



International

**Human Frontier
Science Program**

Organization

HFSP POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIPS 2026 Assessment Criteria and Scoring Guide

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

CRITERIA TO ASSESS	CONSIDERATIONS FOR ASSESSMENT
Excellence of the proposed research plan	
Positioning of the proposal at the leading edge of the life sciences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the proposal truly frontier and thus at the leading edge of the life-sciences? Is it likely to be a trailblazer for future discoveries? • Are the proposal and approaches novel, original, risky and ground-breaking? • Are the results likely to make an impact beyond the immediate field? • Does the proposal challenge existing paradigms and is it going to disrupt the current way of thinking? • Does the project address an important new problem or a barrier to progress in an established field? • How significant is the departure of the proposal from previous research of the applicant? <p>Specific criteria for CDFs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the proposal combine life sciences and non-life sciences in a unique way?
Excellence of the applicant	
Accomplishments and potential of the applicant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the applicant appear ready to embrace the risk of a frontier-pushing project and do they seem to be able to tackle research questions at the leading edge of science that go beyond the scope of expertise gained through their PhD? • Does the applicant appear to have the potential to succeed in their new field and project? • Was the research plan developed by the applicant themselves or does it seem to be a logical extension of the host laboratory's line of research? <p>Specific criteria for LTFs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will the applicant be exposed to new theories, methods and ideas and will they use new approaches? <p>Specific criteria for CDFs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the specific (non-life science) background of the candidate likely to boost progress in the life sciences by answering a fundamental question?
Host laboratory and host supervisor	
Standing of the host laboratory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the choice of host laboratory represent a good fit for the proposed research? • Is the host supervisor capable to direct the research of the applicant towards a successful outcome? • Is there opportunity for the applicant to rise and grow in that particular environment? • Does the host supervisor have a clear mentorship plan?

SCORING GUIDE FOR FULL PROPOSALS

Review Committee members should use the whole scale of scores from 1 to 10, in steps of 0.5, according to the criteria listed below. **Scores of 7 and above are fundable.**

Excellence of Research Plan	Indicators
Truly Frontier 9.0-10.0 (fundable)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly novel and original, cutting edge frontier science; can be risky • If successful, paradigm shifting and highly impactful for more than the immediate field • Very likely that results will change current way of thinking <p>Specific for LTFs: significantly different from previous work Specific for CDFs: perfect combination of life-science and non-life science approaches and questions</p>
Outstanding 7.0-8.5 (fundable)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outstanding science • Novel and original, but less frontier and risky • Some aspects might be impactful for the immediate field, but less likely to be paradigm shifting beyond that • Likely that some results will change current way of thinking <p>Specific for LTFs: distinct from previous work, but conceptually similar Specific for CDFs: good combination of life-science and non-life science approaches and questions</p>
Excellent , but not within the realms of HFSP. 5.0-6.5 (non-fundable)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent science, but somewhat mainstream and less original • impact beyond the immediate field is likely to be minor • unlikely to change current way of thinking <p>Specific for LTFs: largely based on previous work with few novel aspects Specific for CDFs: unclear whether the non-life science background of the applicant would have an impact on the biological question asked in the proposal</p>
Less competitive 3.0-4.5 (non-fundable)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • solid science, but mainstream • obvious next step for host laboratory • no paradigm shifts or major impact expected <p>Specific for LTFs: mainly a continuation of previous work Specific for CDFs: unique experiences and training of applicant are not necessary for or integrated into project</p>
Poor < 3.0 (non-fundable)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • project very much mainstream • scientifically flawed
Excellence of Applicant	Indicators
Truly Frontier 9.0-10.0 (fundable)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • applicant eager and capable to think beyond conventional knowledge and does not avoid risk • applicant seems very comfortable to go beyond the scope of previous expertise, to leave their comfort zone, and is very likely to succeed in doing so • development of proposal was for the most part the idea of and driven by applicant <p>Specific for LTFs: applicant proposes approaches and techniques that will expose them to extremely novel aspects of biology Specific for CDFs: applicant's specific background is ideally suited to boost progress in proposed research question</p>
Outstanding 7.0-8.5 (fundable)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • applicant seems ready to think beyond borders and ready to embrace some risk • applicant provides some evidence for their willingness to leave their comfort zone and for the ability to succeed with the new challenges • development of proposal was driven by host and applicant to a similar extent

	<p>Specific for LTFs: proposes some methods and approaches that are very distinct from previous ones</p> <p>Specific for CDFs: specific non-life science training will likely secure success in new field</p>
<p>Excellent, but not within the realms of HFSP. 5.0-6.5 (non-fundable)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> applicant seems to be somewhat risk-avoiding and less likely to be willing to embrace a completely new research area minor contribution of applicant to the development of the research plan which was mostly driven by the supervisor <p>Specific for LTFs: applicant proposes mostly established methods and approaches that they have been exposed to before</p> <p>Specific for CDFs: somewhat unclear how the specific background of applicant will boost progress in new field</p>
<p>Less competitive 3.0-4.5 (non-fundable)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> applicant does not seem to be ready to embrace a risky and bold research project development of the research plan which was entirely driven by the supervisor minimal change in research direction <p>Specific for LTFs: applicant proposes only mainstream and established approaches and techniques</p> <p>Specific for CDFs: unique background of applicant is not integrated into new research plan</p>
<p>Poor < 3.0 (non-fundable)</p>	<p>Applicant is not competitive</p>
<p>Host laboratory and host supervisor</p>	<p>Indicators</p>
<p>Standing of the host laboratory (rate: yes/no/maybe)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are the proposed host laboratory and host supervisor a good fit for the goals in the research plan? Does the host laboratory provide good opportunities and the right infrastructure for the applicant to achieve their research goals? Does the letter of support show their commitment to mentor and support the applicant?