Disclaimer:

This document is aimed at providing guidance to the applicants to the open calls for proposals launched by the Clean Aviation JU under Horizon Europe. The document may be subject to updates and complementary sections may be added in the course of the implementation of the Programme. Applicants shall consult the provisions and procedures laid down in the Clean Aviation JU Work Programme and the text of the call.

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CAJU-GB-2022-03-16 Rules for submission calls
CONTEXT, SCOPE AND DEFINITION OF TERMS

The Clean Aviation Joint Undertaking (hereinafter referred to as “CAJU”) is a public-private partnership established by the Council Regulation (EU) No 2021/2085 of 19 November 2021 establishing the Joint Undertakings under Horizon Europe - Single Basic Act (hereinafter referred to as “SBA”) which, among others, has the objective to contribute to reduce the ecological footprint of aviation by accelerating the development of climate neutral aviation technologies for earliest possible deployment, therefore significantly contributing to the achievement of the general goals of the European Green Deal.

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance and set out the rules applying to the submission of proposals, selection, evaluation, review procedure and to the award of grants to successful applicants. The rules set parameters to ensure that the procedures leading up to the award of grants are rigorous, fair, effective and appropriate. They have been adopted by the Governing Board of the Clean Aviation JU, the latter being responsible, inter alia, for the adoption of the SRIA (Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda), and the Work Programme for the implementation of the CAJU activities (“CAJU Work Programme”) and for the adoption of the list of actions to be funded under the calls procedures.

Section 2 describes the key principles applying to the process. The procedures for the submission of proposals and their handling, including the verification of eligibility criteria, are also described under that section.

Section 3 describes the evaluation of proposals, including the way in which independent external experts are selected and appointed, and the way evaluation is organized and managed. It describes also the way in which the review procedure, how appeals and complaints are managed, and the evaluation reporting process.

Section 4 describes the grant preparation process and the award process.

The following definitions apply to this document:


Footnotes:

2 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, COM/2019/640 final.

“Work Programme” refers to the document describing the CAJU Research and Innovation Programme on a multi-annual/annual basis for the period of 2022-2030, as will be adopted by the CAJU Governing Board.

“Responsible Authorising Officer (RAO)” refers for the purpose of these rules to the CAJU staff responsible for implementing the operational appropriations relating to the component of Horizon Europe managed by CAJU, and in particular for launching the calls, taking the rejection and grant award decisions and signing the grant agreements, as well as signing the independent external experts’ contracts.

“Panel of experts” refers to the evaluation committee composed of independent external experts who are responsible for evaluating the proposals in accordance with Article 150 of the Financial Regulation and Article 29 of Horizon Europe Regulation.

“Private Member” in accordance with Article 2(5) of the SBA refers to the members of the CAJU other than the Union, the participating states and the international organisations. This shall include Founding Members, Associated Members and their respective constituent entities.

“Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda” refers to the document covering the duration of Horizon Europe that identifies the key priorities and the essential technologies and innovations required to achieve the objectives of a Horizon Europe joint undertaking.

“Programme High-Level Objectives” or “HLOs” designate the Clean Aviation JU programme objectives as specified in Article 57 of the SBA.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Clean Aviation Programme is based on a long-term strategic research agenda for aviation (SRIA) which recognises the scale and the urgency of the challenge of a deep decarbonisation of aviation, as well as the significant reduction of all emissions by 2050, while ensuring the safety, security, European leadership and competitiveness of the European aviation sector, and the sustained societal values it provides.

The Clean Aviation Programme is structured around three coordinated technology development and demonstration areas or ‘thrusts’, each with established technology roadmaps such as disruptive technologies for an ultra-efficient short and medium-range aircraft (SMR thrust), disruptive technologies for a Hybrid Electric Regional Aircraft (HER thrust) and disruptive technologies to enable hydrogen-powered aircraft (H2 thrust).

The Partnership will be implemented according to the principles of openness, transparency, inclusiveness, efficiency and effectiveness. The Governing Board shall supervise the sound implementation of these principles and shall also adopt appropriate rules for the prevention, mitigation and management of conflicts of interests applicable at the level of the Partnership governing bodies and of the CAJU.

As a Public-Private Partnership, the CAJU is built on a membership involving the European Commission (‘Commission’) representing the Union, the 27 Founding Members and the 12 Associated Members (together the “Private Members”) committed to achieving the full

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7 Decision of the CAJU Governing Board adopting the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda (SRIA) (CAJU-GB-2021-12-16)
research and demonstrator activity of the Programme and Associated Members with a substantial long-term commitment towards the Programme.

For more information on the role of the Founding and Associated Members, the definition of topics and technical implementation of the work of the CAJU Private Members within the Clean Aviation Programme, see the applicable CAJU Work Programme.

In accordance with the Article 17(2)(k) of the SBA, the Governing Board of the CAJU will adopt the Work Programme and corresponding expenditure estimates as proposed by the Executive Director, after taking into consideration the States’ Representatives Group’s opinion, to implement the Strategic Research and Innovation Agenda, including, among other, the related rules for submission, evaluation, selection, award and review procedures with particular attention to the feedback to policy requirements.

Applications for CAJU grants under Horizon Europe are made in the form of proposals submitted through the Funding and Tenders Portal (“the portal”), generally following open calls for proposals (“calls”). Calls consist of the publication of the relevant documentation, including the CAJU Work Programme and associated documents. Proposals set out details of the planned work and activities in response to the calls topics, the entities that will carry it out, the estimated budget and the indication of the sources and amounts of any funding received or applied for in respect of the same action. The calls may set out additional conditions at the level of the call and/or at the level of specific topics. Where these conditions are legally included in the calls, applicants shall describe in their proposals the compliance with these conditions, and where appropriate, they will become enforceable contractual conditions of the grant agreements along the duration of the indirect actions.

The calls may also spell out in more detail the way in which these rules and procedures will be implemented and, where options are presented, which are to be followed.

Based on the Topic Panel Reports and the ESRs, the CAJU reviews the evaluation results and draws up the Call Ranked List by which it will recommend to the CAJU Executive Director the list of proposals to be selected for funding to be sent to the CAJU Governing Board for approval.

On the basis of the final ranked list the grants are awarded to the applicant legal entities by the RAO, within the available budget, by means of a formal grant agreement. Grants must respect the principles of equal treatment, transparency, co-financing, no double financing, and no-profit in accordance with Article 188 of the Financial Regulation.

2. SUBMIT A PROPOSAL

2.1 Before Submission

2.1.1 Draft proposals

The coordinator can enter draft proposals in the ‘Electronic Submission Service’ of the Portal (accessible via the topic page of the call), using the forms and templates provided there.

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8 With the possible exception of other calls mechanisms as set out in Article (6) and Article 24(3) of HE Regulation and where duly justified and adopted by the Governing Board.

9 Article 196 of the Financial Regulation.
For tips on the ethics self-assessment, see How to complete the ethics self-assessment.

The call topics are defined in the CAJU Work Programme and in the call text and describe the capabilities and capacity required from the applicants to contribute to the implementation of the Clean Aviation Programme and SRIA in the relevant platform area and the scope, the goals and objectives of the activities of the topic.

Applicants shall submit separate applications for each topic of interest. In each application they shall provide a detailed description of the proposed work breakdown, financial contribution, and capabilities (both technical and managerial). Applications shall satisfy the scope and demonstrate technical and organisational compliance with the objectives of the topic. For more details on the Calls for Proposals and the calls management rules, please see the relevant sections of the applicable CAJU Work Programme.

