - CHRONOLOGY

Weeks	Tentative dates assuming start on March 1st	ERIC	Committee	EEL
1	March 4th	Preparation of SAR		Selection of experts
2	March 11th			
3	March 18th			
4	March 25th			Selection of experts and president
5	April 1st			ERIEC EB Expert selection decision
6	April 8th	On-site visit planning preparation		On-site visit planning preparation
7	April 15th			
8	April 22nd			
9	April 29th			
10	May 6th			
11	May 13th			
12	May 20th	Production of SAR		
13	May 27th		Reading of SAR and documentation and preparation of the analysis note contributions (all experts)	Sending of SAR and documentation to committee
14	June 3rd		Meeting with President	Meeting with President
15	June 10th			
16	June 18th	Draft version of the on-site visit planning Reception of the courtesy letter and distribution to interviewed persons	Preparation meeting Final version of the analysis document Preparation of interviews notes	Preparation meeting Draft version of the on-site visit planning Sending of courtesy letter to ERIC
17	June 24th	Final version of the on-site visit planning	Synthesis of interview note documents	Final version of the on-site visit planning
18	June 25-27th	On-site Visit	On-site visit	On-site visit
19	July 2nd		Preparation of expert cotributions	

			to evaluation report	
20	July 15th			
21	July 22nd			
22	July 29th			
23	August 5th		Sending of expert contributions to president	
24	August 12th			
25	August 19th			
26	August 26th		Sending of president synthesis to EEL support team	
27	September 2nd			
28	September 9th		Interaction President-EEL Production of V1	Interaction President-EEL Production of V1
29	September 16th			Sending of V1 to EEL review panel
30	September 23th			EEL Review panel meeting
31	September 30th		Sending to committee of review panel remarks	Sending to committee of review panel remarks
32	October 7th		Restitution meeting	Restitution meeting
33	October 14th	Reception of first final draft	Production of first final draft	
34	October 21st	Sending of remarks to EEL		
35	October 28th		Treatment of ERIC remarks	Treatment of ERIC remarks
36	November 4th	Reception of final report		Production of final report
37	November 11th	Sending of final observations		
38	November 18th			Reception of final observations and publication

5 – UPSTREAM STAGE, FROM START TO ON-SITE VISIT

Preparation of the committee analysis note

Upstream stage corresponds to the acquaintance by the experts of all documentation made available by the ERIC, in the scope of the evaluation. Based on this information, the experts perform a deep analysis of the ERIC situation and activity. This in-depth understanding of the ERIC allows each expert to contribute efficiently to the joint analysis document, which is collectively prepared by the committee and approved during the preparation meeting.

Expert contributions must be a real start of the evaluation process, going beyond a simple description of the ERIC and its activities, with a list of unanswered questions. Every analysis item identifies a specific point or activity, linked to the content of the ToR. In addition, further analysis may be common to several references of the ToR (or eventually to all of them).

The experts are invited to express clearly their views and opinions about the quality of the self-assessment work performed by the ERIC. In particular, experts may detect lack of information from the ERIC about specific points of the ToR, or more commonly, narrative description rather than true self-evaluation, and must point out these.

The analysis note is an internal tool of the committee. It serves as a guideline for the evaluation. It must remain open and eventually be modified or enriched with information gained during the on-site visit.

Preparation meeting

The preparation meeting, organised 3-4 weeks before the on-site visit is the first opportunity for the experts and the EEL support team, to work together, face to face.

Objectives of this meeting are multiple, and will induce several parts in the meeting agenda.

