EUROPEAN COMMISSION
JOINT RESEARCH CENTRE

Terms of Reference

Expert contributions to the JRC's report on
Meaningful and Ethical Communications

The present document defines the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the call for Expression of Interest in being part of a pool of experts contributing to the fourth pillar of research falling under the Joint Research Centre's (JRC) multi-annual research programme Enlightenment 2.0. The Call is for the provision of advice and State-of-the-Art scientific literature reviews.

Context

1. Background – Enlightenment 2.0

Advances in cognitive, behavioural, decision and social sciences demonstrate that human rationality is complex and many drivers influence political decision-making in addition to facts and logic. Yet despite this evolution, political decision-making models are – for the most part - still based upon the more simplistic Enlightenment model of rationality.

The European Commission's science and knowledge service, the JRC, a provider of world class regulatory science, is seeking to understand and explain, the drivers that influence policy decisions, political and citizen decision-making and discourse, in order to optimise the way scientific evidence is taken into account in policymaking.

The JRC wants to understand the way in which facts, values, interests, concerns and social relations drive political behaviour and decision-making as well as the interplay between individual and group decision-making. We seek to understand these drivers to make our political systems more trustworthy and responsive to citizens and robust to the challenges of polarisation.

If political institutions at the EU and Member State levels are to improve transparency, openness, and accountability, the Enlightenment 2.0 research programme seeks to provide the interdisciplinary scientific underpinning to optimise the evolution of these political decision-making processes.

To date, the Enlightenment 2.0 expert community comprises more than 100 experts from a broad range of disciplines around the world.

The research programme is divided into four separate projects that are closely linked and chronologically planned to ensure that each initiative benefits from the learnings and outcomes of the others:

1. The first report was published in 2019: [Understanding our political nature: How to put knowledge and reason at the heart of political decision-making](#)
2. The second was published in October 2020 on [Technology and Democracy: Understanding the influence of online technologies on political behaviour and decision-making](#)
3. Values & Identities: A policymaker's guide – publication in November 2021
4. Meaningful & Ethical Communications – Call for experts launched in October 2021

Why Meaningful & Ethical Communications?

The project will build upon previous work that examines the relationship between online technologies and political behaviour as well as that of values and identities in the political process. It will seek to understand the potential consequences of communication strategies that use new and different methods, tools and channels as well as tackling the question of ethical communication. The research will analyse the many variables of meaningful communication for different audiences and aims to establish an interdisciplinary framework (including but not limited to values, worldviews, narratives, metaphors, frames and causal reasoning) for scientific and policy issues with high and low levels of uncertainty. The project is aimed to support the communication of scientific and government actors but excludes that of interest groups involved in the political process.

However, it is not appropriate for the Commission or the scientific community alone to determine what citizens consider to be meaningful and ethical communications. Therefore, an important component of this work will involve listening and actively engaging with citizens.

2. Aim

How can scientists and governments ensure that their communication resonates more deeply with citizens without resorting to the manipulative tactics used by those who seek to undermine liberal democracy? How can scientific and government actors ensure their communications are equally meaningful and ethical?

This research aims to combine state-of-the-art scientific knowledge, novel empirical research on values-targeted communication strategies and a deep understanding of citizens' attitudes on this topic to provide the best practical guidance to policymakers and communications professionals. For the purpose of this call, "communications" refers to government, policy-related, institutional (internal and external) and science communications but excludes any commercial communications or those of interest groups.

To communicate and inform citizens in ways that are consistent with upholding EU values, then the communication environment needs to be designed explicitly and accountably in support of those values. If communication policies are to be conducive to building trust and mutual respect, solidarity, citizenship, equality and fairness they will have to be designed explicitly to achieve these values. Consequently, the state-of-the-art literature review has to be both broad and deep, covering the source, sender, message, channel and receiver as well as optimal feedback loops throughout the classical communication process. To illustrate, based upon the scientific literature reviews, the project could provide recommendations on e.g. the role of linguistics, values, metaphors, rhetoric, narratives, storytelling, framing, causal

reasoning, nudging, boosting as well as the expression of numbers, probabilities and visualisations in achieving meaningful and ethical communications.

