

A large version of the CyberSecDome logo, featuring a stylized dome shape composed of purple dots and lines, with the text "CyberSecDome" in a bold, black, sans-serif font below it.

# CyberSecDome Open Call

## Evaluators Guide

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## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Purpose of the Guide

This guide provides evaluators with clear and structured instructions on how to assess the proposals submitted to the CyberSecDome Open Call. It outlines the evaluation process, criteria, scoring methodology, and evaluators' responsibilities. It aims to ensure that all evaluations are conducted fairly, transparently, and consistently with the goals and requirements of the CyberSecDome project.

Evaluators are responsible for reviewing and scoring proposals to identify high-quality, innovative projects that contribute to enhancing cybersecurity through AI and VR technologies in alignment with the CyberSecDome objectives.

### 1.2 Role of the Evaluators

As an evaluator, your role is to assess the proposals based on the predefined evaluation criteria: **Alignment, Excellence, Impact, Implementation, and Value for Money**. Your assessment will help ensure that only the most promising projects, which demonstrate technical feasibility, innovation, and impact, are selected for funding.

You are expected to provide constructive, objective, and detailed feedback to the applicants. This feedback is crucial for applicants to understand the strengths and weaknesses of their proposals, whether they are selected for funding or not.

### 1.3 Overview of the CyberSecDome Open Call Process

The CyberSecDome Open Call aims to identify and fund projects that address key cybersecurity challenges using AI and VR technologies. The Open Call is divided into two rounds, with Round 1 focusing on specific topics related to cybersecurity resilience, threat detection, incident management, and other areas relevant to the CyberSecDome project.

Each round follows a structured process:

- **Proposal Submission:** Applicants submit their proposals via the digital submission system.
- **Eligibility Check:** Proposals are reviewed to ensure they meet the administrative and eligibility requirements.
- **Evaluation by Expert Panel:** Eligible proposals are evaluated by an independent panel of experts based on predefined criteria.
- **Consensus and Ranking:** After individual evaluations, the panel discusses the proposals and ranks them based on their scores.
- **Final Selection:** The highest-ranked proposals that meet the minimum threshold are selected for funding.

## 2 Evaluation Overview

### 2.1 Objectives of the CyberSecDome Open Call

The CyberSecDome Open Call is designed to support projects that contribute to enhancing cybersecurity across digital infrastructures using advanced technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Virtual Reality (VR). The primary objectives of the Open Call are:

- To promote innovation in cybersecurity technologies.
- To strengthen the security and resilience of EU digital infrastructures.
- To foster collaboration between industries, SMEs, research institutions, and other stakeholders in cybersecurity.
- To demonstrate the effectiveness of AI and VR tools in mitigating cyber threats, handling incidents, and enhancing overall security operations.

Evaluators play a key role in ensuring that the projects selected for funding align with these objectives and contribute to the broader goals of the CyberSecDome project.

### 2.2 Topics for Round 1

In Round 1 of the CyberSecDome Open Call, the focus is on predefined topics that align with the project's overarching goals. Each topic represents a specific cybersecurity challenge that can be addressed using AI-driven and VR-enhanced technologies. Proposals must address one or more of these focus areas and demonstrate how their solutions can integrate into the CyberSecDome framework.

Table 1. CyberSecDome Open Call Round 1 Topics

Topic No.	Topic Title	Description	Open Call Contribution (Max)
1	Evaluation & Testing of Integrated CyberSecDome Prototype	This topic focuses on a thorough evaluation & testing of the integrated CyberSecDome prototype, including its virtual reality (VR) functionalities. Applicants are expected to test the system's usability, scalability, and effectiveness in real-world cybersecurity scenarios, providing insights into system limitations and improvement opportunities. The evaluation process must cover diverse threat landscapes and operational settings.	Up to €120,000 per project
2	Advanced Risk Assessment Using the Dynamic Risk Analysis (DRA) functionality	This topic invites applicants to perform a comprehensive risk assessment leveraging <b>CyberSecDome's Dynamic Risk Analysis (DRA)</b> tool. Projects should focus on evaluating interdependencies among assets, quantifying potential threat impacts, and providing detailed insights into system vulnerabilities. Proposals should include a comprehensive list of assets to be tested, methodologies for dynamic analysis, and actionable recommendations for risk mitigation.	Up to €35,000 per project
3	Comprehensive Incident Investigation and Response	This topic addresses the end-to-end process of incident investigation and response, from log capture and intrusion detection to automated incident analysis and mitigation. Proposals should demonstrate integration of multiple CyberSecDome functionalities, such as SIEM, Prophecy, FVT, and adaptive response mechanisms. Projects should also provide feedback mechanisms for continuous system improvement.	Up to €55,000 per project
4	AI-Driven Automated Penetration Testing	This topic seeks proposals that focus on testing CyberSecDome's automated penetration testing functionalities. Applicants will evaluate AI-driven attack modeling and simulation tools, validating their ability to identify vulnerabilities and assess system resilience. Proposals should include clear testing plans and agreement to operate within CyberSecDome's controlled infrastructure environment.	Up to €20,000 per project
5	Generation of Security-Related Datasets for AI-Enhanced Tools Training	This topic focuses on the generation of security-related datasets through simulation of cyber-attack scenarios. Proposals should describe methods for creating high-quality datasets covering a broad spectrum of threats and vulnerabilities. These datasets will contribute to the training and validation of AI models within CyberSecDome. Projects must ensure datasets are comprehensive, anonymized, and compliant with ethical and legal standards	Up to €10,000 per project

