



# TA General Evaluation Guidelines

*Produced by IRISCC WP8 (SAMU/CNR)*

v.1

April 2025



## Table of content

1 Introduction .....	4
2 IRISCC Evaluation Process.....	4
2.1 Eligibility check .....	4
2.2 Feasibility check.....	5
2.3 Independent Merit review and TA selection .....	5
3 Roles and responsibilities .....	6
3.1 International Assessment Panel .....	6
3.1.1 Code of conduct .....	6
3.2 TA providers .....	6
3.3 TA Management Team.....	7
3.4 IRISCC Executive Board/Coordination .....	7
4 General merit review criteria .....	8
4.1 Scoring system.....	8
4.2 Evaluation criteria for excellence-driven access.....	9
4.3 Ranking.....	11
4.4 Prioritisation criteria.....	12
5 Reference documents.....	13

<b>HISTORY OF CHANGES</b>			
<b>Version</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Prepared by / Modified by</b>	<b>Change</b>
0.1	11/12/2024	Rosa M. Petracca Altieri, WP8	First draft of the process, the review form, and the evaluation criteria to be discussed in the IRISCC EB and shared for comments, suggestions and review.
0.2	22/01/2025	Rosa M. Petracca Altieri, WP8	Added comments and reviews received from the WP8 team and project coordination.
0.3	12/02/2025	Rosa M. Petracca Altieri, WP8	New draft following new discussions in the IRISCC EB and new comments and reviews received from the WP8 team, project coordination and IRISCC EB.
1.0	12/03/2025	Rosa M. Petracca Altieri, WP8	Initial version consolidating all inputs and reviews received.

## 1 Introduction

These guidelines provide the criteria and procedures for evaluating the user Transnational Access (TA) requests submitted under the IRISCC project.

IRISCC (Integrated Research Infrastructure Services for Climate Change Risks) is a consortium of diverse and complementary leading research infrastructures (RIs) covering disciplines from natural sciences to social sciences across different domains and sectors. IRISCC provides scientific and knowledge services to foster cutting-edge research and evidence-based policymaking to improve Europe's resilience to climate change.

The document describes the steps in the evaluation process, its inputs and outputs, the main general criteria and the responsibilities of the people participating in the process.

It is especially meant to guide members of the IRISCC International Assessment Panel (IAP) in performing the fair merit review of user TA proposals and to provide complete and transparent information to applicants on the selection process.

The Guidelines also serve as a primary point of reference for users requesting transnational access to understand the key questions they should address in their applications to prepare for evaluation properly.

## 2 IRISCC Evaluation Process

Successful user TA requests are established at the end of a multi-stage process that includes three main steps. Before undergoing actual merit evaluation - the third formal evaluation stage - the applications received are subject to two preliminary checks: eligibility and feasibility. Only proposals that successfully pass the eligibility and feasibility checks are retained for the independent review, which ascertains the scientific/technical merit of the proposed access.

### 2.1 Eligibility check

The eligibility check is ensured by the WP8 TA Management Team/SAMU<sup>1</sup>. TA proposals must meet all the eligibility conditions set out for access in the HE regulations, namely:

- **Transnationality:** the user group leader and the majority of the users must work in a country other than the country where the installation providing access is located (except for international organisations, an ERIC, the EC Joint Research Centre, or in case of remote access to a set of facilities/platforms/installations in different countries offering the same type of service).
- **Affiliation:** applications from user groups with a majority of *users working outside the EU* are eligible, though limits may be applied as TA to users not working in a EU or associated country must be globally limited to max 20% of the total access units provided within the project.

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<sup>1</sup> SAMU is the Service and Access Management Unit of the ACTRIS Head Office, participating in the IRISCC project as TA management Team.

- **Dissemination:** User groups shall be entitled to and willing to disseminate the knowledge they will generate under the project unless they are working for SMEs.

If revisions are needed to make the proposal eligible, the user group leader is given details and asked to provide what is needed by a fixed deadline.

Proposals and applicants shall remain eligible during the evaluation process as well as all throughout the actual provision of the granted TA.

## 2.2 Feasibility check

The feasibility check aims to ascertain/confirm that the TA requests can be dealt with successfully by the access provider, considering the facility/platform/installation calendar, the availability of logistical, human and financial resources to accommodate the access request, host users, provide on-site support, etc.

This step is minimised and only consists of completing a feasibility checklist for Go/No-go when users and the facility/platform/installation discuss the technical and scientific details before the formal submission of the application, as recommended in the TA call.

