TERMS OF REFERENCE for the
ATMO-ACCESS Access Evaluation Panel - AEP

V. 0

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1 Context and background information

This Terms of Reference (ToR) provides guidelines for the work of the Access Evaluation Panel (AEP) established within the ATMO-ACCESS project to perform fair merit review of user transnational access requests.

ATMO-ACCESS (Solutions for Sustainable Access to Atmospheric Research Facilities) is an Integrating Activity supported by the European Commission under the Horizon 2020 – Research and Innovation Framework Programme, H2020-INFRAIA-2020-3, Grant Agreement number 101008004. The project represents the organized contribution of distributed atmospheric research facilities to the development of a pilot for a new model of Integrating Activities. The project will deliver a series of recommendations for establishing a comprehensive and sustainable framework for access to distributed atmospheric Research Infrastructures (RI), ensuring integrated access to and optimised use of the services they provide. Recommendations will build on the experience, feedback and areas of improvements coming from Transnational Access (TNA) realized in the project to test the harmonized access procedures and cross-RI access modalities and services developed.

ATMO-ACCESS offers unique opportunities for transnational access to state-of-the-art facilities belonging to the European research infrastructures Aerosol, Clouds and Trace Gases Research Infrastructure (ACTRIS), In-service Aircraft for a Global Observing System (IAGOS) and Integrated Carbon Observation System (ICOS).

Participating facilities consist of:

- *Observation facilities*, including mobile platforms - ground-based stations to perform experiments under ambient conditions that deliver long-term data based on a regular measurement schedule and common operation standards. They are strategically located in diverse climate regimes both within and outside geographical Europe, and operated (or co-operated) by Research Performing Organisations on the national level.
- *Atmospheric Simulation Chambers*, including mobile chambers - facilities used to perform dedicated experiments under controlled conditions and also for providing data on specific atmospheric constituents, processes, events or regions by following common measurement protocols. They can also be used for testing, comparing and calibrating instruments, for developing new observation techniques and for exploring instrument synergies.
- *Central Laboratories (CLs)*, including mobile reference instruments - facilities which ensure the production of harmonized, reliable and documented data through compliance with standard operating procedures and/or quality protocols across the entire network of the relevant RIs. Some CLs are co-located with (fixed and mobile) Observation and Chamber facilities.
- *Mobile Exploratory Platforms* - small aircraft associated with a specific observation facility and fitted with a payload of ATMO-ACCESS relevant instrumentation.

Physical and remote access to the 43 facilities described above (22 Observational Facilities with 7 integrated CL, 14 Atmospheric Simulation Chamber Facilities with 1 integrated CL, 4 Mobile Exploratory Platforms with 1 integrated CL, 3 Central Laboratories) is coordinated by the ATMO-ACCESS Work Package 9 (WP9).
The WP9 Team is mostly made up of the ACTRIS Service and Access Management Unit (SAMU) staff.

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2 Role, purpose and scope

The ATMO-ACCESS Access Evaluation Panel (AEP) is a large, impartial pool of experts with broad expertise in atmospheric research. The Panel is the consolidated source of reviewers, enlisted for the entire duration of the project (1 April 2021 - 30 March 2025), whose members are periodically drawn to serve on review panels for individual TNA proposals based on their expertise.

The purpose of the Access Evaluation Panel (AEP) is to guarantee that the TNA proposals submitted by users are selected based on an expert, sound, fair, and transparent assessment.

The scope of the panels' evaluation encompasses the proposal research focus, scientific merit, technical soundness and potential for impact, as well as the background and suitability of the user group. Experts will only evaluate proposals that are in line with their personal expertise and which do not cause any conflict of interest with respect to the users or research facility concerned or specific national interests.

The details of TNA proposal evaluation process and the main criteria are described in the ATMO-ACCESS TNA Evaluation Guidelines that will be provided to members of the AEP. Further, specific criteria and workflows could be introduced to meet the particular objectives and types of the calls, allowing testing and implementing the new access methods developed within the project.

3 Composition of the AEP

Complying with H2020 rules, the AEP is composed of international experts in the field of atmospheric research, at least half of them independent from the ATMO-ACCESS beneficiaries.