Proposals may be submitted by individual entities or consortia, and the evaluation process will ensure that the selected projects are those most capable of achieving impact in the outlined areas. Applicants are encouraged to propose solutions that address these topics and demonstrate how their technologies can be expanded and adapted for future CyberSecDome rounds.

### 2.3 Evaluation Workflow

The evaluation process for Round 1 of the CyberSecDome Open Call follows a structured workflow designed to ensure transparency, fairness, and thorough assessment. The evaluation workflow consists of the following stages:

- **Stage 1: Eligibility Check:**
  - The Open Call Management Team (OCMT) reviews proposals to ensure they meet the eligibility criteria, such as applicant eligibility, proposal completeness, and adherence to the submission guidelines (e.g., page limits and format).
  - Only eligible proposals proceed to Stage 2.
- **Stage 2: Individual Evaluations:**
  - Each eligible proposal is assigned to at least three expert evaluators. The evaluators score the proposal individually based on five evaluation criteria: Alignment, Excellence, Impact, Implementation, and Value for Money.
  - Evaluators are expected to provide constructive feedback on each criterion and justify their scores.
- **Stage 3: Consensus Meeting and Ranking:**
  - After individual evaluations, the evaluation panel convenes in a consensus meeting to discuss the proposals. Evaluators agree on a consensus score for each proposal and rank them based on their final scores.
  - Proposals that meet the minimum threshold score are ranked, and those with the highest rankings are recommended for funding.
- **Stage 4: Final Panel Review:**
  - The Open Call Management Team (OCMT) reviews the final list of proposals and ensures that the ranking aligns with the overall objectives of the CyberSecDome project.
  - The OCMT may make final decisions on funding allocations based on the portfolio balance, ensuring a diverse set of use cases is selected.

Each evaluator is responsible for ensuring that their individual assessments are thorough, unbiased, and aligned with the goals of the Open Call. The consensus meeting allows for a balanced discussion and alignment of opinions among the evaluation panel members, ensuring that all relevant aspects of each proposal are considered.

### 3 Evaluation Criteria

Evaluators will assess each proposal based on five key criteria: **Alignment**, **Excellence**, **Impact**, **Implementation**, and **Value for Money**. Each criterion has specific questions and scoring guidelines to ensure proposals meet the strategic objectives of CyberSecDome, demonstrate technical and business feasibility, and have the potential to deliver measurable benefits.

#### 3.1 Alignment with CyberSecDome Objectives

Alignment evaluates how well the proposal fits within the overall objectives of the CyberSecDome project and its specific goals for Round 1.

Questions to be assessed:

- Does the proposal address one or more of the predefined topics for Round 1?
- Is the proposal aligned with the strategic goals of CyberSecDome, particularly the integration of AI and VR technologies?
- Are the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) relevant and measurable in terms of CyberSecDome's goals?

Examples of Good and Bad Scoring:

- **Good Score (4-5):** The proposal clearly addresses a Round 1 topic, outlines a strong fit with CyberSecDome's objectives and provides relevant and measurable KPIs.
- **Poor Score (0-2):** The proposal is vague about its alignment with CyberSecDome, does not clearly address a Round 1 topic, or lacks relevant KPIs.

Scoring Table for Alignment:

**Table 2. Scoring Table for Alignment**

Score	Description
0.0	The proposal does not address the CyberSecDome objectives, nor does it relate to the defined topics.
1.0-2.0	The proposal weakly addresses the topics and does not clearly align with the CyberSecDome objectives.
3.0	The proposal addresses the topics but lacks a clear connection to CyberSecDome's overall objectives.
4.0-5.0	The proposal aligns well with CyberSecDome's objectives, addressing a topic comprehensively.

#### 3.2 Excellence

Excellence assesses the technical quality, clarity of objectives, and innovative approach of the proposed solution.

Questions to be assessed:

- Are the objectives clearly defined, specific, and measurable?
- Does the proposal demonstrate technical innovation, such as the novel application of AI and VR in cybersecurity?
- Are the methods and technical approaches sound and feasible?