2.1.2 Application by legal entities

Legal entities may apply as consortia of legal entities able to perform the technical work under a topic. In this case, the consortium members will be all be required to individually sign the Grant Agreement. By so doing, they will all become beneficiaries to the Grant Agreement and be directly bound by its provisions. The beneficiaries shall conclude an internal consortium agreement regarding the internal organisation of the consortium. A model Consortium Agreement will be published as part of the open call package.

Consortia shall appoint a "coordinator" at the application stage who shall be authorised to act as the single point of contact vis-à-vis the CAJU. The coordinator shall have specific responsibilities in the consortium agreement and shall perform the following tasks:

- ensure, on behalf of the consortium, that the work is delivered, and manage all operational aspects with its members related to the implementation of the activity
- ensure the central coordination of reports and deliverables of the consortium as a whole
- centralize and receive the payments from the CAJU for the whole consortium
- execute the payments to the respective members of the consortium, collect and provide any financial information

Derogation to the Horizon Europe eligibility rules: where applicable at topic level and duly justified in the description of the relevant topics in the Work Programme, a single legal entity established in a Member State or Associated Country to Horizon Europe or consortia not meeting the condition laid down in Article 22(2) of the Horizon Europe Regulation shall be eligible to participate in indirect actions funded by the Clean Aviation Joint Undertaking.\(^\text{10}\)

2.1.3 Mock evaluation

As part of the topic information for the call, the applicant will find a link to the evaluation forms identical to those used by CAJU experts for the evaluation of proposals.

\(^{10}\) The legal basis for this derogation is laid down in Article 72 of Council Regulation n° 2021/2085 of 19 November 2021 establishing the Joint Undertakings under Horizon Europe.
It is recommended that the applicants use these forms to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their proposals before they submit it. Ideally, the mock evaluation can be carried out by independent colleagues or advisors not directly involved in the proposal.

2.1.4 Checklist for submission

- Before the coordinator (or sole applicant) officially submits the proposal, he/she must check that: the proposal fulfils the conditions set out in the call
- the proposal (both the administrative forms and technical annex) is complete, readable, accessible and printable
- the requested declarations have been made
- all consortium members have:
  - obtained access to the electronic exchange system (i.e. the ‘My Area’ section of the Portal) (see section III.3)
  - registered in the Beneficiary Register.

2.2 Submission

2.2.1 Calls for proposals

The content and objectives and indicative timing of the open calls are set out in the CAJU multi-annual Work Programme adopted by the Governing Board and published on the CAJU website as long as any possible update and amended version. The official call text and final list of topics and descriptions are published on the Funding and Tenders opportunities portal at the time calls are officially launched as well as the official submission deadlines.

The CAJU calls and the information and documents relevant for the calls are published on the Commission Funding and Tender opportunities portal and on the CAJU website. The hyperlink to the portal with access to the electronic submission system is also available via the CAJU website as well as in the Information for Applicants to the relevant call documents. These websites provide all the necessary information for those wishing to apply to calls. Contact details are provided for the relevant call mailboxes (for any queries related to the call). A dedicated help desk (managed by the Commission) is available to deal with issues relating to the electronic submission of proposals.

The calls will specify an indicative budget for the entire call and a list of topics (grouped) per technical areas of research that will be evaluated by separate panels of independent experts.

The CAJU Work Programme will announce the indicative dates for when calls will be opened as well as their respective proposal submission deadlines.

All CAJU calls are expected to be single-stage calls.

For each call, a ‘call coordinator’ will be assigned by the CAJU to plan and organise the proposal reception and evaluation process.

2.2.2 Submission of proposals

Proposals are submitted electronically via the electronic submission system operated by the Commission services in accordance with the provisions of the Financial Regulation 11 and the

11 Article 149(2) of the Financial Regulation.
CAJU Work Programme.

A Coordinator must be appointed in accordance with the relevant section ‘Register in the Participant Register’ of the Online Manual.

The electronic submission system will carry out a number of basic preliminary verification checks (e.g., for completeness of the proposal, internal data consistency, absence of virus infection, file types, size limitations, etc.). These checks do not replace the formal eligibility checks as they cannot solely assure that the contents of these files correspond to the requirements of the call.

Only upon completion of these checks as well as after the completion of the required declarations, the electronic submission system will allow the proposal to be submitted.

The CAJU Work Programme may provide specific formatting requirements. The submission system may automatically check page limits in specific parts of the proposal, and if necessary, issue warnings before the final submission. In the case of a submitted proposal exceeding the specified limits, the system may blank out the excess pages or perform another action provided for in the CAJU Work Programme. A proposal exceeding the page limits will not be blocked by the submission system.

Proposals not submitted before the specified deadline in accordance with the above procedure will not be regarded as having been received by the CAJU. Applicants who failed to submit a proposal, and who believe that such a failure was due to a fault in the submission system, may send a complaint by email within 4 calendar days after call closure (to the address specified in the submission system) explaining the circumstances of their case and attaching a copy of all parts of the proposal. Such cases may be examined by the admissibility and eligibility review committee (see section 2.5), taking into account the logs of operations running up to the submission deadline. The applicant will be notified without undue delay of the result of this examination. If it is found that a fault did indeed lie with the electronic submission system, the proposal as attached to the complaint will be considered as submitted before the call deadline.

If a general submission system failure is identified during a submission process and confirmed by the Commission services, the call deadline may be extended.

The proposals submitted via the electronic submission system are entered into databases after the call closure. Versions of proposals or any other additional information affecting their content submitted on paper, by e-mail or any other electronic means will not be regarded as having been received by the CAJU.

To withdraw a proposal before the relevant call deadline, the electronic submission system should be used. The withdrawn proposals will not be considered subsequently for evaluation or for selection, nor count against possible re-application restriction.

If more than one version of the same proposal is submitted before the call deadline, the system keeps only the most recent, updated version for evaluation.

Proposals are archived under secure conditions at all times in compliance with the applicable retention periods.

### 2.2.3 Reception by CAJU

The date and time of receipt of the submitted proposals are recorded. An email is sent to the applicant confirming the successful submission(s).

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12 Unless provided otherwise in the specific call conditions, the limit for a full application is 120 pages.
13 In duly justified exceptional circumstances, the CAJU may authorise submission by other means than the electronic submission system.
14 As set out in the relevant CAJU Work Programme.
15 Each version with the same proposal number.
After the call closure, an e-receipt will be made available to the applicant via the Portal with access to the electronic submission system, containing:

- the full proposal including the proposal title, acronym and unique proposal identifier (proposal number)
- the call identifier to which the proposal was addressed
- the date and time of receipt (i.e. the call deadline)

There is no further contact between the CAJU and applicants with regards to their proposal until after completion of the evaluation, with the exception of the following cases:

- if the CAJU needs to contact the applicant to clarify matters such as admissibility, eligibility, ethics issues, research integrity or to verify administrative or legal data contained in the proposal
- if an obvious clerical error on the part of the applicants is detected at any time\(^{16}\)
- in response to any enquiries or complaints made by the applicant\(^{17}\)
- if proposals are subject to hearings

The CAJU may ask the applicants to provide missing information so long as such information or clarifications do not substantially change the proposal.