- 1) Methodology information and training: This meeting resumes the ToR and the methodology, and, if needed, allows training the experts to the evaluation methodology, as endorsed by the ERIEC consortium for ERIC evaluation.
- 2) Building consensus on the analysis note content: The meeting intends to allow the President of the committee, to present a synthesis of all expert contributions from their first analysis of the ERIC-provided documentation. Beyond this synthesis, additional discussion between the experts must yield a final version of the analysis note.
- 3) Outcome and usage of the analysis note: This note will be used for preparing the courtesy letter, signed by the President and sent to the ERIC to inform all persons concerned with the on-site visit interviews, about the approach of the committee for carrying the evaluation.
- 4) Preparation of the interviews notes: The analysis note serves also the experts for preparing all interviews notes and questions, in the template format provided by the EEL.
- 5) Request for additional documentation: The preparation meeting is also an opportunity for the committee to request additional information from the ERIC, through the EEL support team.
- 6) Discussion about the on-site visit organisation and planning.
- 7) Tentative work distribution for the evaluation report preparation

On-site visit preparation

Courtesy letter

The Courtesy letter is sent to all participants to interviews via the ERIC management. The letter is signed by the President of the committee, and informs the participants about the scope of the interviews, led by the experts.

Visit interviews notes

Each interview note is initiated by the lead expert for this interview, according to responsibilities assigned during the preparation meeting. In concertation with other expert concerned with this interview, the lead expert finalise the note, using the template provided by the EEL (MS-Word document).

All interview notes are sent to the president, who shares them with all experts before the visit, in order to make the notes, a collective tool for the whole committee.

The interview note allows to identify :

- The relevant topics and questions to deal with during the interviews, related to the analysis note and the ToR.
- The outcome of the interview to be supplied to the debriefing meetings and to the evaluation report preparation. Doing so, the interview note, when completed with other participating experts during or after the interview, helps each expert to prepare his own contribution to the evaluation report

Advises to the experts

- To formulate in the interview note, questions based on the content of the SAR and the courtesy letter;
- To put in the note, all needed references to the SAR or to any other piece of documentation, for proper sourcing in the evaluation report.
- To organise the various questions according to their importance in order to manage properly the conduct of the interview for the optimum efficiency

INTERVIEW NOTE TEMPLATE

Date and time of the interview :	Interview number :
Lead expert : Other participating experts : Main topic of the interview : Names and functions of the interviewed persons :	
Before the interview	
Main topics and questions to address, related to the analysis note and the ToR (not all standards in the ToR must be considered, according to the main topic of the interview).	
Useful items for the interview (extracted from the SAR or annexes, to clarify the topic regarding the self-assessment work of the ERIC)	
After the interview	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evaluation arguments to bring into the debriefing meeting : - If needed, elements of description or understanding, to support the arguments during the debriefing meeting. 	
Evaluation elements	Interview verbatim (useful for the writing of the report)

6 – ON-SITE VISIT

Objectives

- To deepen the analysis of items identified before the visit through the preliminary work of the committee, and confirm or correct the understanding;
- To collect additional elements, missing from the SAR and the committee analysis;
- To measure the appropriation of the ERIC policy and its self-analysis work by the stakeholders;
- To finalize the main evaluation and assessments arguments which will become parts of the evaluation report.

Conduct

Set-up of meetings and interviews

During the on-site visit, meetings are organized according to three different set-ups:

- Interviews with plenary configuration : The whole expert committee faces one or several persons. Typically, the first interview allows exchanges between the management team and the committee, and the last one allows the committee to raise additional questions to the ERIC CEO alone.
- Ordinary interviews, when only two or three experts meet with one or several persons (usually ordinary interviews are carried out in parallel. No interview can be carried out with one expert alone.
- Closed meetings, when the whole committee meets, in order to prepare next meetings (day or half a day) or to debrief past interviews.

The ERIC CEO or general director, with his executive team, is interviewed first and is given a chance to give a full presentation of the ERIC, before answering questions raised by the committee.

At the end of the on-site visit, a last interview with the CEO or general director alone, allows the committee to ask for additional questions or clarifications, pending from the visit.

The rule is that this final interview is used for asking questions to the CEO, and not to provide any feedback of the committee about the visit or the evaluation itself.

Conduct of meetings and interviews

The following sequence is recommended for the ordinary interviews :

- Introduction roundtable for the experts and the interviewed persons identifying themselves, with a reminder on the interview duration and the theme of discussion. The interviewed persons are supposed to be informed of specific issues raised by the committee, through the circulation of the courtesy letter by the ERIC CEO, prior to the visit.
- Start of questions by the experts, to sustain a dialog mode during the meeting.
- At the end of the interview, the experts manage to have a closed meeting to debrief and share views about the interview and possibly fill up the interview note for subsequent use with the whole committee.