Examples of Good and Bad Scoring:

- **Good Score (4-5):** The proposal defines clear objectives, demonstrates strong technical innovation, and presents a feasible technical approach.
- **Poor Score (0-2):** The proposal is unclear about its objectives, lacks innovation, or presents an unrealistic or unfeasible technical plan.

Scoring Table for Excellence:

**Table 3. Scoring Table for Excellence**

Score	Description
0.0	The proposal lacks clear objectives and presents no technical innovation.
1.0-2.0	Objectives are vaguely defined, and the technical approach is unfeasible or lacks innovation.
3.0	The proposal defines objectives but does not clearly demonstrate how its technical approach is feasible or innovative.
4.0-5.0	The proposal defines clear objectives, presents a technically sound and innovative approach, and is highly feasible.

### 3.3 Impact

Impact evaluates the potential for the project to deliver measurable benefits to the cybersecurity community and the broader European digital ecosystem.

Questions to be assessed:

- Does the proposal outline measurable technical and business impacts (e.g., improvements in resilience, faster incident response)?
- Is there a clear plan for dissemination and exploitation of the project results?
- Does the proposal include a sustainability plan for the outcomes beyond the funding period?

Examples of Good and Bad Scoring:

- **Good Score (4-5):** The proposal outlines a clear, measurable impact on cybersecurity and includes a well-defined dissemination and sustainability plan.
- **Poor Score (0-2):** The proposal is vague about its potential impact, with no clear dissemination or sustainability strategy.

Scoring Table for Impact:

**Table 4. Scoring Table for Impact**

Score	Description
0.0	The proposal provides no clear impact or measurable benefits.
1.0-2.0	The impact is vaguely described and does not provide a strong business or technical benefit.
3.0	The proposal describes potential impacts but lacks concrete, measurable benefits or dissemination strategies.
4.0-5.0	The proposal clearly describes measurable impacts, provides a strong dissemination plan, and includes a feasible sustainability strategy for post-funding continuation.

### 3.4 Implementation

Implementation assesses the feasibility of the proposed work plan, resource allocation, and risk management strategies.

Questions to be assessed:

- Does the proposal provide a detailed and realistic work plan with clearly defined milestones and deliverables?
- Are the resources (e.g., personnel, equipment) appropriately allocated to the proposed tasks?
- Does the proposal include a risk management strategy with identified risks and mitigation measures?

Examples of Good and Bad Scoring:

- **Good Score (4-5):** The proposal presents a well-structured and feasible work plan with adequate resource allocation and a robust risk management strategy.
- **Poor Score (0-2):** The proposal lacks a clear work plan or does not adequately allocate resources to meet the project's goals.

Scoring Table for Implementation:

Table 5. Scoring Table for Implementation

Score	Description
0.0	The proposal lacks a clear work plan, resource allocation, or risk management strategy.
1.0-2.0	The work plan is poorly defined, resources are inadequately allocated, and risk management is weak or missing.
3.0	The proposal provides a work plan but lacks sufficient detail in terms of milestones, resources, or risk management.
4.0-5.0	The proposal presents a clear, realistic work plan with adequate resource allocation and a robust risk management strategy, making successful implementation likely.

### 3.5 Value for Money

This criterion assesses whether the requested funding is justified and whether the proposed project represents good value for money.

Questions to be assessed:

- Is the budget well-justified and aligned with the proposed activities and expected outcomes?
- Does the proposal represent good value for money, considering the requested resources and expected impact?

Are additional funding sources identified, and is there a clear strategy for utilizing them?

Examples of Good and Bad Scoring:

- **Good Score (4-5):** The budget is well-justified, aligned with the work plan, and provides excellent value for money.

- **Poor Score (0-2):** The budget is not aligned with the work plan, lacks justification, or does not represent good value for money.

Scoring Table for Value for Money.

**Table 6. Scoring Table for Value for Money**

Score	Description
0.0	The budget is poorly justified, and the proposal does not represent good value for money.
1.0-2.0	The budget is inadequately aligned with the proposed activities, and value for money is weak.
3.0	The proposal provides a budget, but the justification is unclear or the resources requested do not fully align with the expected outcomes.
4.0-5.0	The proposal presents a well-justified budget, aligned with the work plan and expected outcomes, and represents excellent value for money.

## 4 Scoring Methodology and Evaluator Instructions

This section outlines how evaluators should score proposals, including interpretation of scores, minimum thresholds, criteria weighting, and step-by-step instructions for using the provided evaluation template

### 4.1 Score Scale and Interpretation

Each criterion (Alignment, Excellence, Impact, Implementation, and Value for Money) will be assessed by answering specific questions, and each question will be scored on a scale from **0 to 5**, as follows

**Table 7. Score Scale**

Score	Description
0	The proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.
1	Poor – The criterion is inadequately addressed, with serious weaknesses.
2	Fair – The proposal broadly addresses the criterion but with significant weaknesses.
3	Good – The proposal addresses the criterion well, but improvements are needed in some areas.
4	Very Good – The proposal addresses the criterion very well, with only minor improvements required.
5	Excellent – The proposal successfully addresses all aspects of the criterion comprehensively and effectively.