Considering the vast amount of access planned in the project and the need to ensure the availability of as many reviewers as possible, the WP9 TNA Team and the Projects Office (PO) publish an open call to invite volunteer experts to join the AEP. The call shall allow for periodic replenishment of the Panel, necessary to guarantee adequate capacity to carry out the TNA assessment in a due time frame.

Also, the WP9 TNA Team invited the ATMO-ACCESS TNA providers to submit lists of experts to propose for the panel, encouraging, in particular, recommendations of experts coming from institutions, organizations, or countries different from the provider's own institution/organization[1]. Proposed experts are contacted and invited to confirm their willingness to be included in the AEP, registering their details in the database of prospective AEP experts in line with the ATMO-ACCESS data policy, privacy policy and GDPR rules.

Identified and volunteer experts are officially invited by the WP9 TNA Team to join the Panel, acknowledging the ToR and the need to follow the ATMO-ACCESS guidelines for the TNA Evaluation[2].

[1] Following the example of the EU Commission's call for organizations to recommend experts for the Horizon 2020 research and innovation program.

[2] These include the general ATMO-ACCESS TNA Evaluation guidelines and all further, specific guidelines released during the project. General and specific guidelines will be published on the project website and distributed to reviewers with the relevant TNA proposals assigned for review.

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The members of the AEP act in honorary capacity. AEP reviewers receive recognition and acknowledgment of their efforts in the form of a Certificate of contribution to the ATMO-ACCES Peer Review.

4 Appointment and term

The invited or volunteer experts who have accepted to become members of the AEP are officially nominated by the ATMO-ACCESS General Assembly.

AEP members are appointed for the entire duration of the ATMO-ACCESS project, starting from the date of their nomination.

An AEP member may withdraw from the AEP at any time upon written notification to the WP9 TNA team and the Project Office. In cases of resignation, the WP9 TNA Team and the Project Office evaluate if and how to proceed to replacement.

5 AEP members profile

Collectively, the AEP members shall have strong scientific and technical expertise in the different areas including, but not limited to:

- Aerosol remote sensing
- Aerosol in situ
- Cloud remote sensing
- Cloud in situ
- Reactive Trace Gases remote sensing
- Reactive Trace Gases in situ
- Radiative balance/ climate / models
- Life/ health/ environment
- Instrument/ prototypes
- GHG air composition in-situ, vertical profiles and remote sensing
- GHG flux in-situ through eddy covariance and profile measurements
- Radiation and water balance observation
- Ecosystem observations linked to GHG fluxes and water balance

Experts have knowledge of the latest scientific progress, including new developments/technologies in the atmospheric domain, and a deep understanding of the key open issues in addressing global challenges in science, industry, and society.

Sound analytical, interpersonal, and language skills to contribute effectively to review panels complete the AEP member profile.

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6 Mandate

The AEP mandate is to assess TNA proposals submitted by users and make recommendations on proposals that should benefit from access under the ATMO-ACCESS project.

The AEP mandate includes the tasks identified in section 6.1.

6.1 Tasks of the experts

AEP members serve on ad-hoc review panels established by the WP9 TNA Team for evaluating individual TNA proposals based on the required diverse knowledge and experience in the relevant fields.

Ad-hoc panels shall be composed maximum of three experts who perform individual reviews of the TNA proposals.

Upon receiving a request to serve in an ad-hoc review panel, the expert shall report any conflict of interest (see section 7.1) or, in case, any temporary unavailability to take part in the review of the specific individual TNA proposal assigned.

One of the three members of the ad-hoc panel, identified by the TNA Team at the moment of the assignment, acts as *Rapporteur* summarizing the individual assessments performed by the others.

Individual review of the proposals consists of:

- Reading and examining the proposal, and evaluating its main elements (the research project and the applicant user group) against the general criteria[3] and weights detailed in the ATMO-ACCESS TNA Evaluation Guidelines, as well as specific criteria introduced to meet the particular objectives and types of the ATMO-ACCESS TNA calls.
- Assigning scores for each criterion.
- Providing brief explanatory comments sustaining the score given. Short explanations and comments are included in a final, synthetic individual evaluation report.