In any case, applicants must not contact any independent expert (including panel members and panel chair or moderator) involved in the evaluation of the proposals, as described in section 3.1.

2.3 Admissibility and eligibility checks

Proposals shall meet the admissibility and eligibility criteria laid down in the applicable CAJU Work Programme (section Conditions and Management of the Calls) and the additional conditions set in the call/topic in order to be evaluated.

Proposals and applicants must remain eligible under the conditions set out in the applicable CAJU Work Programme during the evaluation and granting processes as well as throughout the entire implementation of the project.

Applicants must immediately inform the CAJU at any point in time of any events or circumstances which would be likely to affect the fulfilment of the eligibility criteria or any information substantially affecting the evaluation of the proposal.

If it becomes clear before, during or after the evaluation, that one or more of the admissibility or eligibility criteria has not been or are no longer met, the proposal will be declared inadmissible or ineligible. Where there is a doubt about a proposal’s admissibility or eligibility, the CAJU may proceed with the evaluation pending a final decision on admissibility or eligibility. The fact that a proposal is evaluated in such circumstances does not constitute proof of its admissibility or eligibility.

If a proposal is considered to be out of scope and not to relate to the topic description and objectives of the call for proposals, it will be declared ineligible.

\(^{16}\) In application of Article 151 and 200(3) of the Financial Regulation, where the CAJU detects an obvious clerical error on the part of the applicants (i.e. a clear mistake or omission that concerns a non-substantial part of the proposal, but should be corrected in order to allow its proper evaluation and to have complete information/data), the applicant shall be contacted for clarifications, so long as the latter do not substantially change the proposal. If the nature of the error and information is clear from the proposal, the relevant service in CAJU may propose the correction to the applicant.

\(^{17}\) Article 30(5) of the Horizon Europe Regulation.
2.3.1 Admissibility and eligibility review committee

If it is not immediately clear that a proposal is admissible or eligible under the applicable rules, an admissibility and eligibility review committee may be convened by the CAJU to advise the RAO. It may deliberate remotely through an exchange of emails or in a meeting.

This committee is made up of CAJU staff, and where necessary, other JUs or Commission staff having the relevant expertise as appropriate. The committee’s role is to ensure a consistent legal interpretation of such cases and equal treatment of the applicant legal entities involved in the proposal. The committee may also, where appropriate, recommend contacting independent external experts, if a specific expertise is necessary.

It examines the proposal and any other pertinent information and provides advice to help decide whether to reject it on admissibility or eligibility grounds. The committee may decide to contact the applicant in order to clarify a particular issue.

Those applicant legal entities whose proposals are found to be inadmissible or ineligible are informed in writing of the grounds for such a decision and the available means of redress, as described under section 3.5. An internal redress committee, as referred to under section 3.5, will be convened by the CAJU to examine the complaints dealing with the inadmissibility or eligibility decision of specific proposals.

3 EVALUATION OF PROPOSALS

3.2 Experts

3.2.1 Role of independent external experts

The CAJU relies on independent external experts to ensure that only proposals of the highest quality are selected for funding.

An independent external expert is an expert who is external to the CAJU and the Commission and is working impartially in a personal capacity and without conflict of interest.

The CAJU may contract independent external experts as observers in order to examine the evaluation process from the point of view of its working and execution, as described in section 3.2. Independent external experts with the appropriate skills in ethics may be requested to carry out ethics review and ethics monitoring of projects.

Independent external experts may also assist the CAJU in assessing cases of eligibility, as described in section 2.5 as well as possible cases of breach of research integrity (scientific misconduct) during all stages of evaluation, granting and project implementation.

Proposals will be examined initially by at least three external experts (for the large majority of topics, five or more experts are expected). Additional ethics experts will be appointed, when appropriate, for the ethics review.

In addition, the evaluation process may be followed by one or more independent observers:
   - to observe the practical workings of the evaluation process

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18 An information letter is sent once the RAO has adopted the relevant rejection decision.

19 Exceptionally, in duly justified cases, when relevant specialised knowledge is held by staff of Union institutions or bodies, and provided that these are not implementing Horizon Europe as a funding body, such staff may work as independent external experts in compliance with Article 29(1) of the Horizon Europe Regulation.
to give independent advice on:

- the conduct and fairness of the evaluation sessions;
- the application of the award criteria;
- ways in which the procedures could be improved but not to express views on the proposals or the other experts’ opinions.

### 3.2.2 Selection and appointment of independent external experts

The CAJU appoints independent external experts to carry out the evaluation of proposals from the Horizon Europe database of external experts. By way of derogation from Article 237(3) of the Financial Regulation, the CAJU may, exceptionally and in duly justified cases, select in a transparent manner any individual expert with the appropriate skills not included in the database provided that a call for expression of interest has not identified suitable independent external experts.

The CAJU is responsible for selecting independent external experts for the evaluation of proposals and afterwards for the continuous monitoring and review of the implementation of the actions required under the SBA to ensure alignment with the CAJU Work Programme and programme HLOs.

The RAO will conclude a contract with the selected experts based on the model contracts approved by the Commission. The model set out the applicable conditions, including a code of conduct, and provisions on conflicts of interest. Independent external experts must have:

- appropriate skills and knowledge relevant to the technical areas of activity and topics in which they are asked to assist, with a majority of them having expertise in aeronautics
- high level of professional experience (public or private sector) in scientific research, scholarship, or scientific management; programme management and the implementation of large projects and in aeronautical business and economics
- appropriate language skills required for the tasks to be carried out
- Other experts may be selected on the basis of their expertise in operational areas of aviation/air transport, sustainability or business and international programme expertise and other relevant core related sectors and, provided the aforementioned conditions can be satisfied, a balance in terms of:
  - skills, experience and knowledge
  - geographical diversity across the EU and associated countries, and reasonable inclusion of nationals of third countries
  - gender balance
  - where appropriate, the private and public sectors, and
  - an appropriate turnover from year to year; and
  - regular rotation of experts, consistent with the appropriate balance between continuity and renewal

Other skills may also be required (e.g. such as assessment of long-term financial plans and

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20 Article 49 of the Horizon Europe Regulation.
21 Prior to contracting remunerated experts, JU will invite the selected experts to complete the formalities for registration as experts in the database referred to in Article 49 of the Horizon Europe Regulation.
22 EU Experts Contract: V2.1 – 11.01.2022
budget, managing or evaluating projects; technology transfer and innovation; international cooperation in science and technology).

Independent external experts may come from countries other than the Member States or countries associated to Horizon Europe.

The names of the independent external experts assigned to individual proposals are not made public. However, the list of independent external experts used in a call will be published yearly on Commission websites and the list of panel members will be published on the CAJU website.

Any direct or indirect contact regarding the evaluation of a call between an applicant and any independent external expert involved in the evaluation under the same call, in view of attempting to influence the evaluation process is strictly forbidden. Such contact can constitute an exclusion situation and, may result in the decision of the CAJU to reject the proposal concerned from the call in question (Article 141 of the Financial Regulation).

3.2.3 Conflict of interest of external experts

Experts will be requested to complete and sign a declaration of interests which is part of their expert contract and which includes also a code of conduct to respect when acting as expert. Experts that have a conflict or potential conflict of interests will be excluded by the CAJU.