Evaluators should provide clear and specific feedback to justify their scores, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of each proposal. The goal is to ensure transparency and consistency across evaluations.

## 4.2 Minimum Thresholds

To be eligible for funding, proposals must meet the **minimum threshold score of 3 for each criterion**. A proposal that fails to meet this threshold in any of the five criteria will not be considered for funding.

Additionally, the **total minimum score** for successful proposals is **9.3**, considering the weighted contribution from each criterion. Proposals not meeting this overall score will also be disqualified from funding.

## 4.3 Weighting of Criteria

Each criterion carries a specific weight in determining the final score for the proposal. The weighted scores reflect the importance of each criterion in the overall evaluation. The weightings are as follows:

Table 8. Weighting of Criteria

Criterion	Weighting
Alignment	20%
Excellence	30%
Impact	30%
Implementation	10%
Value for Money	10%

To calculate the final score, the total score for each criterion is multiplied by its respective weighting. The maximum total score a proposal can achieve is **15.50**. For example, if a proposal scores 15 (out of 15.5), that indicates an excellent proposal. Any score below **9.3** means the proposal has failed to meet the minimum threshold.

### 4.3.1 Example of Weighted Scoring Calculation:

#### **Alignment (3 questions):**

- Scores: 4, 5, and 3
- Total Score for Alignment:  $4+5+3=12$
- Weighted Score for Alignment:  $12 \times 20\% = 2.4$

#### **Excellence (3 questions):**

- Scores: 5, 4, and 4
- Total Score for Excellence:  $5+4+4=13$
- Weighted Score for Excellence:  $13 \times 30\% = 3.9$

#### **Impact (4 questions):**

- Scores: 3, 4, 3, and 5
- Total Score for Impact:  $3+4+3+5=15$
- Weighted Score for Impact:  $15 \times 30\% = 4.5$

#### **Implementation (2 questions):**

- Scores: 4 and 3
- Total Score for Implementation:  $4+3=7$
- Weighted Score for Implementation:  $7 \times 10\% = 0.7$

**Value for Money (2 questions):**

- Scores: 4 and 4
- Total Score for Value for Money: 4+4=8
- Weighted Score for Value for Money:  $8 \times 10\% = 0.8$

**Total Weighted Score = 2.4+3.9+4.5+0.7+0.8=12.3**

This example shows a proposal achieving a weighted total score of 12.3, which meets the threshold for success.

Evaluators should ensure that the weighted total accurately reflects the overall performance across criteria, especially in high-impact areas such as Impact and Excellence.

#### 4.4 Handling Tied Scores

In the event of a tie between two or more proposals, the **Impact** score will be used as the deciding factor. If proposals have the same Impact score, the following tiebreakers will be used in order:

- **Excellence score**
- **Alignment score**
- **Value for Money score**

The goal is to ensure that the proposals with the highest potential for business and technical impact are prioritized for funding.

#### 4.5 Evaluator Instructions for Proposal Review and Scoring

In addition to understanding the scoring criteria, evaluators must follow a structured approach to review and score each proposal. The evaluation sheets have been designed to ensure consistency across all evaluations. Follow the steps below to complete your evaluation:

- **Review the Proposal**
  - Carefully read through the proposal, paying particular attention to how it addresses the five key criteria (Alignment, Excellence, Impact, Implementation, and Value for Money).
  - Use the evaluation guide to understand what is expected in each section and what the applicant should demonstrate.
- **Answer the Evaluation Questions**

For each criterion, you will be asked a series of specific questions. These questions are outlined in the evaluation sheet and correspond to the five main criteria:

  - **Alignment:** How well does the proposal fit the objectives of CyberSecDome?
  - **Excellence:** Does the proposal demonstrate technical innovation and feasibility?

- **Impact:** What are the expected business and technical impacts of the project?
- **Implementation:** Is the work plan feasible, and are resources allocated effectively?
- **Value for Money:** Is the budget reasonable, and does it provide good value for the requested funding?
- **Assign Scores**
  - Using the scale of 0 to 5, assign a score to each question for each criterion. The individual scores will be summed to generate the total score for each criterion.
  - Make sure to provide written feedback for each criterion. Highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal, which will help the applicants understand areas for improvement, whether or not they are selected for funding.
- **Using the Evaluation Template in Excel**
  - Navigate to the **“Evaluation” tab** in the provided Excel template.
  - Fill in the scores for each question under the corresponding criterion columns (Alignment, Excellence, Impact, Implementation, and Value for Money).
  - The Excel sheet will automatically calculate the total score for each criterion and apply the weighting to generate the overall score.
  - Ensure that the scores you input are accurate and align with your assessment of the proposal. Check that the total scores reflect the performance of the proposal across all criteria.
- **Comments**
  - Include detailed comments for each section, explaining why the proposal received the score it did. Comments are particularly important when a proposal receives a low score so that applicants can understand their weaknesses.