Once the individual review is concluded, the *Rapporteur* draws up a summary report of the individual assessments and formulates recommendations for the selection. Only where needed, if the Rapporteur deems necessary to produce recommendations, a remote consensus meeting may be arranged between the experts in the ad-hoc panel.

[3] Review criteria cover, among others, the *scientific excellence* (scientific and technical value, originality and innovation, relevance and impact of the project, dissemination plan, etc.); the *relevance of the technical need* to be satisfied with the service to increase quality of measurements and performance of the instrument, (for instance, maintenance, calibration, QA); *market-driven aspects*, especially when access involves users from the private sector (for instance, innovation potential of TNA proposals, market developments and impacts on the economy).

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6.2 Effort required

The WP9 TNA Team shall seek to guarantee an appropriate balance of the workload for each expert, ensuring that reviewers are invited to evaluate a fair and reasonable amount of proposals per year.

The effort required for reviewing the individual TNA proposals can be roughly estimated, in general, in 1 working day (exceptionally 2), based on the complexity of the request. TNA proposals shall typically be short and concise, depending on the call requirements.

Experts in the ad-hoc panels have 15 days to conclude the individual reviews and release the recommendations for selection, provided that no additional integrations or clarifications for the assessment are required. In case of need (e.g., if the requested access is not urgent and is scheduled at later stage), additional time can be allowed to the expert, on request, to complete the review in a reasonably more extended term.

Where explanations and integrations are needed, the panel members shall inform the WP9 Team, which will interact with the user accordingly and adjust the timeline, where needed.

7 Working approach and methods

A flexible working approach is adopted for the AEP with experts having complete control over where, when, and the hours they work at individual reviewing the assigned proposals, provided that they can keep the schedule envisaged at the time of the assignment.

Remote working is the rule as it is considered most suited to fulfil the tasks.

Reviewer work is eased thanks to the ACTRIS PASS, the online platform for managing the access process (see section 5.2). At the beginning of the project, waiting for the PASS to be fully operative, online forms shall be used for the individual review.

The WP9 TNA Team takes all possible measures to ensure sufficient flexibility of the working methods in order to manage the review of TNA projects in a dynamic manner.

The expert cannot delegate the work to another person or be replaced by another person.

7.1 Code of conduct

The AEP members serve in their personal and technical capacities and do not represent their employer, institution or any other entity.

The AEP members perform the assigned reviews in a confidential, impartial, fair, and equitable way. They also agree to disclose to the WP9 TNA Team any interest, affiliation, or different factor that may create an actual or perceived conflict of interest in assessing a specific proposal.

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AEP members must have no conflict of interest with applicants for access to an ATMO-ACCESS facility or communicate and discuss the assigned TNA proposal with any other AEP member except those in the same ad-hoc panel established for review of the said proposal.

Unless foreseen by the procedure, the AEP members reviewing a TNA 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.

The AEP 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 devices4 upon completion of the assignment.

They must not disclose the results of the evaluation outcome.

7.2 ACTRIS PASS – Access Management Platform

At the beginning of the project, the ATMO-ACCESS TNA process will be managed mainly "offline" with emails and documents exchanges between the users, the TNA team, the TNA providers, and the AEP review experts.

The TNA management will be optimized during the project thanks to an online access management platform. The platform is currently being implemented in ACTRIS by the SAMU and will be made available to ATMO-ACCESS possibly in Spring 2022.

As a web-based tool for access management, PASS promotes efficiency, effectiveness and information management capacity. It streamlines the distribution of tasks and facilitates interaction among all actors involved, supporting them in completing their assignments. The platform should provide for real-time tracking of processes, tasks, reminders and feedback.

In particular, the use of PASS will allow AEP experts to:

- Be involved only when necessary;
- Undergo an easy procedure to be granted access to the applications and online evaluation forms;
- Enjoy easy, user-friendly filling in of online evaluation forms;
- Be thoroughly informed and updated on the access process and the terms of the selection;
- Carry out the evaluation according to established terms and timelines;
- Reach easily to SAMU and other evaluators.

[4] Except the information stored on the space reserved for them on the access management platform ACTRIS PASS.

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