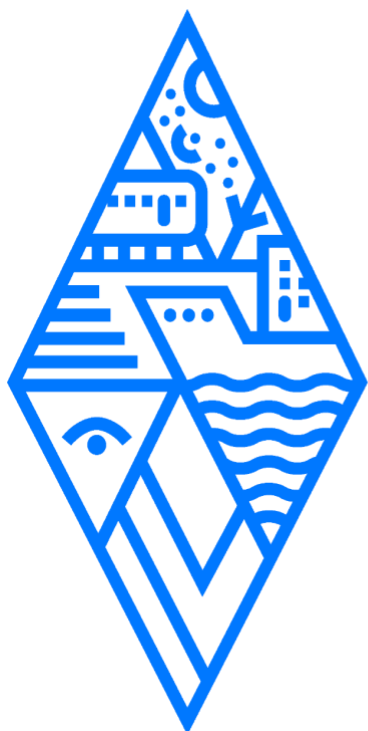




POLARIN

POLAR
RESEARCH
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NETWORK

Deliverable 2.2. Quality Assurance Programme report for access provision

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Summary

The POLARIN Quality Assurance Program (QAP) covers the whole chain of Transnational Access (TA) provision from call opening to proposal submission, and reporting and feedback of used TA. It consists of various tools and organizational structures, including several key performance indicators and procedures to monitor the quality of access provision and user experience across RIs and access modalities, enabling the operation of POLARIN TA as a coherent and streamlined instrument addressing key polar research needs and challenges.

POLARIN QAP encompasses three cycles of quality assessment: the *Annual TA cycle* includes continuous assessment and improvement of quality during the access provision chain, e.g. refining of the features of POLARIN Transnational Access Platform (TAP) based on user feedback. The *Reporting Period cycle* consists of quality control measures performed in the end of every 18-month reporting period, such as introduction of new quality assurance measures or developments in the access provision. The *Project-life cycle* consists of a large-scale feedback survey targeted to all different types of stakeholders involved in the POLARIN TA provision conducted after the first and final TA.

The management structures related to quality assurance and control include the Access Management team, Scientific Evaluation Secretariat, Steering Board and Advisory Board, Scientific Liaison Panel, TA Watchdogs, Data Watchdog, Infrastructure Operators' Forum, and the outreach and training teams, meaning that all WPs of the POLARIN project contribute to the quality assurance of the TA provision.

The tools and measures used to monitor the quality of access provision include e.g. the TAP system with embedded quality control measures such as key performance indicators, feedback forms and various statistics. Furthermore, agreements and data management plans are required from all TA User Groups to secure quality of the access implementation and data resulting from the TA.

The large-scale feedback survey conducted as part of the Project-life cycle allows tracking the progress of quality assurance throughout the POLARIN lifecycle, assessing both the effectiveness of actions implemented after the first large-scale feedback survey but also the POLARIN QAP in general with its different tools and quality assurance cycles. The results of the large-scale survey will also pave the way for the future with the creation of the roadmap for POLARIN TA provision after the EU funded project ends.

1. Introduction

The project “Polar Research Infrastructure Network” (POLARIN) is funded by the European Commission Horizon Europe Framework Programme (HORIZON) as a “HORIZON- Research and Innovation Action” on the topic “HORIZON-INFRA-2023-SERV-01-01 - Research infrastructure services to enable R&I addressing main challenges and EU priorities”.

POLARIN’s large international network of polar research infrastructures includes a unique set of complementary and interdisciplinary top level Research Infrastructures (RIs). These infrastructures have a large geographic and typological variability, covering a wide range of polar regions. The consortium consists of Arctic and Antarctic stations, research vessels and icebreakers operating in both polar regions. Furthermore, observatories, repositories and data infrastructure providing Transnational Access are also included in the consortium.

When 5927 units of In-Person and Remote Transnational Access is offered to 64 RIs in the framework of a major distributed infrastructure such as POLARIN, it’s crucial to monitor the quality and effectiveness of access provision chain in a highly structured manner. For that, the POLARIN Quality Assurance Program (QAP) covers the whole chain of Transnational Access (TA) provision from call opening to proposal submission, and reporting and feedback of used TA.

The QAP consists of various tools and organizational structures, including several key performance indicators and procedures to monitor the quality of access provision and user experience across RIs and access modalities, enabling the operation of POLARIN TA as a coherent and streamlined instrument addressing key polar research needs and challenges. In addition, major reference documents including the POLARIN Grant Agreement and work plan, as well as guidance documents by the European Commission, provide the overall framework for TA provision.

This report outlines the tools and organizational structures of POLARIN QAP, ensuring integration, efficiency and high quality of access provision and related services.

2. Quality Assurance in Transnational Access Provision

Quality Assurance includes the systematic process established to ensure high quality of the service - in the case of POLARIN the In-person and Remote Transnational Access to RIs.

Quality Assurance covers the whole chain of access provision including the processes for user selection and guidance, training of staff, methods and platforms used in access provision, sample handling and sharing of results, reporting of the used access, and the collection and analysis of user and access provider feedback across the access modalities and services provided.