## 4.6 Using the Evaluation Scoring Templates

This section provides evaluators with detailed instructions on using the scoring templates provided in Excel for the CyberSecDome Open Call evaluation process. Follow these steps to ensure consistency and accuracy when recording scores and comments.

### 4.6.1 Overview of the Scoring Templates

Each proposal will be evaluated individually by three evaluators using the **Evaluator Proposal Scoring Template**. Once individual evaluations are complete, the scores are compiled by the OCMT in the **Consolidated Proposal Scoring Template** for discussion during the consensus meeting.

**Templates Included:**

- **Evaluator Proposal Scoring Template:** Used by each evaluator to record individual scores and comments for a single proposal.
- **Consolidated Proposal Scoring Template:** Used by the OCMT to compile scores from all three evaluators for each proposal.

#### 4.6.2 Instructions for Completing the Evaluator Proposal Scoring Template

##### *Accessing the Template*

- Locate the **Evaluator Proposal Scoring Template** provided by the OCMT.
- Ensure that the Proposal ID is correctly entered in the designated cell for identification purposes.

##### *Scoring Each Criterion:*

- Each proposal is evaluated against five main criteria: Alignment, Excellence, Impact, Implementation, and Value for Money.
- Under each criterion, specific questions guide your evaluation. Assign a score from 0 to 5 for each question, based on the scale provided in Section 4.1 of this guide:
  - **0:** Criterion not addressed
  - **1-2:** Poor to Fair
  - **3:** Good
  - **4-5:** Very Good to Excellent

##### *Providing Comments:*

- Use the **Evaluator Comment** column to justify each score. Comments should be clear, specific, and highlight both the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal for each question.
- Include actionable feedback where possible, especially if the proposal scores below the minimum threshold (3) for any criterion.

##### *Reviewing and Saving Your Work:*

- Double-check your scores and comments to ensure they align with the evaluation criteria.
- Save your completed template and submit it to the OCMT by the deadline provided.

#### 4.6.3 Instructions for the Consolidated Proposal Scoring Template

##### *Purpose:*

- The **Consolidated Proposal Scoring Template** is used by the OCMT to compile the scores from all three evaluators for each proposal, preparing for the consensus meeting.

##### *Filling in Evaluator Scores:*

- The OCMT will copy each evaluator's scores and comments into the appropriate columns under Evaluator A, Evaluator B, and Evaluator C.

- Check that all scores and comments match those submitted in the individual evaluations.

#### *Calculating Totals and Identifying Discrepancies*

- The template will automatically calculate the subtotal for each criterion and the total score for each evaluator.
- The **Proposal Total Score** will display the average score across all three evaluators.
- Review the scores to identify significant differences between evaluators, especially if scores vary by more than two points for the same criterion. These should be prioritized for discussion during the consensus meeting.

#### *Preparing for Consensus Discussion*

Highlight areas of discrepancy and note any commonalities in the comments. This will help streamline discussions during the consensus meeting.

Save and distribute the completed **Consolidated Proposal Scoring Template** to the evaluators and OCMT members prior to the meeting.

#### **4.6.4 Key Points for Accuracy and Consistency**

- **Ensure Clear Justifications:** Scores should always be backed up by specific comments that explain why a particular score was assigned.
- **Maintain Professional Tone:** Comments should be professional, constructive, and helpful to applicants, especially for proposals that may not meet the minimum threshold.
- **Check for Completeness:** Confirm that all required fields are filled out and that no criteria or questions have been overlooked.

By following these instructions, evaluators and the OCMT can maintain a consistent and transparent evaluation process, providing fair and actionable feedback to all applicants.

## **5 Review Stages**

The evaluation of proposals for the CyberSecDome Open Call is a multi-stage process designed to ensure fairness, transparency, and thorough assessment. Evaluators play a key role in each stage, ensuring that all proposals are assessed consistently against the defined criteria. Below is an overview of the stages involved in the review process.

### **5.1 Stage 1: Eligibility Check**

Before the detailed evaluation begins, each proposal undergoes an eligibility check conducted by the **Open Call Management Team (OCMT)**. This initial assessment verifies that proposals meet the fundamental requirements of the CyberSecDome Open Call, allowing only eligible proposals to proceed to the next stage. To proceed to the detailed evaluation phase, each proposal must meet the following eligibility criteria mentioned in the following subsections



### 5.1.1 Applicant Eligibility and Entity Requirements:

- The proposal must be submitted by a legally established entity registered in an eligible EU Member State or a Horizon Europe-associated country, excluding the UK and Switzerland.
- At least one applicant in the consortium (if applicable) must be a Micro, Small, or Medium-sized Enterprise (SME).
- Consortia of up to 3 members are permitted, provided that each partner meets the eligibility criteria and contributes to the project objectives.