If users and providers have not discussed the access project before submission, the feasibility check takes longer and covers the technical-scientific details. During feasibility, the user can be asked, if needed, to amend the submitted proposal or submit a revised one.

## 2.3 Independent Merit review and TA selection

The merit review and selection phase opens only for TA proposals whose feasibility is confirmed by the TA provider. Each TA proposal is typically evaluated by an *ad-hoc panel* composed maximum of *three experts* from the IRISCC International Assessment Panel (IAP, see section 3.1), identified based on their knowledge in the scientific or technical field that is the subject of the application to be reviewed.

Reviewers perform the individual evaluation of assigned proposals remotely, assessing the main elements (research activity and user group) against the general criteria detailed in [section 4](#)<sup>2</sup>, giving marks and completing synthetic individual assessment reports.

The TA Management Team draws up the shortlist of TA proposals that pass the required thresholds and are recommended for selection. The shortlist ranks TA applications based on the marks received and any advice from the independent experts concerning the priority order for proposals.

The TA Management Team transmits the shortlist to the Project Coordination and the IRISCC Executive Board for the acknowledgement of the evaluation results.

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<sup>2</sup> Further specific criteria can be introduced to meet the particular objectives and types of the IRISCC TA calls.



### 3 Roles and responsibilities

#### 3.1 International Assessment Panel

The independent merit review of the user TA feasible proposals is entrusted to the IRISCC International Assessment Panel, the project's consolidated source of reviewers from which members are drawn to serve on ad-hoc review panels for TA proposals based on their expertise.

The International Assessment Panel guarantees that the selection of TA proposals submitted by users is based on an expert, sound, fair, and transparent assessment.

The composition, appointment, mandate and tasks of the IAP members are described in detail in the IAP Terms of Reference [REF 2]. The IAP code of conduct is reported for convenience in the following section, though already included in the ToR.

##### *3.1.1 Code of conduct*

1. The IAP members serve in their personal and technical capacities and do not represent their employer, institution or any other entity.
2. The IAP members perform the assigned reviews in a confidential, impartial, fair, and equitable way. They also agree to disclose to the WP8 TA Management Team/SAMU any interest, affiliation, or different factor that may create an actual or perceived conflict of interest in assessing a specific proposal.
3. Unless foreseen by the procedure, the IAP members reviewing a TA proposal must not directly communicate with persons involved in the proposal, namely the principal investigator, any team members or any person linked to the users' affiliated entities.
4. The IAP experts serving on a review panel shall maintain the confidentiality of any documents or files received for the evaluation, deleting all copies of the files they may have stored on personal devices<sup>3</sup> upon completion of the assignment.
5. The IAP members must not disclose the results of the evaluation outcome.

#### 3.2 TA providers

TA providers are responsible for the feasibility check ([section 2.2](#)) of the TA proposals that concern services provided by their Facility/platform/installation, having to confirm the scientific, technical and logistical viability of the TA proposal, and if it fits (for the proposed timing and requirements) in their availability, schedule and plans.

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<sup>3</sup> Except the information stored on the space reserved for them on the access management platform ACTRIS PASS.

To avoid possible bias in the selection process, direct contact between the applicants and TA providers before the actual provision of the access can only take place for the feasibility check:

- Preliminarily if, as recommended, applicants discuss with facilities the technical and scientific details of the proposed TA before the formal submission of the application, or
- After eligibility and before independent merit review.

Outside feasibility and until the end of the selection, the exchanges between applicants and providers can only happen through the TA Team.

### 3.3 TA Management Team

The TA Management Team is the main interface between all key actors involved in the evaluation of TA proposals (users, access providers, International Assessment Panel members, Project Coordination, IRISCC EB). The Team is made up of staff from the ACTRIS SAMU<sup>4</sup> and is responsible for organising, coordinating and supervising all the processes.

In particular, the TA Team is responsible for:

- Receiving all applications and performing the preliminary eligibility check
- Liaising with TA providers, users and review experts and supporting their work
- Communicating eligible requests to providers for the feasibility check
- Coordinating the review and selection process, establishing and instructing the ad-hoc review panels
- Notifying users of any possible request for further information from the reviewers or the providers
- Receiving the individual and summary evaluation reports and preparing the shortlist of recommended TA proposals
- Transferring the shortlist to the Project Coordination and the IRISCC EB for final selection
- Officially communicating the final decision on the TA to the selected users.

### 3.4 IRISCC Executive Board/Coordination

The EB and the Project Coordination take part in the final evaluation step and are responsible for establishing the final list of approved TA projects for each TA Call.

