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The terms used in this document shall have the meaning as defined in the Glossary in the section "Glossary" of the Call.

1. Purpose of the Manual

This Manual supports people serving as Experts' Jury members and shall provide a guideline and framework for the Jury's work. It is a living document to be constantly adapted, evolving with lived practice.

2. Appointment and Composition of Experts' Jury members

Experts' Jury members are selected and appointed by ECoD NPO after consultation with the ECoD Consortium. ECoD NPO acts as the contracting party in the Experts' Jury member Agreement. Additional candidates can be put on a shortlist for potential replacements.

It is noted that the Experts' Jury does not constitute a legal body of ECoD NPO in the sense of corporate law provisions.

The Experts' Jury consists of five permanent members, three ordinary members, a Chairperson and a Deputy Chairperson. The ordinary members stay on the Jury for two years. The Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson stay on the Jury for four years and serve as regular members in the second term, ensuring that know-how is transferred to new Jury members.

The Experts' Jury member Agreement defines the starting date and thus the duration of the membership.

Additionally, ECoD NPO will provide one Experts' Jury secretary in an entirely supporting role without voting rights.

3. Activities of the Experts' Jury

Acting as a pre-selection panel for the Nominee Cities, the Experts' Jury members particularly review all Call submissions by Cities, conduct on-site interviews, and draw up the Shortlist of the best candidates (= Nominee Cities). The Experts' Jury members will initially review the evaluation criteria, in accordance with the set of criteria outlined in the Call (Collaboration, Exchange, Innovation, Organisation and Output) and the details of the Shortlist selection process. After careful review and examination, it will make a decision solely on free and dutiful discretion according to the mentioned criteria and provide the Shortlist of the three most convincing submissions according to the criteria, to be forwarded to the Citizens' Jury.

The Experts' Jury members perform all activities in an independent manner, in the absence of binding instructions regarding the time spent on their activities, place of activity, behaviour and content of activity, in a lack of involvement or integration in ECoD NPO's operation, but within the agreed upon time frames and deadlines.

4. Main Activities

The scope of activity of the members of the Experts' Jury for the ECoD Calls is to evaluate and pre-qualify the submissions received according to the applicable criteria during the selection process and to agree on a Shortlist of the best Member Cities to be proposed to the Citizens' Jury for selection (the Citizens' Jury has the final call). The Experts' Jury members also conduct on-site interviews for this purpose. The Experts' Jury also accompanies the Cities, which are nominated as potential European Capitals of Democracy, in developing their programmes (on-site) during their preparation period.

The indicative planning of the activities of the Experts' Jury and number of working days for accomplishing the tasks are defined in the Experts' Jury's constituent meeting, including but not limited to

- Number and timing of Experts' Jury meetings
- Periods of remote evaluations
- Dates and locations of the evaluations
- Dates by which reports should be submitted to ECoD NPO

In its constituent meeting, the Experts' Jury members will elect a Chairperson and a Deputy Chairperson, observing the Diversity and Inclusion Guidelines (see Annexes to Experts' Jury Member Agreement).

At the beginning of every new term, the Jury members will convene for a planning session, either in person or remote, to discuss and agree upon:

- Information about the term's specifics, time tables and workload (ECoD NPO will provide essential information, provisional planning and scheduling)
- Amendments regarding the Manual in coordination with and subject to approval by ECoD NPO

The Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson shall be elected by consensus. If no consensus can be found, they shall be elected by secret ballot. Voting will be facilitated by ECoD NPO, which shall lead and supervise the voting. The Chairperson and the Deputy Chairperson shall be the candidates who receive the votes of a majority of the members present. If no Chairperson and/or Deputy Chairperson are/is elected in the first round of voting, a second round shall be conducted between the two top-scoring candidates.

The activities of the Chairperson include

- Presiding over the Experts' Jury's work
- Representing the Jury as a spokesperson
- Coordinating and clearing reports
- Acting as the primary contact for the current European Capital of Democracy

In addition, the Chairperson will be publicly visible and will have to deal with regular queries from the press in accordance with ECoD NPO's communications staff members.

When Jury votes are in a tie, the Chairperson will cast the deciding vote.

Activities of the Deputy Chairperson:

- Assisting the Chairperson in directing the affairs
- Acting in the Chairperson's absence

Activities of the Secretary

- Responsibility for the accuracy of agenda and minutes of the meetings and for bringing any corrections to the attention of the Jury, the Consortium and ECoD NPO
- Signing the approved minutes and file them accordingly
- Preparing city visits in special regard to the technical and organisational prerequisites

All individual Experts' Jury members consent to:

- The membership as laid out in the Experts' Jury Member Agreement
- Delivering a complete and valid vote within the set period
- Maintaining complete secrecy regarding the balloting process
- Cooperating with the Jury's Chairperson and ECoD NPO

The Jury can amend its own rules subject to the approval by ECoD NPO, which have been established by the very first Experts' Jury panel, to organise the monitoring process and establish routine procedures. ECoD NPO must be informed about these amendments and be responsible for the necessary changes and adaptations of documents and procedures.

Each member shall strive to be present at all meetings. To ensure maximum attendance, ECoD NPO, together with the Chairperson, will seek to announce the dates of the meetings as far in advance as possible.

5. Jury Selection Procedure

The Experts' Jury acts to pre-qualify submissions during the selection process of the European Capital of Democracy. Its members review all submissions (according to the set of criteria), conduct on-site interviews and develop a shortlist of the best contenders for the Citizens Jury, having the final call on selecting the next European Capital of Democracy.