Role of briefing and debriefing meetings

Every day, the times for briefing before interviews and debriefing after, are important steps during the visit, as they frame the interviews and summarise the outcome. At the end of the visit, a general debriefing with all committee members take place, and prepare the key points to be developed in the evaluation report.

The goals of such meetings are:

- To exchange information at the end of each interview;
- To prepare the followings;
- To contribute to cross-checking outcomes of different interviews et to identify possible inconsistencies or diverging view between different stakeholders;
- To sketch in advance global conclusions like strength, weakness, threats or opportunities, which will conclude the evaluation report;

The final debriefing meeting is also an opportunity to remind the work distribution between the experts to contribute to the evaluation report, as proposed initially at the time of the preparation meeting. The reminder concerns also the

agenda for the subsequent steps for the preparation of the evaluation report (Versions V0, V1 and then the V2, which will be used to start the contradictory stage with the ERIC).

Recommendations to the President of the Committee

- Make sure that all experts follow the evaluation principles:
 - Respect and consideration of the interviewed persons ;
 - To avoid any criticism, disagreement or advise ;
 - Compliance with neutrality, objectivity and impartiality requirements during the interviews.
- Lead and animate the debriefing meetings at the end of the day. This assume, for each expert to distinguish between the key elements of the interview, and the evaluation items to feed the evaluation process.
- During the last closed meeting with the ERIC CEO, achieve a consensus about strengths, weaknesses, threats, opportunities and recommendations for the final report, on which the experts will rely to build their respective contributions to the final report.

Recommendations to the experts

- Find the appropriate distance with the interviewed persons to guarantee neutrality. Do not give any evaluation information (negative or positive), nor any reference to the content of previous interviews. Do not make any reference to his/her own experience or affiliation or scientific discipline;
- Guide the interview according to the planned questions and subjects as identified previously in the interview notes. Avoid the overflowing with a full flow of questions from experts, which may put the interviewed person in an uncomfortable or difficult position. Eventually, reformulate the answers as understood, and seek for the approval of the interviewed person.
- Be able to interrupt the interview to bring it back on the tracks essential to the interviewed, and eventually avoid the repetition of already acquired information;
- During interviews with the ERIC staff, the experts should identify how much the persons were involved or participate to the preparation of the SAR, and how much they recognize their own views in it.
- When the interviewed persons refer to an unknown or unavailable document, request for that document through the EEL support team;
- No hesitation to ask the same question to different interviews, in order to cross-check the given information and to avoid later, references to single sourced items;
- If needed, feel free to remind the anonymous feature of the interview. No personal information is to be included in the evaluation report;
- Make a full and extensive use of the interview note, both to guide the meeting and to document by writing, the outcome of the interview: operation and activities of the ERIC, analysis items from the experts. These notes must be usable by all experts during the debriefing meetings and to support the preparation of written contributions to the evaluation report.

7 – DOWNSTREAM STAGE, FROM THE VISIT END TO THE EVALUATION REPORT PUBLICATION

Evaluation report production : from the sending of expert contributions to the final report

Building the draft report

- In coherency with the main conclusive points agreed during the on-site visit final debriefing (strength, weakness, threats, opportunities and recommendations), the experts are invited to develop the text contribution under their own responsibility, as decided during the preparation meeting, and confirmed during the final debriefing. The experts have two weeks to deliver their contribution to the president of the committee. The experts will use all material collected during the visit and received from the interviews. These informations are supposed to be in the interview notes, or sent separately by the experts to the one responsible for the contribution write-up.
- After all expert contributions are received, the president has two weeks to produce a synthesis which will reinforce the coherency, the hierarchy of the committee views. He will point out the lack of information about specific points, mentioned in the ToR, or even duplicate information between the different contributions. As president, he is especially responsible for the second part (non-descriptive) of the introduction, and the conclusion.
- The draft version of the report is delivered to the EEL support team, around four weeks after the visit. The support team make a first set of comments to the president, who may eventually consult the committee for discussion and feedback. Then the draft report (referred to as V1) is ready to be send to the EEL review panel.