The project aims to include a detailed review of horizontal factors that influence communications including but not limited to; trust, authenticity, credibility, contextualisation, openness, transparency, risk, uncertainty and ambiguity.

Europe's citizens are highly heterogeneous (age, level of formal education, language ability, numeracy and risk literacy, ideologies, religious backgrounds, level of motivation and self-control) — and no one-size-fits all. The project could help understand if certain groups are particularly receptive to specific messages and media. Importantly, the aim is to establish if any vulnerable groups are disadvantaged by particular communication techniques and if so, what can be done to minimise inequalities in knowledge and understanding.

Insights from the literature of what can be done to prevent the degradation of the "informational commons" through online targeting are also sought. A review of different messaging techniques with a particular focus on those that can help generate shared understanding, build resilience to mis- and disinformation and encourage critical thinking are part of the project. Insights into what a healthy media market looks like in a democracy is also part of the project.

The project also aims to provide recommendations on the potential impacts of "Deepfakes", augmented and virtual reality. The aim is develop insights on the societal implications if citizens can no longer rely on what they see, feel or experience, because of these new techniques.

These are examples of the kind of insights sought through this project. The exact research questions will be discussed in detail and co-created together with all the selected experts at the January 2022 workshop.

3. Disciplines

Given the scope and multidisciplinary nature of the problems at hand, it is important to avoid one discipline or set of experts dominating this research programme. For instance, psychology has contributed significantly to cognitive and behavioural understandings in relation to decision-making, yet such understandings often lack contextual, cultural, and political insights that other disciplines readily offer. As a result, a wide variety of expertise is required. The European Commission's Joint Research Centre has substantial experience in working collaboratively with such multidisciplinary groups.

These terms of Reference should be regarded as guidance. Once the experts have been selected, we will work collectively to determine the final research programme. Consequently, the following list of indicative expertise is intended to inspire rather than exclude. We would be delighted to receive applications from:

Agnotologists	Climate scientists	Computer scientists
Anthropologists	Cognitive scientists	Behavioural Economists
Citizen engagement scholars	Communication scientists	Deliberative democracy scholars

Engineers working on AI and Machine Learning	Media scholars	Psychologists
	Narratologists	Rhetoric scholars
Ethicists	Neuroscientists	Risk scholars (communications, perception, trust, uncertainty)
Ethnicity scholars	Persuasion scholars	
Gender scholars	Philosophers	
Historians	Political economists	Social geographers
Journalism scholars	Political scientists	Sociologists
Legal scholars	Pro-social design scholars	Statisticians
Linguists		Theologians

4. Scope of work

These ToR define the roles, guidelines and assessment criteria for selecting experts who can provide their expertise in the following areas:

- Advising upon the scope of the academic review work (identify potential gaps if necessary);

- Reviewing and refining the questions that will be addressed by each of the literature reviews;

- Conducting State-of the-Art scientific literature reviews;

- Advising on the structure of the Enlightenment 2.0 Flagship Report; and

- Suggesting conclusions and recommendations from the literature reviews for the Flagship Report.

The JRC will draw up a list of experts who meet the criteria set out at above. This list will comprise sub lists, corresponding to each of the fields described below:

- Authors (Lead / Contributing)

- Advisors (Steering Committee members)

The ToR is the basis of the application for authors and advisors. The call, to be launched week commencing 11 October 2021 and **will be open to applicants until midday (CET) on 29 October 2021.**

5. Roles and responsibilities

The final report will be written by JRC staff based upon State-of-the-Art scientific literature reviews carried out by experts.

The work will be carried out by: the Steering Committee, the Author Teams and the JRC team. Their work is closely interrelated but still independent.

5.1 Advisors - Steering Committee members

The members of the Steering Committee in addition to JRC staff, will comprise external experts selected through the open call for Expression of Interest for Authors and Advisors. The Steering Committee will advise the project on specific topics and sensitive issues, as well as reviewing the final Flagship Report.