The CAJU considers that a conflict or potential conflict of interest exists if an expert:

- was involved in the preparation of a proposal;
- benefits directly or indirectly if a proposal is accepted;
- has a close family or personal relationship with any person representing an applicant;
- is a director, trustee or partner or is in any way involved in the management of an applicant;
- is employed or contracted by one of the applicants or any named subcontractors;
- Such an expert may, however, exceptionally be admitted by the CAJU to take part in the evaluation session based on the specific case and when the following apply:
  - the expert works in a different department/laboratory/institute from where the action is to be carried out;
  - the bodies operate with a high degree of autonomy and
  - such a role is justified by the requirement to appoint the best available experts and by the limited size of the pool of qualified experts (and this is documented).

- is a Member or Alternate of the Governing Board, Technical Committee, State Representative Group of the CAJU or is a National Contact Point or is directly working for the Enterprise Europe Network.

The CAJU will decide whether a conflict of interest may exists taking account of the objective circumstances, available information and related risks when an expert:

- was employed by one of the applicants in the last three years;
- is involved in a contract or grant agreement, grant decision, membership of management structures (e.g. member of management or advisory board, etc.) or research collaboration with an applicant (or had been so in the last three years);
- is in any other situation that could cast doubt on their ability to participate in the
evaluation of the proposal impartially (or that could reasonably appear to do so in the eyes of an external third party).

The CAJU will also consider and apply the rules for the prevention and mitigation of conflict of interest applicable to the CAJU bodies as adopted by the Governing Board of the CAJU.

The experts contracted by the CAJU are published by the European Commission via the Portal in the Commission’s annual list.

The above provisions are without prejudice to the application of the rules under the Horizon Europe Model Contract for Experts.

3.2.4 Observers

Independent external experts may be contracted as independent observers based on the model contract approved by the Commission to examine the implementation of the evaluation process. The remit of observers covers the entire evaluation session, including any remote assessments. The role of the independent observers is to give advice on the conduct of the evaluation sessions, the ways in which the procedures could be improved and the way in which the independent external experts apply the criteria.

The role of the independent observers is to verify that the procedures set out or referred to in these rules are adhered to and report on ways in which the process could be improved. If proposals are subject to remote evaluation, observers have access to all communications between the CAJU and the external independent experts and may make contact with some or all external independent experts to poll their opinions on the conduct of the evaluation. Observers have access to any meetings that are part of the evaluation session.

Due to the nature of the independent observers’ task, it is not necessary that the observers have expertise in the area of the proposals being evaluated. Indeed, it is considered advantageous to avoid having observers with too intimate a knowledge of the particular Research & Innovation area in order to avoid conflicts between their opinions on the outcome of the evaluations and the functioning of the sessions. In any case, they will not express views on the proposals under examination.

The independent observers shall, under no circumstances, influence the outcome of the panel meeting(s) they attend and shall record their findings and suggestions in a final report which will be shared with the call coordinator. The CAJU will share the received report with the Governing Board as part of the procedure for the adoption of the list of actions proposed for funding. The observers are also encouraged to enter into discussions with the CAJU staff involved in the evaluation sessions and to make observations on any possible improvements that could be put into practice. Any such suggestions will be recorded in the observer’s final report.

The CAJU will inform the States Representatives Group (“SRG”) of the selected observers’ identity, their terms of reference and their findings, and may publish a summary of their reports.

The contractual conditions of independent observers, including tasks, code of conduct and provisions on conflict on interests and confidentiality are set out in the expert’s contract.

Based on justified reason(s), and at the sole discretion of the RAO, the CAJU may decide that CAJU Governing Board members or their duly appointed representatives may attend panel meeting(s) as observers.

The person concerned shall duly sign a declaration on the absence of conflict of interest and a declaration on confidentiality. As any other observer, the person concerned shall not influence,
under any circumstances, the outcome of the panel meeting(s) they attend.

3.3 Selection and award criteria

All eligible proposals are evaluated by the panel, composed of independent external experts, to assess their merit with respect to the operational capacity, selection and award criteria applicable to the call.

The award criteria and specific sub-criteria, including the scoring of the proposals and any associated weightings and thresholds or any other detail concerning the application of these criteria are set out in the CAJU Work Programme call management rules chapter, in accordance with rules set out in the Horizon Europe Regulation23 and in the SBA Regulation24. The information documents for the call may further explain how these rules and criteria will be applied.

As provided for in the SBA Regulation25, for those proposal that have passed the applicable scoring thresholds, the CAJU will rank them according to the evaluation scores.

Additional procedures may be applied for proposals with ethically sensitive issues (see Annex A) or for proposals raising security issues.

As set out in the CAJU Work Programme call management rules chapter, selection criteria will make it possible to assess the applicant's capabilities, competences, track record and the ability to perform the proposed work.

To evaluate the applicant's capability, the experts will assess the applicant's operational capacity to contribute to the implementation of the CAJU Programme based on the information provided in the application and against the criteria set out in the CAJU Work Programme call management rules chapter.

3.3.1 Award criteria — Scoring — Thresholds

Proposals will be evaluated against the following award criteria set out in the Horizon Europe Work Programme 2021-2022 and section Conditions and Management of the Calls of the applicable CAJU Work Programme:

- excellence,
- impact and
- quality and efficiency of implementation.

To determine the ranking for those topics labelled as ‘Innovation actions’, the score for ‘Impact’ will be given a weight of 1.5. More details on the specific award criteria and sub-criteria are set under the applicable CAJU Work Programme Conditions and Management of the Calls section.

In order to be considered for selection and possible funding, the proposal must score above a certain threshold for each criterion, and above an overall threshold.

For each criterion, proposals will be given scores of 0 to 5 (half marks are possible), as follows:

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23 Article 28 of the Horizon Europe Regulation.
24 Article 17.2.k) of the SBA Regulation.
25 Article 19.4.j) of the SBA Regulation.
0 — The proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information (unless the result of an 'obvious clerical error').
1 — Poor: the criterion is inadequately addressed or there are serious inherent weaknesses.
2 — Fair: the proposal broadly addresses the criterion but there are significant weaknesses.
3 — Good: the proposal addresses the criterion well but with a number of shortcomings.
4 — Very good: the proposal addresses the criterion very well but with a small number of shortcomings.
5 — Excellent: the proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion; any shortcomings are minor.

Attention:
Proposals with an inflated budget are likely to receive a lower score.

3.3.2 Evaluation process

The evaluation process has the following phases:
Phase 1 - Individual evaluation
Phase 2 - Consensus group
Phase 3 - Topic Panel Review
Phase 4 - Call Panel Review (Optional)

Before starting the evaluation process, the experts are briefed on the process and different aspects of the evaluation. The CAJU call coordinator is responsible for briefing the independent external experts before each evaluation session.

The briefing (adapted as necessary) should cover:
- the background documents (SBA and programme HLOs, SRIA, Work Programme, call text, guidance documents, etc);
- the key features of the programme; the evaluation processes, phases and timeline and procedures (including the criteria to be applied), with a key focus on the criterion “Impact” in line with the impact-driven approach of the CAJU and applicable documents;
- the role/s of the experts;
- the award criteria and sub-criteria;
- the content and objectives of the research topics under consideration;
- the terms of the experts’ contract, including confidentiality, impartiality, prevention of conflict of interest, completion of tasks and approval of reports and the possible consequences of non-compliance with the contractual obligations;
- the rules on conflict of interest and obligation to declare;
- instructions to disregard any excess pages; and
- the need to evaluate proposals ‘as they are’, but also taking into account their potential synergies with the CAJU portfolio of activities under the SRIA.