Role of the EEL review panel

- The EEL review panel is made of 4 persons: two are representing the ERIEC consortium (EEL plus eventually a representative of another member) complemented by the EEL support team.
- The review panel, during its unique face-to-face meeting (typically 4-5 hours) makes a deep reading of the draft report (sent a week in advance of the meeting). He checks the consistency of the report regarding all items of the ToR, and the compliance with the writing standards and style of ERIEC production. The review panel is invited to comment and eventually to request changes to satisfy the requirements of report quality.
- These comments/requests are sent by the EEL support team to the committee president, who may eventually consult the committee for final decision.

Restitution meeting

The restitution meeting is the last opportunity for the committee to work together in a face-to-face meeting before the delivery of the evaluation report. This meeting allows:

- the feedback, by the president and the support team, of the review panel;
- A collective discussion between experts, led by the president, about the comments and requests from the review panel, leading possibly to
 - The refinement of the analysis, together with the development of arguments;
 - A cross-check of the consensus between experts for the expressed opinions and the overall coherency between the different parts of the report;
 - A verification of the final conclusion of the report, making sure its consistency with the complete text;
 - A hierarchical presentation of the concluding items (strengths, weaknesses, threats, opportunities and recommendations)
 - The harmonization of the expression rules to emphasise the neutrality of the committee's views and the acceptability of the report
- The president of the committee summarises the changes to the draft report and make sure that this version is fully endorsed by all the committee members. This new version, becomes the provisional version and is referred to as the V2. In case the full endorsement cannot be made during the meeting, it belongs to the EEL support team to get the approval of all experts by on-line consultation.

Contradictory phases and final version

- After receiving the provisional draft report (V2), the ERIC is invited, within two weeks, to formulate its remarks and comments during the first stage of the contradictory phase. Comments are transmitted to the EEL support team, who interacts first with the president of the committee, to support him for the treatment of the comments and remarks, addressed by the ERIC. The whole committee may be consulted to assist the president for taking into account the remarks and eventually propose changes to the report. At the end, the committee members are invited to give their full endorsement for this final version of the evaluation report.
- The final report is then sent to the ERIC, which is invited to make its final observations. These observations are to be made public with the final report and have no impact on report content. The sum of the final version and the ERIC observations constitutes the definitive evaluation report.
- The definitive report is co-signed by the President of the committee and the president of the EEL. Then it is made available to the ERIC members, and public to all stakeholders.

Preparation of the evaluation report

Introduction

The introduction does not include any evaluation information or statement. It is made of two distinct parts. A first one, which is strictly descriptive of the ERIC, aims to characterize it. It is made of history information and figures describing the perimeter of the ERIC. A second part summarises the outcome of the analysis note, developed by the committee prior to the on-site visit. This part announces also the specific views and concerns the committee may have, performing its evaluation task. While the first part may eventually be proposed by the EEL support team, the second part is under the responsibility of the president of the committee.

Text body

The report is organised in chapters, according to the three domains identified in the ToR, to group the 14 standards covering the ERIC evaluation.

Each expert writes or contributes to the writing of one or several parts in the chapters. Each write-up is structured as :

- a general introduction presenting the strategy of the ERIC in this domain during the reference period (ex-post evaluation)
- a text development structured into three elements:
 - an evaluation statement leading to possible recommendations, among which the main ones will be recalled in the report conclusion;
 - the description and the context of the evaluated activity;
 - A deep analysis, relying always on facts and proofs, collected and sourced during the on-site visit or in the SAR, or eventually previous evaluation or activity reports provided by the ERIC;

To facilitate a quick reading of the report, the committee may decide to use either one of:

- meaningful titles and subtitles, inside the three domains (chapters). Such meaningful text should preferably be made of committee opinions, and not recommendations, and should be balanced between positive and negative opinions, as much as possible;
- neutral titles, which will necessarily be complemented by conclusive texts.