The EB and Project Coordination may decide on a specific proposal acceptance rate based on the available resources and the remaining TA calls to be published. In case, this decision is made and publicized before the launch of the call or, at the latest, by its closure date.

The EB and Coordination receive the shortlisted TA proposals and decide by consensus.

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<sup>4</sup> The Service and Access Management Unit of the ACTRIS Head Office.

## 4 General merit review criteria

The general criteria for selecting users to any IRISCC facility/platform/installation stem from the EU Charter of access to research infrastructures [REF 4], the contractual and legal obligations under the Grant Agreement [REF 1], and acknowledge the different purposes of access. Section 4.2 describes the evaluation criteria for excellence-driven access, grouped in sections that reflect the main evaluation issues that reviewers have to consider when examining the TA proposals. Each section has its own specified range of marks available for evaluating the criteria based on the level of achievement or performance demonstrated.

### 4.1 Scoring system

Evaluators assign points to individual criteria in the sections using whole numbers, ranging from 0 to 10 (Section 1) or from 0 to 5 (Sections 2-3).

**Table 1** below provides the scoring scheme and explanations:

SECTION 1			SECTIONS 2-3		
Score	Performance indicator	Descriptor	Score	Performance indicator	Descriptor
0	<b>Inadequate</b>	the proposal fails to address the issue under examination or cannot be judged against the criterion due to missing or incomplete information.	<b>0</b>	<b>Inadequate</b>	the proposal fails to address the issue under examination or cannot be judged against the criterion due to missing or incomplete information.
1	<b>Poor</b>	The TA proposal is significantly deficient and lacks key elements required for a satisfactory evaluation against the specific criterion.	<b>1</b>	<b>Poor</b>	The TA proposal is not very convincing and presents numerous weaknesses.
2	<b>Low</b>	The proposal falls short of expectations and demonstrates limited elaboration or effectiveness.	<b>2</b>	<b>Fair</b>	The TA proposal is moderately convincing on how it addresses the criterion and presents some important inadequacies.
3	<b>Weak</b>	The proposal is below average and exhibits notable weaknesses or inadequacies.	<b>3</b>	<b>Good</b>	The TA proposal is good at addressing the criterion but presents some moderate shortcomings
4	<b>Fair</b>	The proposal meets the basic requirements but lacks elements of strength or excellence.	<b>4</b>	<b>Very good</b>	The TA proposal is strong and addresses most aspects of the criterion convincingly, with minor weaknesses.

5	<b>Average</b>	The proposal is satisfactory and meets the standard expectations without standing out positively or negatively.	5	<b>Excellent</b>	The TA proposal is fully convincing, without weaknesses.
6	<b>Sufficient</b>	The proposal meets the requirements and expectations at a basic level without any notable strengths.			
7	<b>Good</b>	The proposal is above average, demonstrating proficiency and effectiveness with some strengths			
8	<b>Very good</b>	The proposal is strong and exhibits notable proficiency and effectiveness with several strengths			
9	<b>Excellent</b>	The proposal is outstanding and demonstrates exceptional competence, effectiveness, and numerous strengths			
10	<b>Outstanding</b>	The proposal is exceptional in all aspects, exceeding expectations and setting a high standard for evaluation			

**Table 1** - TA proposal marking scheme

With this scoring system, different sections of the evaluation can be weighted differently, reflecting their relative importance and complexity of the review. This approach offers flexibility to assess diverse aspects of the application, ensuring that each section is appropriately weighted and contributing to the overall assessment accurately.

#### 4.2 Evaluation criteria for excellence-driven access

The peer review of excellence-driven TA projects considers the evaluation criteria in the following sections:

1. Scientific and technical relevance
2. Novelty and innovation
3. Quality and efficiency of the implementation
4. Ethics

**Table 2** below describes each group, detailing the criteria, related explanation and maximum points that can be scored in the different sections.