Close contact is maintained with the individual experts to assist them on any query.
Proposals will be evaluated as they are submitted with the proposed budget, but also considering the potential impact they may have following the recommendations of the Topic Panel, should certain technical adjustments be made to the proposal aiming at achieving a higher impact in relation to the SBA objectives and SRD/programme HLOs. In particular, proposals with a significantly inflated or unjustifiably high budget, taking into account cost efficiency considerations as set out in the evaluation criteria, may receive a lower score and may not pass the threshold.

Allocation of proposals: Each proposal is allocated to the external evaluators on the basis of the subject-matter of the proposal and the technical expertise of the evaluators.

Phase 1 — Individual evaluation

Each expert carries out an evaluation and prepares an ‘individual evaluation report (IER)’ with comments and scores for each criterion.

They also indicate if the proposal:
- falls entirely outside the scope of the topic they are evaluating or
- involves security issues that will need further scrutiny.

Phase 2 — Consensus group

The individual experts then form a ‘consensus group’ to reach a common opinion and agree on comments and scores (in a ‘consensus report’). The group will be composed of a minimum of three experts.

If the applicant has previously submitted a proposal to the CAJU under Horizon Europe, and if the Work Programme topics and criteria were comparable, the moderator of the consensus group may give a copy of the previous Evaluation Summary Report (see below) to the experts.

The group has an impartial ‘moderator’ (a CAJU staff member), who:
- steers the discussion on the evaluation
- clarifies the programme HLOs and topics’ content and technical objectives and focus on impact as set out in the SBA, Work Programme and the call text.
- seeks a consensus
- ensures that proposals are evaluated fairly, in line with the award criteria.

If a consensus group cannot reach a common view, the consensus report will set out both the majority view and the dissenting views. In some cases, the CAJU may ask additional experts to examine the proposal, to establish whether a clear majority opinion exists.

Hearings (optional)

As part of the Consensus Group deliberations, the CAJU may organise where appropriate, hearings with the applicants. The experts will draw up a list of questions which shall be sent by the CAJU to the applicants prior to any hearing.

Travel and subsistence costs incurred in relation to hearings may be reimbursed by the CAJU. Specific arrangements for hearings will be described in the information documents for

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26 “High Level Objectives” of article 57 of the SBA Regulation.

27 The reimbursement of travel expenses, daily allowance and accommodation allowance will be possible for legal entities who have been invited by the CAJU to attend a hearing, as well as for anyone responsible for accompanying.
the call. Hearings may be conducted at the location of the peer review evaluation, Consensus Group meetings or, subject to technical feasibility, by electronic means (video link, teleconference or similar). Under exceptional circumstances, such as illness or maternity, requests by applicant legal entities for postponement of a scheduled hearing date may be considered by the CAJU.

Unless otherwise agreed by the CAJU, hearings will not be postponed beyond 3 weeks from the original hearing date. Postponed hearings may have to take place remotely, due to technical and organizational constraints. Should a planned hearing not be possible for reasons beyond the control of the CAJU, the Consensus Group will have to take its decision based on the written proposal.

The purpose of the hearings should be the following:
- clarify certain technical aspects of the proposals as well as their scope, and help the Consensus Group establish their final assessment and scores;
- clarify aspects concerning the synergies of the proposal and their potential to be linked to other actions;
- improve the experts’ understanding of the proposals;
- require adjustments to the proposals in relation to the technical aspects and scope of the project, and/or to ensure synergies between the call topics and the linking of actions;
- ensure budget optimization and financial adjustments;

Please note the following:
- Hearings may not be used by the applicant coordinators to modify proposals at this stage.
- The applicants may only provide explanations and clarifications in response to questions submitted to them in advance.
- Hearings held via telephone or video-conference may be recorded, with the agreement of the applicants.
- Applicants may choose not to attend the hearing and to reply only in writing.
- Hearings are usually held in Brussels, but may also be conducted by a written procedure, via telephone, or by video-conference.

The CAJU will send the hearing invitation letters to the applicants. The hearing invitation letters will contain the questions that will be asked and explain how the hearings will be conducted as well as the date of the hearing, which will be not be later than fifteen (15) days before the date of the invitation letter. The applicant coordinators invited to the hearings will be requested to coordinate the reply and provide all necessary elements in writing prior to the day of the hearings.

Results of the hearings:
- following the hearings, the Consensus Group may make comments on the clarifications presented by the applicant coordinators and may recommend technical and financial adjustments to the proposals that will require dedicated actions during the Grant Agreement Preparation Phase and
- the comments are then incorporated into the proposals’ Consensus Reports by the expert evaluators of the proposals and ESRs are established and submitted to the Topic Panel for finalisation.

the legal entity if the legal entity is a disabled person. The relevant Commission Decision on the reimbursement rules of expenses incurred by people from outside the Commission invited to attend meetings in an expert capacity applies by analogy (Commission Decision C(2007) 5858).

28 Please consult sub-sections “Cooperation Agreement” and “Linked Actions” in section 4 below.
The CAJU shall draw up the minutes of the hearing to record any decisive clarification obtained during the hearing and any other important observations and recommendations as appropriate.

**Phase 3 — Topic Panel Review**

Finally, **Topic Panels** will review all the proposals within each topic to:
- ensure that the consensus groups have been consistent in their evaluations;
- if necessary, adjust or propose a new set of marks or comments and
- resolve cases where a minority view was recorded in the consensus report.

The Topic Panel review is guided by an impartial moderator (a CAJU staff member) whose role is to ensure fair and equal treatment of the proposals. A rapporteur may be appointed to draft the panel report.

The '**Topic Panel reports**' include the '**draft evaluation summary reports (ESRs)**' for all proposals (based on the consensus reports, including comments and scores, and taking into account the Topic Panels’ deliberations and any new scores or comments considered necessary with explanations and a list of proposals passing all thresholds, along with a score (i.e. '**draft Topic Panel ranked list**'). The Topic Panel report will include, where appropriate, the Topic Panel recommendations for a priority order for proposals in the event of equal scores, using the procedure set out in the CAJU Work Programme call management rules chapter.

For each topic, the draft Topic Panel ranked list will show the order of scoring of the applicants as an outcome of the admissibility and eligibility check, and the evaluation phases (individual evaluation, consensus group and Topic Panel review) as described above.

**Phase 4 – Call Panel review (optional)**

A Call Panel Review may take place, where appropriate, after phase 3. The Call Panel would be composed of a selected number of external experts who participated in the evaluations of the proposals for a final cross-review of the draft topics panel ranked lists with a focus on the degree of contribution and alignment with the SBA objectives and the SRIA HLOs and in view of supporting the CAJU in the establishment of a ranking at the level of the call.

**Establishment of the Call Ranking list**

Based on the Topic Panel Reports and the ESRs (and where applicable after Phase 4 – Call Panel Review) the CAJU reviews the evaluation results and draws up the Call Ranked List by which it will recommend to the CAJU Executive Director the list of proposals to be selected for funding to be sent to the CAJU Governing Board for approval (together with all relevant information and informed opinions enabling the definition of the final list) taking into account the specific objectives of the programme, the objectives of the call and budget availability.