### 5.1.2 Proposal Restrictions by Topic:

- Applicants are allowed to submit proposals for multiple topics; however, if a proposal is selected for Topic 1 (Evaluation & Testing of Integrated Prototype), the applicant is restricted from submitting additional proposals for other topics in the same round.

### 5.1.3 Funding Limitations:

- While applicants are permitted to propose a total project budget exceeding the Open Call Maximum Contribution, the maximum funding provided per proposal will be capped at €120,000, regardless of applicant type (SME or larger industry) or consortium structure.
- SMEs will receive up to 100% of eligible costs, subject to the €120,000 funding cap. For larger industries, up to 50% of eligible costs will be funded, with the total funding for any single proposal (including consortium submissions) not exceeding €120,000.

### 5.1.4 Financial and Compliance Requirements:

- The applicants must demonstrate financial capability to support project costs until receiving funding disbursements.
- Proposals must not rely on or duplicate funding from other EU programs.
- All partners must declare that there is no double funding for the project submitted.

### 5.1.5 Completeness and Format Compliance:

- The proposal must be fully completed, including all required sections and supporting documentation.
- The proposal must be written in British English and adhere to specified format requirements, including word count, document structure, and file format.

### 5.1.6 Alignment with Project Objectives:

- The proposal should demonstrate clear alignment with the objectives of the selected topic(s) and provide detailed descriptions of the technical and operational approach.

Only proposals that satisfy all these eligibility criteria will proceed to the next stage of evaluation by the expert panel.

## 5.2 Stage 2: Individual Evaluations

Each eligible proposal is assigned to at least **three expert evaluators**. At this stage, evaluators assess the proposal individually based on the five key criteria: **Alignment, Excellence, Impact, Implementation, and Value for Money**.

### Key responsibilities of evaluators during Stage 2:

- Thoroughly review the proposal against each criterion.
- Assign scores on a scale of 0-5 for each question under each criterion.
- Provide detailed feedback justifying the scores, noting both strengths and weaknesses of the proposal.
- Ensure all aspects of the proposal are considered, including technical soundness, business feasibility, and impact on the broader cybersecurity community.

Each evaluator must submit their individual evaluation form (via the provided Excel template) with clear reasoning for their scores. These individual assessments will serve as the foundation for the consensus meeting in Stage 3.

## 5.3 Stage 3: Consensus Meeting and Ranking

Following individual evaluations, the evaluators meet as a panel to reach a consensus on each proposal. The **Consensus Meeting** is designed to align the evaluators' perspectives, particularly in cases where there are significant differences in the individual scores.

Consensus meeting process:

- *Review Individual Scores*: The panel will review the individual scores submitted by each evaluator. Evaluators discuss each proposal, highlighting areas of agreement and any discrepancies in their scores. If all evaluators are in agreement, the score will stand as is.
- *Discuss Differences*: If evaluators have different scores for a particular criterion, they must discuss their rationale. Each evaluator will have the opportunity to explain their assessment based on the proposal's content.
- *Reach Agreement*: The panel will work towards reaching consensus on a single score for each criterion. This may involve compromise or re-evaluation of certain aspects of the proposal.
- *Document the Consensus*: The panel agrees on a final score for each proposal. Once agreement is reached, the final scores will be documented in the consensus evaluation form, including detailed comments justifying the scores.
- *Proposals' Ranking*: Proposals are ranked based on their final scores, and those that meet the minimum threshold for each criterion and overall score are considered for funding.

Only the highest-ranked proposals that meet the minimum threshold of **9.3** will be shortlisted for funding. The ranking list is submitted to the OCMT for the final review.

## 5.4 Stage 4: Final Panel Review

The final review of proposals is conducted by the **Open Call Management Team (OCMT)**. The OCMT reviews the consensus evaluation results to ensure that the selected proposals align with the overarching goals of the CyberSecDome project.

### Portfolio review:

- In addition to reviewing the ranking list, the OCMT ensures that the selected proposals represent a balanced portfolio of projects that cover the key topics and challenges defined in the Open Call.
- If necessary, the OCMT may adjust the final selection based on portfolio balance, ensuring that a diverse set of use cases is represented.

Once the final selection is approved, the OCMT notifies the applicants of the evaluation results and proceeds with the grant agreement process for the successful proposals.

## 6 Consensus and Feedback

The feedback process is crucial in ensuring that all applicants receive clear insights into the strengths and weaknesses of their proposals, regardless of the funding outcome. Constructive feedback is vital, particularly for applicants who are not selected for funding, as it allows them to improve their proposals in future rounds.