To assess the organisational capacity and structure that is required for the realization of the City's projects, the Experts' Jury relies upon the following set of criteria:

CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION
Collaboration	Active partnerships with other organisations, institutions and stakeholders
Exchange	Communication, dissemination and sharing of local initiatives
Innovation	Ambition and appeal of the programme and its main activities
Organisation	Management capacity, project and budget resources
Output	Planned activities and dissemination measures, and how effectively they will reach the target audiences, media and citizens

The performance in these fields compared to the ambition and scope of the City's mission statement will be of eminent importance to the overall assessment of the submission.

The Experts' Jury also accompanies incumbent European Capitals of Democracy on-site during their preparation period, in developing their programmes (see "Monitoring Phase")

The Experts' Jury will be provided with all necessary information regarding the cities passing the formal check.

Documents provided by Interested Cities (as defined in the ECoD Call document):

- Technical Prerequisites Questionnaire and Evaluation
- Self-Evaluation on the current State of Democracy
- Application
 - Abstract (executive summary)
 - Mission Statement
 - Democracy Projects

Meetings will be convened by ECoD NPO in consultation with the Chairperson.

The ECoD office is committed to enabling a fair and complete selection process and to providing the Jury members with all materials. Documents will be provided via a secure online tool with protected access.

Overview of the selection process:

- A. The formal accuracy of applications will be checked and confirmed by ECoD NPO before forwarding them to the Experts' Jury. Only reviewed and confirmed applications will be transferred.
- B. All individual Jury members will evaluate the formally approved applications and will document their assessment using an online questionnaire with reference to the ECoD set of criteria. The Experts' Jury members are expected to read the applications carefully ahead of the first selection meeting. An evaluation questionnaire will be provided to break down the criteria to questions and gradations and help to summarise the Jury's findings.
- C. In case Jury members need clarification or require a proof of facts, they will bring these questions to the attention of the Chairperson for clarification.
- D. At the first selection meeting, the Experts' Jury is expected to reach a consensus on which Cities should be visited. If consensus is not reached, a secret vote shall be organised. Each member has one vote. Should there be no result after two rounds of voting, the Chairperson has a casting vote for the third voting-round.
- E. It is the Deputy Chairperson's responsibility to prepare the summary of the results and to provide the reports, which will be kept for internal use only.

- F. The selected Cities will be visited by two members of the Experts' Jury, who shall report about their findings. A staff member of ECoD NPO will accompany these two members - in a supporting and reporting role. If necessary, the ECoD NPO member will cover any questions regarding the technical or organisational prerequisites. The same requirements and conditions apply to each visit (e.g. duration and structure of the programme). The Jury members will decide themselves on the travel procedure at this stage.
- G. In the second Experts' Jury meeting, the results of these visits will be discussed and the Jury members vote on which candidate Cities will be shortlisted for the Citizens' Jury. Voting procedures as above.
- H. The Experts' Jury shall uniformly endorse the decision and issue a schematic report in a fair, balanced and comparable manner according to the criteria. The Jury and ECoD NPO will publish the names of the pre-selected Cities together.

6. Monitoring Phase

A joint Steering Group, including representatives of the City Designate, ECoD NPO and relevant stakeholders, will be installed to plan, coordinate and monitor all projects and to facilitate the implementation of the programme and monitor the realisation of the individual activities, elements and projects. If necessary, the Experts' Jury members (represented by the Chairperson) provide selective support to the Steering Group and City Representatives - both through their know-how and their network.

The City, within the framework of the Steering Group, has to provide a progress report within the 3 months preparation period. The Jury members shall study the progress report and coordinate with the Steering Group. If necessary, the Chairperson will visit the City on behalf of or together with the Steering Group members¹.

7. Communication and Contact with the Press

The Experts' Jury members names, photos and CVs will be made public.

The Chairperson will be the first point of contact for the Jury members, ECoD NPO and the Participants. For all tasks related to official statements or press inquiries, the Chairperson will consult with ECoD NPO's Communication Office representative.

ECoD NPO acts as the legal representative of the Call and all related aspects (including subsequent questions, decisions and organisational issues) and is the responsible entity for all formal and process-dependent questions.

If a Jury statement is needed, ECoD NPO will contact the Chairperson who will support and answer this request in coordination with the Jury panel.

8. Right to Propose

The Experts' Jury members have the right to propose candidates for the Experts' Jury to the Chairperson who in turn will address the matter to ECoD NPO and its Advisory Board.

¹ To be detailed in accordance with the steering board agreement and manual (work in progress).

9. Replacement Members

The Replacement members are selected to take the place of Jury members in case of an unexpected long-term impairment (e.g. injury or illness) of the appointed Experts' Jury member.

Should a Jury member be absent for a short period of time (e.g. unable to attend one meeting), the Experts' Jury remains operational and decides in each case how to deal with the short-term absence.

ECoD NPO has also the right to replace a Jury member in case of termination of a Jury Member's Agreement.

ECoD NPO appoints and organises the deployment of a Replacement Member, in coordination with the Chairperson.

Replacement members get full access to all information relevant to the Experts' Jury and documents and are kept fully informed about proceedings and results (e.g. minutes) - without obligation to comment or participate in meetings.

Annex: [26 ECoD Experts' Jury Planning Document for ECoD 2028](#)