

FOLLOW-UP COMMITTEE: ROLE, MANDATE AND FUNCTIONING

PRINCIPLE

The aim of the POST-COVID programme is to fund scientific projects that aim at a close examination of the long-term impact of the COVID crisis on the Belgian society, with a view to produce key messages and lessons learned for the federal government.).

In order to maximise the impact of funded research, the setting up of a user committee known as **Follow-up Committee** is foreseen for each research project.

This committee should be understood as a forum for exchanges between the project promoters and potential users of the project results (academic and non-academic), a meeting place between scientific expertise and field knowledge. It is therefore made up of the project's scientific team, Belgian or foreign external researchers competent in the field of the funded project, experts from federal administrations and institutions and, where applicable, from non-federal administrations, representatives of the civil society (non-governmental organizations, various associations, etc.).

By pooling expertise, exchanging and making available data/samples/materials and equipment or even giving access to the field, the aim is to consolidate the work of the scientific team(s), to co-create the phases and results of the project, to ensure their dissemination and integration among appropriate users in and outside the research field. In this context, it is also advisable to submit to the committee, for its opinion, the valorisation actions and outputs of the project.

The Follow-up Committee aims to promote dialogue and external communication on the project. The research team(s) should consider the opinion of the committee, as far as possible given the constraints imposed by the contract, such as the available time and budget. If this is not the case, however, the Programme manager can take up these recommendations and, in consultation with the research team, consider how to implement them anyway.

COMPOSITION AND FUNCTIONING

COMPOSITION

It is up to the project team to contact the potential members of the Follow-up Committee - where applicable taking into consideration any comments made by the evaluators - and to set the terms of their participation in the committee, in consultation with the BELSPO Programme Manager.

Given the objective which is to bring together adequate external expertise around the project, the number of people who make up a Follow-up Committee is variable and depends on the theme of the project as well as the potential exploitation of the results. The final composition is approved by the Programme Manager, on the proposal of the research team. Any modification during the project must be reported and receive the approval of the Programme Manager.

The members of the Follow-up Committee agree to participate on a voluntary basis in the meetings of the said committee as well as to devote the necessary time to reading the documents transmitted by the research team. This is an in-kind contribution to the project. Foreign experts can be members of the Follow-up Committee as far as practically possible. Their possible transport and accommodation costs may be charged to the operating budget of the project.

The list of members of the Follow-up Committee is made public on the BELSPO web page, as well as in the final research reports, subject to the explicit agreement of the members in compliance with the legal provisions in force.

FUNCTIONING

ORGANISATION OF THE MEETINGS

It is up to the Project Coordinator, in consultation with the Programme Manager, to organise the meetings (date, preparatory documents, PowerPoint presentations, ...) and to write the minutes. Minimum one meeting per year must be organised. In all cases, a project kick-off meeting and a closing meeting intended to discuss the final report and expected outcome (valorisation) must be organised. It is up to the Coordinator to bring together the members of the Follow-up Committee when substantial progress needs to be presented and discussed with them.

OPERATION

The research team and the members of the Follow-up Committee commonly set the rules for their operation (use of languages, internal communication, confidentiality, frequency of meetings, etc.).

MEETING PLACE

The first and last meeting of the Follow-up Committee will be organised (subject to the availability of a meeting room) at BELSPO. The other meetings will be organised by the research team in consultation with the members of the Follow-up Committee.

Physical meetings with members are not essential. Video conferencing platforms can be used to involve some or all of the members in discussions on the progress of the project. Ad hoc meetings on the sideline of other (inter) national meetings or conferences provide additional opportunities to collect contributions from members.

BELSPO makes its meeting rooms available to research teams to host Follow-up Committee meetings.

DOCUMENTS FOR THE FOLLOW-UP COMMITTEE

Working documents, PowerPoint presentations, etc. produced by the research team should be written in clear and concise language. They will be sent within 2-3 working days preceding the meeting.

The draft final report must also be submitted to the Follow-up Committee for examination, after which the team can present it to BELSPO for agreement before introducing a final version.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The members of the Follow-up Committee are required to respect the confidentiality of the information transmitted by the research team and not to disclose it within or outside their organisation/institution without the prior consent of the research team and the Programme Manager. Likewise, when the research team receives sensitive information from committee members, any confidentiality clauses on the use of this information will be respected.

OTHER PROVISIONS

- it is important to underline that the Follow-up Committee, in order to maintain itself throughout the duration of the project, must be actively mobilised by the team. Indeed, it is a lever that the team must be able to activate. The latter could, for example, ask the committee to examine sampling results, questionnaires to which the team wishes to submit individuals, to compare analytical methods, or even to help it formulate policy recommendations in line with the scientific results obtained, to reflect together on avenues for valorising the results at the end of the project, etc.
- at the start of the research, the presentation of the state of the art on the research topic is an important moment for the Follow-up Committee. This state of the art makes it possible to present both what science already knows on the topic and the questions not yet resolved at the scientific level. Such an overview constitutes a reference for non-scientific stakeholders.
- at the request of the research team and/or the Programme Manager, the members of the Follow-up Committee are likely to inform their organisation/institution on research progress and thus ensure maximum dissemination of information within their department in order to stimulate exchanges between stakeholders and the scientific team.