

SOP FOR ESPN RESEARCH GRANT

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1. OVERVIEW

ESPN regularly awards a number of research grants. At the Spring 2020 ESPN Council meeting, the frequency of grant awards was increased from biennially to annually. The awards are open to ESPN members only. The amount of funding granted depends on the financial situation of ESPN and current funding, e.g. by industry partners, but will generally not exceed EUR 20,000. A grant application call is made via members' emailing and on the ESPN website. The applications are reviewed by both internal (ESPN Council) and external (usually senior ESPN members not currently serving on Council) reviewers. Winners are announced at the General Assembly held during the annual ESPN congress.

2. DETAILS OF THE GRANTS

- i. Grants will be awarded for collaborative work within Europe, ideally within more than one country. Applicants submitting single-centre projects are unlikely to be successful.
- ii. There will be three categories for grants:
 - a. A general grant category (application of an ESPN member with documented support by an ESPN Working Group)
 - b. Working Group grants (must include evidence that the relevant Working Group Board is actively involved in the project of the grant)
 - c. Young Investigator Award as start-up funding for projects (the principal application must be aged 35 or younger)
- iii. All categories of applications will be scored and ranked together and awards made to the agreed number of top-ranking applications, but ensuring that one Young Investigator grant and at least one Working Group grant are awarded each year; if there is not a sufficiently highly-enough ranked general grant, it will not be awarded that year.
- iv. Unsuccessful candidates from previous years may re-apply but they need to declare previous submissions on the application form and itemise how the revised application has addressed previous reviewers' comments.
- v. Previously successful candidates may not reapply for further awards until 3 years after their last successful award.
- vi. Current members of ESPN Council may not be the principal applicant.

3. CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

- i. The total amount available for grants that year will be decided by Council at their spring meeting

- ii. A timetable for the call for applications, closing date, reviewers' deadline and winners' announcement will also be agreed at that meeting. The President will propose two or three Council members to act as internal reviewers.
- iii. If an internal reviewer has any connection to a grant application that year, they must demit from their internal review role at the earliest opportunity. The president may then appoint a replacement internal reviewer.
- iv. Council will suggest and agree three individuals to be external reviewers. These will be senior ESPN members in good standing who have experience of clinical and/or laboratory research. Effort will be made to ensure good representation of European countries and areas of clinical interest with these reviewers.
- v. A reserve external reviewer may be chosen in case of decline from the one of the others.
- vi. The internal reviewers will be responsible for:
 - Approaching external reviewers to ask if they would agree to take part
 - Communicating expectations of their role and the timetable to reviewers
 - Sharing the application forms and a template score-sheet with external reviewers
 - Reviewing and scoring/ranking applications prior to receiving external reviews
 - Collating all scores/ranks
 - Meeting to agree recommendations for the winning applications
 - Communicating the collective reviewers' recommendations and individual scoring/ranking to the ESPN President
 - Reviewing the grant application process each year and making any recommendations for improvement to Council
- vii. The call for applications will be made via the grants webpage of the ESPN website with signposting from a home-page slider and also via specific emailing to all ESPN members
- viii. All applications will be considered in the general grant category; applicants may request for their application to be included within the ESPN Working Group category and/or Young Investigator Award as well if relevant.

REVIEW PROCESS

- i. A list of conflicts of interest for internal reviewers should be complied at the start of the review process. These must include (but are not limited to):
 - i. Membership of the relevant Working Group
 - ii. Shared nationality with the principal applicant for that particular application
 - iii. Shared centre with any one of the co-applicants for that particular application
- ii. Internal reviewers should check that no principal applicants have received ESPN grants over the previous 2 years.
- iii. Internal reviewers should check that all applications are in the correct category: WG-applications should include evidence of WG board involvement (not just a supporting letter); any principal applicant under 35 years may be included in the Young Investigator Award category.
- iv. For the review process a previously agreed-upon standardised form will be used both by internal and external reviewers. This form will cover the following aspects that shall be scored upon:
 - Problem definition, scientific hypothesis and aims
 - Relevance to clinical practice
 - Innovative potential
 - Work plan and feasibility in proposed time
 - Cost/benefit
 - Contribution to improved collaboration
 - Statistical design (score is left blank if not relevant)

- Ethical profile (score is left blank if not relevant)
 - Scientific profile of principal applicant
- v. Reviewer will give a score on every single aspect listed above. The maximal score for that aspect is shown alongside
- vi. Scoring will be summed up for a final score for a specific application. If the statistics or ethical aspects are not relevant, the final score will be adjusted accordingly. For example, for a project that does not need ethical approval, the reviewer would leave the box blank meaning a total possible score of 95. The candidate's adjusted score would then be multiplied by 1.05 (=100/95).
- vii. In case of equal sums of multiple applications, the reviewer can give a personal recommendation for ranking.
- viii. Reviewers are also requested to underline the scoring by providing short written comments on strengths and limitations of the applications with emphasis on the aspects defined for scoring.
- ix. Scores and rankings of all reviewers will be summarized by the internal reviewers to come up with a ranking list to be presented to the president.
- x. At the end of the process, the lead internal reviewer should produce a short report for the autumn Council meeting. The SOP should be reviewed and any amendments to the process discussed at the same Council meeting.

4. COMMUNICATING RESULTS

- i. ESPN council will be informed of the results during the council meeting at the beginning of the corresponding yearly ESPN meeting.
- ii. Applicants will be informed of the results during the general assembly of the yearly ESPN meeting.
- iii. All applicants (both successful and unsuccessful) will receive a written confirmation and reviewers' comments during the weeks after the ESPN meeting.

5. REPORTS OF FUNDED PROJECTS

- i. Funded projects are requested to provide progress report after 6 months and then annually until the project is complete (or after a maximum of 3 years if the work is continuing). Reports will be presented to the council and then be published on the ESPN webpage.
- ii. At the completion of the project, or after 3 years (whichever comes sooner), a final project report is requested which should list publications and also financial details of how the grant was used.
- iii. Templates are available for 6 month, annual interim and final reports.
- iv. The president and one named ESPN council member will be responsible for contacting grant holders to request reports.
- v. Funded projects are requested to acknowledge ESPN funding with indication of the grant number in any publication emerging from the project for 5 years after initial funding.

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