Members of the Steering Committee will be selected for their expertise and ability to advise upon the following:

- Draft outline of the Flagship Report with explanatory notes;

- Advising on sensitive issues (e.g. use of non-peer reviewed literature, treatment of uncertainty);

- Number of days required to undertake the work;

- Blind review process of the literature reviews, communicate with Authors via JRC regarding comments and feedback;

- Review of the final JRC report.

5.2. Authors

Preparation and content delivery for the individual literature reviews is in the hands of the Author Teams.

Authors will be selected for their expertise and ability to ensure:

- That the various contributions of their literature review are brought together on time and are of uniform high quality;

- That the content of the literature review reflects the latest science available;

- They can work in a novel research environment;

- Effective communication with the JRC and Steering Committee on topics whenever necessary; and

- The timely endorsement and incorporation of comments and proof reading results.

6. Application Procedure

In order to have their expression of interest considered for the Steering Committee, Advisor applicants need to submit the following:

- Identification, affiliation and discipline (please refer to section 3)

- Core skills and expertise (max. 2,000 characters)

- Motivation (max. 2,000 characters)

In order to have their expression of interest considered, interested Authors need to submit the following:

- Identification, affiliation and discipline (please refer to section 3)

- Core skills and expertise (max. 2,000 characters)

- Motivation (max. 2,000 characters)

- Abstract - briefly outlining the scientific contribution they would like to make to this project in view of its aims, objectives and their expertise (max. 2,000 characters)

Please use this link to the dedicated EU survey **form to submit your application[1]**.

Applicants may apply for more than one category and more than one specific discipline. Please fill in the application form twice if you apply both as author and advisor.

Closing date: Applications must be sent no later than **29 October at midday CET.**

7. Selection procedure

- **Evaluation Committee composition**

The evaluation committee will be composed by JRC staff specifically appointed for this call.

- **Assessment Criteria**

Assessments criteria	Authors	Advisors (Steering Committee Members)
ABSTRACT (Authors only)	40%	N/A

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[1] By responding to this call, you accept that we process the data you insert for the sole purposes of the selection procedure of suitable experts to carry out the work described in Section 5 of these Terms of Reference. For more info on the purpose and conditions of the processing operations of personal data by the Commission, please see the Data Protection Register (for targeted consultations). Please click here for the privacy statement.

SKILLS AND EXPERTISE	30%	70%
MOTIVATION	30%	30%

- **Registration to the Participant Portal**

Upon confirmed selection, **experts will be required to enter their details into the European Commission's database of independent experts within 5 days.** More information can be found here.

It is imperative that the experts selected by the Evaluation Committee to provide the JRC with the necessary expertise as described in these ToR register themselves in the Commission's database of independent experts. Only once the registration is complete, will the JRC will be able to select them and prepare an ad-hoc expert contract.

Further information on how to become an expert at the European Commission can be found via the following link https://ec.europa.eu/info/node/14313

Please note that independently of this call for expression, experts can register themselves in the Commission's database of independent experts at any time. **We strongly recommend that all applicants do this already when submitting their application**.

8. **Provisional timing in 2021/2022**

- **October 2021** - The call closes at midday (CET) on 29 October 2021. The Evaluation Committee will meet and inform all applicants of their decisions week commencing 1 November.

- **November 2021** – Selected experts will have to create an expert profile by Monday 8 November. The remainder of November will be for organising experts contracts.

- **December 2021** – Work will begin with

- **January 2022** - Selected experts will be invited to an in-person (COVID-19 measures permitting) 2-day workshop in January 2022 in Brussels, Belgium to scope and map out the subjects to be addressed in the literature reviews and the subsequent impact this will have upon the structure of the Flagship Report.

- **January – April 2022** – Authors to work on State-of-the-Art scientific literature reviews.

- **May 2022** - A second workshop in May 2022, will be used to discuss the literature reviews and develop conclusions and recommendations for the synthesised Flagship Report.

9. **Questions / additional information**
   Please use the following email address for all correspondence: JRC-ENLIGHTENMENT2@ec.europa.eu Please do not submit your application to this email address as it will not be considered. Please use the link to the dedicated EU Survey Form, here.