Where necessary, the CAJU will establish a priority order for proposals within the same topic in the event of equal scores/ex aequo and a priority order for proposals across the topics in the case of call funding limitations using the procedure set out in the CAJU Work Programme Conditions and Management of the Calls chapter, as well as a reserve list of proposals, if applicable.

Applicants will receive a copy of their ESRs when they are informed of the final outcome of the evaluation by the experts.
3.3.3 Evaluation results, selection and rejection of proposals

The CAJU draws up the final list of proposals selected for possible funding which is presented by the Executive Director of the CAJU to the Governing Board. This results in:

- a list of proposals which are of sufficiently high quality to be retained for possible funding (the retained list);
- if the total recommended funding for the retained proposals following the evaluation exceeds the indicative budget for the call, the CAJU will apply the above mentioned priority order and one reserve list of proposals may be established. The number of proposals kept in reserve is decided by the CAJU in view of budgetary considerations and of ensuring the greatest impact and best alignment with the SBA objectives, the HLOs of the SRIA and in a way as to ensure consistency of projects portfolio;
- a list of proposals which are not retained for funding. This list includes those proposals found to be ineligible; proposals scored below the required threshold and proposals which, cannot be funded because the available budget is insufficient.

Any proposal which does not fulfil the ethical requirements or the conditions set out in the Horizon Europe Regulation, in the CAJU Work Programme or in the call conditions shall be rejected or terminated once the ethical unacceptability has been established. Proposals may be rejected after the ethics review on ethics grounds following the procedures in Annex A.

Proposals may be rejected from the evaluation procedure at any time, if an applicant has misrepresented data or information included in the proposal with due regard being given to the principle of proportionality.

Proposals may also be rejected based on breach of the interdiction to contact independent external experts as described in section 3.1.

The RAO will adopt a rejection decision for all non-retained proposals, grouped by grounds for rejection.

In order to ensure the consistency of the portfolio actions co-funded by the CAJU in accordance with the SRIA, actions funded by the CAJU (including after the relevant proposal is ranked in the main list and is at grant preparation phase) may be linked to other EU-funded actions or any formally set-up activity, such as other EU grants, but also grants from EU Member States or international organisations, blended finance, or activities carried out under procurement contracts, etc. upon the CAJU’s decision irrespective of the actions’ state of implementation, including those not funded under the same Call and/or topic, in accordance with Article 3 of the Model Grant Agreement for Horizon Europe.

3.4 Coordination and support actions

Coordination and support actions may be implemented to contribute to the implementation of the CAJU objectives.

The details on the evaluation procedure and award criteria of coordination and support actions will be set out in the CAJU Work Programme and other relevant call documents.

For these actions and in other justified cases set out in the Work Programme, the evaluation committee may be composed partially or fully of representatives of the CAJU and other Union

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29 Article 19(6) of the Horizon Europe Regulation.
30 Articles 141 of the Financial Regulation.
31 Article 2(39) of the Horizon Europe Regulation.
Institutions or bodies\textsuperscript{32}.

Following the evaluation of proposals, the CAJU provides feedback through an “information letter”.

### 3.5 Outcome of the evaluation

Following the “evaluation” of proposals, the CAJU provides feedback on the evaluation process through an “information letter” to the applicants\textsuperscript{33}. The aim is to inform applicants of the result of the evaluation by the independent external experts and of the ranking list established by the Executive Director for approval by the Governing Board, and for the selected proposals to initiate the “grant preparation” phase as described in section 4 and subject to the approval by the Governing Board. All communication and feedback from the CAJU to the applicants is carried out electronically. The calls for proposals indicate the expected date of feedback regarding the outcome of the evaluation.

The list of proposals selected for funding based on the ranked list will be subject to the approval of the Governing Board of the CAJU pursuant to Article 17.2.u) of the SBA and to the CAJU available budget.

#### 3.5.1 Communication to applicants: rejected and retained proposals

##### 3.5.1.1 Rejected proposals

Following the admissibility and eligibility check:

- applicants whose proposals are found to be inadmissible or ineligible are informed of the grounds for such a decision and of the means of redress.

Following the evaluation:

- applicants whose proposals are above threshold but are not retained for funding and for the next step for budgetary or quality reasons, as applicable, receive feedback on their evaluation in the form of an Evaluation Report (ESR)

- applicants whose proposals are rejected due to being below the threshold, receive feedback on their evaluation in the form of an Evaluation Report (ESR)

- if the proposal is retained for funding, but the applicant may not participate (e.g. because it is found to have insufficient operational capacity or to be ineligible), the CAJU will inform the applicant coordinator (via an ‘applicant rejection letter’ sent through the electronic exchange system)

If the proposal has not been retained for funding, the CAJU will inform the coordinator, or the sole applicant (via a ‘proposal rejection letter’ sent through the electronic exchange system), together with the reasons why and how to appeal.

\textsuperscript{32} Article 29(1) of the Horizon Europe Regulation.

\textsuperscript{33} In accordance with Article 200(7) of the Financial Regulation, this information is provided as soon as possible, and in any case within 15 calendar days after information has been sent to the successful applicants.
3.5.1.2 Proposals retained for funding

Applicants whose proposals are retained for funding receive a notification and feedback on their evaluation in the form of an Evaluation Report (ESR).

If on the basis of the ranking and the available call budget, a proposal is on the main list, the CAJU will invite the applicant to the grant preparation stage (via a ‘grant information letter’ sent through the electronic exchange system) which will deal with the technical, operational, legal and financial issues related to the preparation of the grant agreement.

The grant information letter is not a commitment that the CAJU will fund the project. The applicant will receive this letter within 5 months as of the call deadline.

3.5.1.3 Reserve list

If the proposal is put on a reserve list, the CAJU will inform the applicant coordinator or the sole applicant and let him/her know of any subsequent change, where appropriate. If indicated in the specific call conditions, proposals which were judged to deserve funding but did not succeed because of due to budgetary limitations will receive a Seal of Excellence34. With prior authorization from the applicant, the CAJU may share information concerning the proposal and the evaluation with interested financing authorities, subject to the conclusion of confidentiality agreements.

3.5.2 Evaluation Summary Report (ESR)

The ESR provides the outcome of the “technical evaluation” which contains, as appropriate, the final panel score per each of the three Horizon Europe award criteria, the aggregated total score, and the panel comments and the assessment of the evaluation.

For proposals on the retained list, where appropriate, the ESR indicates any recommendation made on the maximum amount of funding to be awarded, and any other appropriate recommendations on the technical activities of the project, including possible suggestions for adjustments to the technical activities, planning of the work and budgetary aspects in the interest of guaranteeing the alignment with the programme’s HLOs stated in the SBA and in the SRIA in a way as to ensure consistency of the projects portfolio.

For proposals raising ethics issues, feedback on the results of the ethics review process is communicated to the applicants in the form of an ethics summary report, which may include ethics requirements that may become contractual obligations.

Applicants whose proposals are rejected because of ethics and research integrity breaches, or due to contacts with independent external experts involved in the evaluation in the attempt to influence its outcome, are informed of the specific reason for rejection and the means of redress, after having been given the opportunity to provide observations.

The CAJU will not change the content of the final ESRs that form part of the Call Evaluation Report (“CER”) approved by the CAJU Governing Board, except if necessary to improve readability or, exceptionally, to remove any clerical errors or inappropriate comments, provided such errors or comments do not affect the evaluation results.