Final conclusion

The final conclusion is organised as :

- a summary which analyses the ERIC strategy, its implementation and its trajectory.
- a synthesis of the main challenges that the ERIC is facing or will face, with a full context description
- lists or table (SWOT) of strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities, properly hierarchized, in full coherency with the full text body
- a list of short recommendations sorted in decreasing importance order, addressed to the ERIC in the form of dense content with strong potential impact for the future

Format of the report

The format of the report must be dense, compact and accurate. It should not be longer than 20-30 pages, with no annex, meaning 70 000-100 000 characters (blanks included). Century Gothic 9 is suggested, and a template for the report is to be provided by the EEL support team.

The respective distribution of page numbers for each chapter is discussed between the committee members, during the final closing debriefing of the visit, based on a proposed repartition at the preparation meeting

Quality criteria for the report

The quality of the report, and therefore the fulfilment of the ERIC expectations rely on the following points:

- For the background, the report is expected to evaluate, and not just to describe;
- For completeness, the report covers all aspects of the ERIC operation and activities, described through the 14 standards of the ToR;
- The ERIC expectations for the evaluation must be all considered, in respect of the freedom of judgement of the committee. This covers also the remarks produced by the ERIC during the first phase of the contradictory stage;
- The committee is engaged by the evaluation work. All opinions, positions and evaluation statements are clearly expressed in the report
- Transparency of the judgements: each evaluation statement is placed in its context and is supported by factual and verifiable analysis; with no useless repetition or duplication;
- Strength of arguments: Report conclusion are well founded on properly sourced objective and neutral data and information;
- Overall coherency of the report which prevents of having internal contradictory statements or opinions.

The form of the report contributes to its acceptability as well:

- The organisation of the report obeys to the order of presentation of chapters and standards given by the ToR;
- The style of the report is dominated by a declarative mode, with simple sentences and accurate vocabulary. The report aims to evaluate activities, not persons. It must not refer to identifiable individual.
- The report is not prescriptive. It gives opinions, recommendations, not requirements or prescriptions
- For the presentation, the report includes initials and acronyms, for which the definition is made explicit, and use corresponds to usual practices.

The main difficulties that the experts may meet:

- Copy/paste of long pieces of the SAR without proper sourcing
- Writing essentially descriptive, which does not point out the essential information point
- Lack of indicators needed to characterize a given activity of the ERIC
- Opinions too much prescriptive
- Ambiguous or subjective opinion of the committee
- Weakness of the strategic dimension and context analysis;
- Lack of proofs and sourcing of statements
- Contradiction between statements and opinions
- Lack of distance regarding the collected information during the interviews;
- Ad hominem references.

Recommendations for all committee members

- The expert writes a contribution according to the plan (evaluation statement, context, arguments). It is not interview minutes, but rather a synthesis, including reference documentation and objective data and information;
- The expert complies with the writing rules given by the president of the committee, and brings all needed arguments for justifying the mention in the SWOT analysis;
- The report analyses the capacity of the ERIC to implement its strategy along the reference period under evaluation, its capacity to mobilise funding and resources, its overall governance, the operation of its activities. It enlightens also the trajectory of the ERIC, in terms of future
- The report must allow confirming or contradicting the SAR produced par the ERIC. As such. The report must also provide a judgement on the capacity of the ERIC to evaluate itself.

LIST OF SYMBOLS

A

AÉRES *Agence d'évaluation de la recherche et de l'enseignement supérieur*

C

CEO Chief Executive Officer

E

EC European Commission

EEL ERIC Evaluation Leader

ERIC European Research Infrastructure Consortium

ERIEC European Research Infrastructure Evaluation Consortium

H

Hcéres *Haut Conseil de l'évaluation de la recherche et de l'enseignement supérieur*

S

SAR Self-Assessment Report

SWOT Analysis Strength, Weakness, Opportunities and Threat Analysis

T

ToR Terms of Reference



2 rue Albert Einstein
75013 Paris, France
T. 33 (0)1 55 55 60 10
hceres.fr

Haut Conseil de l'évaluation de la recherche et de l'enseignement supérieur