### 6.1 Key elements of constructive feedback

- **Clear and Specific:** Feedback should address specific areas of the proposal, highlighting both strengths and weaknesses
- **Actionable Suggestions:** Where possible, provide suggestions for improvement. For example, if a proposal lacked detail in the work plan, explain which sections needed further elaboration.
- **Balanced:** While pointing out areas for improvement, be sure to acknowledge the positive aspects of the proposal. This ensures that applicants receive balanced feedback.

### 6.2 Finalizing Feedback

Once the Final Panel Review is complete, the agreed-upon feedback for each proposal will be compiled into a final Evaluation Summary Report. This report will include:

- A summary of the scores for each criterion
- Detailed feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal.
- Recommendations for improvement (if applicable).
- A **Go/No-Go** decision based on the proposal's overall performance and ranking.

The feedback will then be communicated to the applicants by the Open Call Management Team (OCMT).

## 7 Ethical Guidelines and Conflict of Interest

Maintaining the integrity of the evaluation process is critical to the success of the CyberSecDome Open Call. Evaluators must adhere to strict ethical guidelines and declare any potential conflicts of interest that could affect the impartiality of their assessments. This section outlines the ethical standards expected of evaluators and the procedures for handling conflicts of interest.

### 7.1 Ethical Guidelines for Evaluators

All evaluators are required to conduct themselves with the highest level of professionalism and integrity. The following ethical guidelines must be observed throughout the evaluation process:

- **Confidentiality:** All information contained in the proposals and discussions during the evaluation process is confidential. Evaluators must not disclose any details of the proposals, scoring, or discussions to anyone outside the evaluation panel or Open Call Management Team (OCMT). This includes refraining from discussing or sharing information with colleagues, external parties, or applicants themselves.
- **Impartiality:** Evaluators must provide objective assessments based solely on the content of the proposals and the evaluation criteria. Personal opinions, biases, or external influences should not play a role in the scoring or feedback provided.
- **Fairness:** All proposals should be evaluated consistently and fairly, ensuring that each applicant is given an equal opportunity. Evaluators should avoid making assumptions about the applicants or their organizations and focus on the written content of the proposals.
- **Professionalism:** Evaluators must conduct themselves in a professional manner throughout the process. This includes being respectful of the opinions of fellow evaluators, adhering to the evaluation timelines, and providing thoughtful and constructive feedback.

### 7.2 Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest arises when an evaluator has a personal, financial, or professional relationship with an applicant or proposal that could compromise their impartiality. It is crucial that all conflicts of interest are identified and addressed before the evaluation process begins.

Types of Conflicts of Interest:

- **Personal Relationships:** If an evaluator has a family member, close friend, or personal acquaintance involved in a proposal, they must declare this as a conflict of interest.
- **Professional Relationships:** If an evaluator works for or has worked with an applicant organisation within the past three years, or if they have a financial stake in the organisation, this must be declared.

- **Financial Interest:** If an evaluator stands to gain financially from the success of a proposal (e.g., through investments, partnerships, or future contracts), they must declare a conflict of interest.

Procedure for Declaring Conflicts of Interest:

1. **Declaration:** All evaluators must declare any potential conflicts of interest before beginning the evaluation process. This includes completing a **Conflict-of-Interest Declaration Form**, which will be provided by the OCMT.
2. **Review:** The OCMT will review the declarations and determine whether any conflicts exist. If a conflict is identified, the evaluator will be recused from assessing that particular proposal.
3. **Reassignment:** Proposals for which an evaluator has a conflict of interest will be reassigned to another independent evaluator. The affected evaluator will not participate in any discussions or scoring related to that proposal.

### 7.3 Handling Conflicts of Interest During the Evaluation Process

In some cases, conflicts of interest may not become apparent until the evaluation process is underway. If an evaluator realizes during the process that they have a conflict of interest, they must take the following steps:

1. **Notify the OCMT Immediately:** The evaluator should immediately notify the OCMT about the potential conflict of interest.
2. **Withdraw from the Evaluation:** The evaluator must recuse themselves from further involvement in the assessment of the proposal in question.
3. **Reassign the Proposal:** The OCMT will reassign the proposal to a different evaluator who does not have a conflict of interest.

Failing to declare a conflict of interest can result in the disqualification of the evaluator and may impact the integrity of the entire evaluation process.

### 7.4 Consequences of Non-Compliance

Failure to adhere to these ethical guidelines or properly declare conflicts of interest can lead to serious consequences, including:

- **Removal from the Evaluation Panel:** Evaluators who violate the ethical guidelines or fail to declare conflicts of interest may be removed from the panel by the OCMT.
- **Invalidation of Evaluation Results:** If an undeclared conflict of interest is discovered after the evaluation process, the results of the affected evaluation may be invalidated, and the proposal may need to be re-evaluated.
- **Legal and Reputational Consequences:** In severe cases, such as the deliberate withholding of information or unethical conduct, legal action or reputational damage may follow.