34 https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/funding/funding-opportunities/seal-excellence_en
The information letter will contain indications of the means of redress available, including the evaluation review procedure.

3.6 Complaints about proposal rejection

The CAJU provides information on the procedure to be followed by applicants to submit requests for admissibility or eligibility review concerning a specific proposal and requests for evaluation review concerning the results of a particular evaluation in relation to any CAJU call (means of redress), as well as to submit any enquiries and complaints regarding their involvement in Horizon Europe.

Requests for admissibility, eligibility or evaluation review:

Complaints will be handled by the CAJU based on the same rules and guidance applicable in Horizon Europe. If the applicant considers that the CAJU unduly rejected his/her application, he/she may file a complaint in the ‘My Personal Area’ section of the Portal (‘formal notification box’).

The information letter referred to under sections 2.3 and 3.4 will provide an electronic address to be used for the applicant legal entities which consider that the applicable evaluation procedure has not been correctly applied to its proposal. The letter will specify a deadline for the receipt of any such complaints, which will be 30 calendar days from the date of receipt of the CAJU's notification. As a minimum any complaint should contain the name of the call, the proposal number (if any), the title of the proposal, and a description of the alleged shortcomings.

An internal redress committee will be convened by the CAJU to examine the cases that have been submitted by the applicant legal entities in question, within the deadline mentioned above through the means foreseen in the information letter. Requests that do not meet the above-mentioned conditions, or do not deal with the admissibility, eligibility or evaluation of a specific proposal, will not be admitted. Applicants who, before the deadline, submit requests other than via the dedicated web site will be requested to resubmit using that site.

The committee will bring together CAJU staff with the requisite scientific/technical and legal expertise. The committee shall be chaired by and include staff of CAJU who were not involved in the evaluation of the proposals. The committee's role is to ensure a consistent legal interpretation of such requests and equal treatment of applicants. It provides specialist opinion on the admissibility, eligibility and evaluation processes, based on all available information related to the proposal and its evaluation. It works independently.

During the evaluation review procedure, the committee itself, however, is not entitled to assess, evaluate or re-evaluate the scientific merits of the proposal. The committee cannot call into question the scientific judgement of appropriately qualified independent external experts and shall limit its review only aspects related to the evaluation process or admissibility/eligibility check.

In light of its review, the committee will recommend a course of action to the RAO for the call. Should the committee consider that there is evidence to support the complaint, it may suggest a partial or total re-evaluation of the proposal by independent external experts and inform the applicant. If the complaint is not justified, the committee will uphold the initial evaluation and inform the applicant, together with the reasons why.

Complainants will receive an acknowledgement of receipt of the submitted request indicating the estimated date of the final reply.

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35 Article 30 of the Horizon Europe Regulation.
36 The access date in the system. A formal notification is considered to have been accessed by the applicant 10 calendar days after sending, if not accessed before in the system.
Other means of redress:
The above procedures do not prevent the applicants from using other means of redress, such as:
- bringing an action for annulment under Article 263 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union against the Agency, within 2 months of receiving the CAJU's letter\textsuperscript{37}.

Applicants may choose which means of redress they wish to pursue. They are not allowed to take more than one formal action at a time.

Applicants are asked to wait for the reply to their complaint or request (final decision) of the CAJU and then they may take further action against that decision. Deadlines for further action will start to run from when applicants receive the final decision.

3.7 Reporting and information on the evaluation process

After each call evaluation, a CER is prepared by the CAJU services and made available to the Governing Board. The report gives information on the proposals received (for example, numbers of proposals received, results of each call, ranked lists, evaluation scores of proposals and budget requested), on the evaluation procedure and on the independent external experts. This information is also made available to the States’ Representative Group (SRG).

Applicants may be contacted for any other communication activities involving their proposed project and/or requiring their participation.

For purposes related to monitoring, study and evaluating the implementation of CAJU actions, the CAJU may need that the submitted proposals and their respective evaluation data be processed by external parties. The data may also be used for the monitoring and evaluation of the EU funding programme and the design of future programmes. Any processing will be conducted in compliance with the requirements of Regulation (EU) 2018/1725.

4 AWARD DECISION AND PREPARATION OF GRANT AGREEMENTS

In accordance with Article 19.4.j) of the SBA, the CAJU Executive Director’s submits for approval to the Governing Board a list of actions selected for funding by the CAJU. The Governing Board, in accordance with Article 17.2.u) of the SBA, will approve the retained list of selected actions for funding. Following section 3.4, after successful completion of the grant preparation process, grants may be awarded to the applicants by the RAO on the basis of such final ranked list, within the available budget, by means of a formal grant agreement.

The grant agreements are concluded with the applicant legal entities subject to the financial and legal procedures, as well as the verification of the requirements mentioned in this section.

4.2 Adjustments to the proposal

Based on Article 29.2 of the Horizon Europe Rules for Participation, the Grant Agreement Preparation ("GAP") for the signature of grant agreements of CAJU actions may involve the implementation of any adjustments to the proposal recommended by the expert evaluators in the corresponding ESR concerning the following:
- scientific/technical and/or financial aspects as well as the scope, methodology and

\textsuperscript{37} See footnote 31.
planning of the work of the project

- the alignment of the proposal with the SBA objectives and SRIA HLOs
- budget optimization
- ensuring synergies with other CAJU topics and other EU/national/regional programmes
- the linking of the action with other actions, as explained in section 3.3

4.3 Cooperation Agreement

When required under the call topic conditions, the selected applicants will be required to agree to and sign up a Cooperation Agreement in order to connect the selected action to other identified relevant CAJU actions under the same call to foster synergies across the topics and in view of ensuring an integrated programmatic approach to the actions in the Clean Aviation Programme.

A model Cooperation Agreement will be made available by the CAJU.

4.4 Linked actions

Based on the above requests for adjustments in the proposal’s ESR, the CAJU may request that an action is linked to another action\(^{38}\) in order for the grant agreement to be signed, possibly including modifications to the budget where necessary. The CAJU services will give a deadline for applicants to provide a confirmation. In the absence of a reply in due time, the RAO may terminate the grant preparation phase for that proposal and invite the next highest ranked proposal in the reserve list for grant preparations. In exceptional cases, when duly justified and requested by the applicants, the RAO may extend the deadline to reply.

The CAJU will make available to the consortia a model collaboration agreement to be used to link the relevant actions.

Once the grant agreement is signed, and during the implementation of the project, the CAJU, in accordance with Article 3 of the Model Grant Agreement, may request that the action be linked to another action or formally set-up activity as explained above.

4.5 Administrative, legal and financial aspects

All administrative information must already have been included at proposal stage. During the preparation of the grant agreement, the applicant may receive requests for further administrative, legal, ethical, technical and financial information necessary for the preparation of a grant agreement. Where required as an eligibility criterion in the relevant CAJU Work Programme and in line with its requirements, legal entities must have a gender equality plan (GEP) or equivalent, which must be in place at the latest by the time of the signature of the grant.

The administrative and legal aspects during the grant preparation shall cover, in particular, the verification of the existence and legal status of the applicant legal entities\(^ {39}\), review of any optional provisions in the grant agreement, or conditions required for the project, and other aspects relating to the development of the final grant agreement (including the start date of the

\(^{38}\)As provided for in Article 3 of the Model Grant Agreement for Horizon Europe, the CAJU may demand that the action be linked to any formally set-up activity, such as other EU grants, but also grants from EU Member States or international organisations, blended finance, or activities carried out under procurement contracts or, after the grant signature, to an action to be funded under future CAJU calls.