Criterion	Explanation	Points available
<b>1 - Scientific and technical relevance</b>		<b>30</b>
<b>a) Alignment to IRISCC strategic priorities/call requirements</b>	Evaluate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TA project’s contribution to the strategic goals of IRISCC, including a good level of multi-inter-trans disciplinarity (More on Multi-Disciplinary, Inter-Disciplinary and Trans-Disciplinary Research <a href="#">here</a>)</li> <li>• how it aligns with the specific thematic priorities set out in the call</li> <li>• how well the TA project integrates various scientific disciplines to address climate change risks comprehensively with respect to composition of users group, workplan, choice and use of facility/platform/installation and/or equipment, etc</li> </ul>	0-10
<b>b) Scientific/technical value</b>	Evaluate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarity and pertinence of the scientific objectives.</li> <li>• Appropriateness and rationale of the proposed scientific work.</li> <li>• Degree to which it is based on sound scientific and technical principles.</li> </ul>	0-10
<b>c) Impact</b>	Evaluate the degree to which the results and the new knowledge are useful and may significantly impact: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Science → the academic community, by exploring creative, original, or potentially transformative concepts, building X-disciplinary developments (up to 5 points).</li> <li>• Society → contributing to inform decision-making bodies, support and strengthen adaption and mitigation strategies (up to 5 points)</li> </ul>	0-10
<b>2 - Novelty and innovation</b>		<b>10</b>
<b>a) Use of new technology, methodology, or innovative approaches</b>	Evaluate the degree to which the proposed work makes use of new technologies and methodologies or explores innovative measurement/data evaluation approaches.	0-5

<b>b) Potential for seeding links with industry and innovation</b>	Evaluate the degree to which the proposed work shows potential for industrial applications, contributing to new technology development, for prototype testing.	0-5
<b>3 - Quality and efficiency of the implementation</b>		<b>10</b>
<b>a) Quality of the workplan and dissemination plan</b>	Evaluate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality and effectiveness of the work plan.</li> <li>• Suitability of the approach and activities to be developed.</li> <li>• Clear identification of dissemination recipients (stakeholders that could uptake and make use of results) and dissemination activities' planning.</li> </ul>	0-5
<b>b) Scientific qualification/track record of the user group</b>	Evaluate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research track record, professional background, references, capabilities, and user group leader's and members' experience (up to 3 points)</li> <li>• Presence of early career scientists and students, who have the chance to learn from experienced scientists (up to 2 points).</li> </ul>	0-5
<b>4 - ETHICS</b>		
<b>Are ethical issues adequately addressed in the application?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• Yes, but additional points could be considered: <i>+open text box</i></li> <li>• No, the proposed research raises ethical concerns: <i>+open text box for justification</i></li> </ul>	
<b>Bonus points</b>		
<b>Use of multiple RIs' services – facilities/platforms/installations</b>	Bonus points are added automatically in case of proposals requesting access to services/facilities of more than 1 RI.	<b>5</b>

**Table 2** - Evaluation criteria for excellence-driven access

### 4.3 Ranking

After scoring, TA applications are classified according to the range of scores obtained and assigned specific grade labels.

The score thresholds are predetermined according to the maximum scores available. **Table 3** reports the specific ranking scheme used.

RANKING				
Max scores available:				<b>55</b>
accepted	<b>A</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	A+	<b>52.x-55</b>
			A	<b>49.x-52</b>
			A-	<b>46.x-49</b>
accepted	<b>B</b>	<b>Good</b>	B+	<b>43.x-46</b>
			B	<b>40.x-43</b>
			B-	<b>37.x-40</b>
accepted or rejected	<b>C</b>	<b>Average</b>	C+	<b>34.x-37</b>
			C	<b>31.x-34</b>
			C-	<b>28.x-31</b>
rejected	<b>D</b>	<b>Poor</b>	D	<b>&lt;28</b>
(or for revision)	<b>E</b>	<b>Rejected or not eligible</b>	E	

**Table 3** - Ranking schemes by access mode

#### 4.4 Prioritisation criteria

In case of need, if and when there is a necessity to discriminate/restrict the number of TAs, the prioritisation criteria described in Table 4 can be applied in preparing the final list of selected proposals.

Source of priority	#	Prioritization criteria
HE	1	Collaboration and access to new Users, considering in particular: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Users who have not previously used the installation</li> <li>b. Users who are working in countries where no equivalent research infrastructure exists.</li> </ol>
HE	2	Gender balance
IRISCC	3	Involvement of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- students / first-stage researchers</li> <li>- users from non-academic domains.</li> </ul>
IRISCC	4	Likelihood of developing a new successful technology/product with market potential

**Table 4** - Prioritisation criteria



## 5 Reference documents

REF 1. IRISCC Grant Agreement (ID: 101131261)

REF 2. [IRISCC International Assessment Panel Terms Of Reference](#)

REF 3. [European Commission \(2023\), HORIZON EUROPE Proposal Evaluation - Standard Briefing for Experts](#)

REF 4. European Commission: Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, *European Charter for Access to Research Infrastructures – Principles and guidelines for access and related services*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/8299402>