By adhering to these ethical guidelines, evaluators will contribute to a fair, transparent, and trustworthy evaluation process for the CyberSecDome Open Call.

## 8 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for Evaluators

This section provides answers to common questions that evaluators may have throughout the evaluation process. It serves as a quick reference guide to clarify any uncertainties and ensure consistency in the evaluation approach.

### 8.1 General Evaluation Questions

#### **Q1: How much time should I spend on each proposal**

The time required will vary depending on the complexity of the proposal. However, evaluators are expected to spend sufficient time to thoroughly read, assess, and score each proposal against the established criteria. A well-considered review with thoughtful feedback is expected for each proposal.

#### **Q2: What if I feel I do not have enough expertise to evaluate a specific proposal?**

If you feel that you lack the necessary expertise to fairly assess a proposal, immediately notify the Open Call Management Team (OCMT). They will assign the proposal to another evaluator with the appropriate expertise.

#### **Q3: Can I collaborate with other evaluators when reviewing a proposal?**

No, the individual evaluation phase must be conducted independently. However, during the consensus meeting, you will have the opportunity to discuss the proposals with other evaluators to reach a common agreement on scores.

### 8.2 Scoring and Criteria

#### **Q4: How do I score proposals if they exceed the word limit or fail to follow formatting guidelines?**

Proposals that exceed the word limit or do not adhere to formatting guidelines should be flagged during the eligibility check stage. However, if these issues are overlooked in the eligibility check, you should still evaluate the proposal based on its content but note the formatting issue in your feedback.

#### **Q5: What if I believe the proposal addresses a criterion but is incomplete?**

If a proposal addresses a criterion but lacks sufficient detail or is incomplete, you should score it accordingly. For example, if a proposal's methodology is partially described but missing critical details, it may merit a lower score (e.g., 2 or 3 out of 5), with specific feedback explaining what is missing.

#### **Q6: How do I handle discrepancies in individual scores during the consensus meeting?**

If there are discrepancies between evaluators' scores during the consensus meeting, a discussion should take place to reconcile the differences. Each evaluator should explain their reasoning for their score. The goal is to reach a consensus by understanding each other's perspective and aligning on a final score.

### 8.3 Conflict of Interest

#### **Q7: What should I do if I discover a conflict of interest after starting the evaluation process?**

If you discover a conflict of interest during the evaluation process, immediately inform the OCMT. You must recuse yourself from evaluating the proposal, and the OCMT will reassign it to another evaluator.

**Q8: Can I participate in evaluating a proposal from an organization I have previously worked with?**

No. If you have worked with or have any financial interest in the organization submitting the proposal within the past three years, this constitutes a conflict of interest. You should notify the OCMT, and they will reassign the proposal.

## 8.4 Feedback and Reporting

**Q9: How detailed should my feedback be?**

Feedback should be specific and constructive. Each comment should be directly tied to the criterion being evaluated and should provide actionable suggestions for improvement where applicable. Avoid vague or overly brief comments such as “good work” or “needs improvement.”

**Q10: What if I cannot provide constructive feedback due to a lack of information in the proposal?**

If a proposal is missing critical information, state this clearly in your feedback. For example, you might write: “The proposal did not provide sufficient detail on the risk management strategy, making it difficult to assess the feasibility of the work plan.”

**Q11: How do I record my scores and comments?**

Use the Excel evaluation template provided by the OCMT. Ensure that you fill in all required fields, including individual scores for each question under each criterion and detailed comments. The template will automatically calculate the final score based on your inputs.

## 8.5 Consensus Process

**Q12: What happens if the evaluators cannot reach a consensus on a proposal?**

If consensus cannot be reached on a proposal during the consensus meeting, the OCMT may assign an additional evaluator to provide an independent assessment. The final score will be determined based on a majority decision after this additional evaluation.

**Q13: Can I change my score after the consensus meeting?**

No, once the consensus meeting is complete and final scores have been agreed upon, evaluators cannot change their scores. The final agreed-upon scores will be documented and submitted to the OCMT.

## 8.6 Evaluation Timelines

**Q14: What are the deadlines for completing the evaluations?**

The OCMT will provide a detailed timeline for the evaluation process. Evaluators must adhere to these deadlines to ensure the timely processing of all proposals. Failure to meet deadlines may impact the review schedule and disrupt the overall process.



**Q15: What should I do if I am unable to complete my evaluations by the deadline?**

If you anticipate being unable to meet the evaluation deadline, notify the OCMT as soon as possible. They will either extend the deadline in special circumstances or reassign the proposals to other evaluators.