\(^{39}\)See the relevant section on ‘Validation of potential beneficiaries’ in the Online Manual.
The financial aspects shall cover the establishment of the JU contribution, the amount of the pre-financing, the estimated breakdown of budget and the JU financial contribution per participant, and the assessment of their financial capacity, if required. Please note, the CAJU reserves the right to carry out ex-ante controls for financial capacity if the need arises.

Applicants are reminded to consider in advance any existing/potential outstanding debts of any member of the consortium which could lead to offsetting and should prepare their proposal accordingly, taking due account of the potential impact on pre-financing and cash flow for the action. As part of the financial ex-ante control, the CAJU may request the applicants to declare whether they have any outstanding debt towards any EU institution or body.

Prior to the signature of the grant agreement the CAJU will examine the above-mentioned financial aspects of the proposal and in cases where a member of the consortium has overdue debts, the prospective coordinator would be informed before signing the legal commitment that there are outstanding debts, and that any future payment would be offset. At this point, the applicants may reconsider whether the action is still implementable under the conditions of offsetting and decide whether a contract signature still makes sense.

If during this phase the CAJU services discover that the declarations made by applicants are false, the RAO may terminate grant preparations and invite the next highest ranked proposal in the reserve list for grant preparations.

The removal, addition or substitution of a legal entity before the signature of the grant agreement will be permitted if duly justified and requested by the applicants or requested by the CAJU based on the outcome of the assessment of the administrative, legal and financial aspects of the proposal.

The RAO shall reject from an award procedure those applicant legal entities who are, at the time of a grant award procedure, in one of the exclusion situations established in accordance with Article 136 of the Financial Regulation or situations referred to in Article 141(1)(b) or (c) of that Regulation (relating, for example, to bankruptcy, convictions, grave professional misconduct, social security obligations, other illegal activities, previous break of contract, conflicts of interest, misrepresentation).

The abstract of the proposals awarded granting (in the DoA – Part A) will be published. If the applicant wishes so, the abstract may be revised.

Should a proposal be rejected during the grant preparation phase on any possible grounds, including eligibility, ethics, security, misrepresentation or availability of funds, the RAO will adopt a rejection decision for the proposal. This decision will be communicated to the applicant through an information letter indicating the available means of redress, in line with section 3.5 of these rules.

Grant preparation of proposals from the reserve list may begin once the sufficient budget has become available to fund one or more of these projects. Subject to budget availability, grant preparation should begin with the highest ranked proposals and should continue in descending order.

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40 Applicant legal entities must have stable and sufficient resources to successfully implement the project and contribute their share. Organisations participating in several projects must have sufficient capacity to implement all these projects. The financial capacity of applicant legal entities will be verified in accordance with Article 198(5) of the Financial Regulation and Article 27 of the Horizon Europe Regulation. See additional information on the Financial Capacity Assessment in the relevant Information for Applicants’ document.

41 In accordance with Article 141 of the Financial Regulation.
5 ANNEX A: ETHICS APPRAISAL PROCESS

A. Objective
The process is aimed at ensuring that Articles 18 and 19 of the Horizon Europe Regulation are implemented and, in particular, that all actions carried out under Horizon Europe, including CAJU projects, comply with ethical principles and relevant national, Union and international legislation, including the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the European Convention on Human Rights and its Supplementary Protocols.
Actions which do not fulfil the ethical requirements and are thus not ethically acceptable and therefore shall be rejected or terminated once the ethical unacceptability has been established.

B. Applicants’ ethics self-assessment
When submitting their proposal, applicants must submit an ethics self-assessment identifying and detailing all the foreseeable ethics issues related to the objective, implementation and likely impact of the activities to be funded, including a confirmation of compliance with the ethical principles and relevant national and international legislation, and a description of how it will be ensured.

C. The ethics review process
All proposals recommended for funding will undergo an ethics review process carried out by CAJU, in line with relevant Commission guidelines.

C.1. Ethics Screening
The Ethics Screening is carried out to identify proposals raising complex or serious ethics issues and submit them to an ethics assessment. Each proposal will be screened by a panel consisting of at least two independent ethics experts focusing on the elements described in section B above.
The Screening may be preceded by an Ethics Pre-Screening performed by the CAJU ethics team. This process is based on the proposal, the "ethics issues table" and the “ethics self-assessment” as submitted by the applicants. The CAJU ethics team may require additional information or documents. Proposals with no ethics issues and proposals that are ethics compliant can be cleared at this stage.

C.2. Ethics Assessment
The Ethics Assessment is the third step in the ethics review process and is only carried out on proposals that were not cleared in the previous step.
The Ethics Assessment performed by the CAJU ethics team is an in-depth analysis of the ethical issues performed on the proposals recommended for funding and flagged by the ethics screening experts, or on the proposals for which the CAJU considers it appropriate. It is systematically performed on all proposals involving the use of hESCs.
The Ethics Assessment is carried out by a panel consisting of at least three independent ethics experts who focus on the elements described in section B above. The Ethics Assessment takes

42 Article 19(3) of the Horizon Europe Regulation.
43 In agreement with the Commission Statement related to research activities involving human embryonic stem cells of 20 December 2013 (2013/C 373/02).
into account the analysis done during the Ethics Screening as well as the information provided by the applicants in response to the Ethics Screening.

C.3. The possible outcomes of the Ethics Screening and the Ethics Assessment are:

1. Clearance

   The applicants have provided the necessary elements to adequately address the identified ethical issues and the preparation of the grant agreement can be finalised. An ethics summary report is produced to finalise the process.

2. Conditional clearance

   The panel or the CAJU formulate ethics requirements. These requirements are communicated to the applicant through an ethics summary report. Some of these requirements may constitute conditions to be fulfilled before the signature of the grant agreement or be included as Ethics deliverables in Annex 1 of the grant agreement.

   The conditions may include:
   - regular reporting
   - appointing an independent ethics advisor or board (that may notably be tasked to report to the CAJU on the compliance with the ethics requirements)
   - an ethics check or audit
   - submission of further information/documents
   - necessary adaptation of the methodology to comply with ethical principles and relevant legislation

   For all requirements, also those not included in Annex 1, applicants shall obtain all approvals or other mandatory documents from the relevant national, local ethics committees or other bodies such as data protection authorities before the start of the relevant activities. Those documents shall be kept on file and provided to the CAJU upon request.

   The panel or the CAJU may also recommend that an Ethics Check, conducted by the CAJU, is performed during the lifetime of the project and suggest the most suitable time frame (e.g. prior to the start of the relevant research work).

   An ethics summary report is produced to finalise the process before granting.

3. No clearance

   The identified ethics issues were not addressed by the applicants. The proposal is rejected (no ethics clearance), the CAJU will inform the coordinator or the sole applicant (via a ‘proposal rejection’ sent through the electronic exchange system), together with the reasons

D. Additional information on the ethics appraisal process.

Additional guidance related to the ethics appraisal process is provided in the relevant ethics guidelines and the Information for Applicants document relevant for each call.

In addition, CAJU will provide a briefing to the experts prior to their assignment.

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44 Article 19(4) of the Horizon Europe Regulation
45 The guidance How to complete your ethics self-assessment may be found here: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/how-to-complete-your-ethics-self-assessment_en.pdf