Quality Assurance can take place through various on-line management tools, performance indicators, evaluations, organizational structures and safeguards, collection of feedback, and

analysis of the information gathered at regular time intervals to make corrective actions and improvements where needed.

In the case of large, distributed RIs such as POLARIN, a rigorous Quality Assurance Program with performance indicators and control measures allows the coordinators to keep track on the process and detect and react to emerging problems quickly. Secondly, the QAP enables the continuous streamlining and improvement of the access provision processes -both during the project life and for the future.

All structures, measures and activities presented in the following sections of this POLARIN Quality Assurance Program report are geared to ensure comprehensive, continuous and sustained quality control, leading to increasingly streamlined, effective and high-quality TA provision that benefits both the research infrastructures and the access users in polar regions, Europe and beyond.

3. POLARIN Quality Assurance Program

POLARIN QAP utilizes several tools, key performance indicators and measures and organizational structures at all levels of access provision, with a feedback loop to develop the processes and make corrective actions if the quality control measures so indicate.

POLARIN QAP encompasses three cycles of quality assessment. The first cycle, i.e. *Annual TA cycle*, is the quality assurance conducted during every call following the timing of the access provision chain and involves continuous assessment and improvement of quality, e.g. refining of the features of POLARIN TAP based on user feedback. The second cycle, i.e. *Reporting Period cycle*, includes the quality control performed at the end of every 18-month reporting period, when both TA users' and RI operators' feedback from project reports are compiled and analysed. New quality assurance measures or developments in the access provision may be implemented in response to challenges or suggestions reported in the feedback. The third cycle of quality assessment, i.e. *Project-life cycle*, consists of a large-scale feedback survey targeted to all different types of stakeholders involved in the POLARIN TA provision (i.e. successful and non-successful applicants, external reviewers, Scientific Liaison Panel members and RI operators) about their experiences in the different steps of the access provision chain. The survey is conducted twice, after the first call and before the end of the project, to assess the progress in the quality of the POLARIN TA provision. Figure 2 presents the three-level structure of the POLARIN QAP.

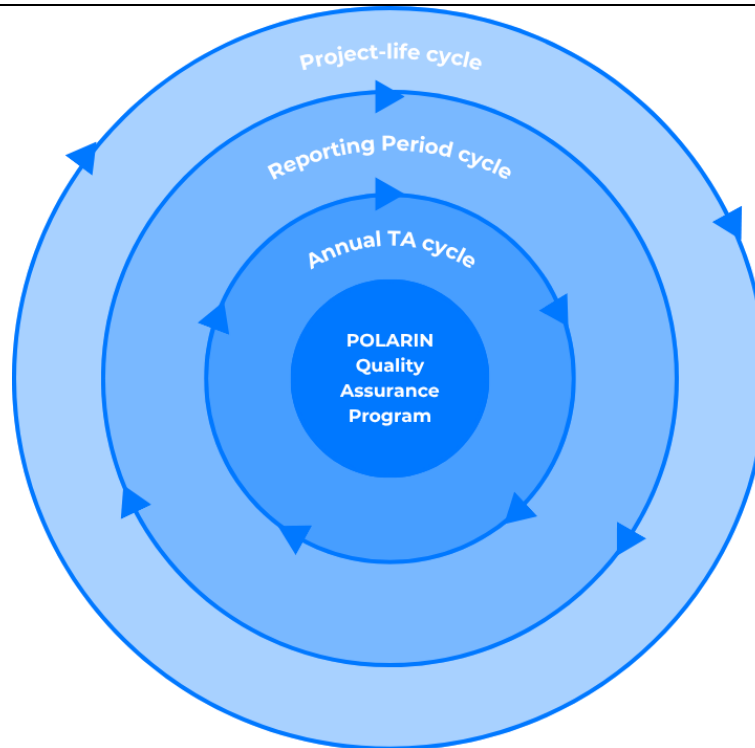


Figure 1. The three cycles of Quality Assessment in POLARIN QAP: Annual TA cycle, Reporting Period cycle, and Project-life cycle.

Figure 2 presents the tools, structures and activities related to quality assessment and quality assurance along the TA provision chain. **Quality assessment** measures refer to the task of checking and analyzing the quality of the services provided, while **quality assurance** measures encompass the activities performed with the aim of improving and ensuring the high quality of services.

There are a variety of tools and methods of quality assessment at different stages of the TA provision chain from opening of the calls to reporting of used access. Analysis of the collected feedback and key performance indicators obtained via the various tools, and statistics on TA use are performed at the end of each reporting period, including actions to improve or fine-tune the TA provision processes, if the used measures and feedback so indicates. The analysis and statistics will be included in the periodic reporting to the European Commission and utilized in both the mid-term evaluation and final reporting.

Similarly, several activities and measures are conducted to improve and ensure the highest possible level of quality. These measures include the helpdesk service, the confidentiality clause and conflict of interest for external evaluators, the Data Management Plan and signature of agreements for TA User Groups, and the rescheduling tool, RI change tool, and Access Dates Modifier used in access management. The scope and functionality of the different measures and tools are described in section 3.1.1.

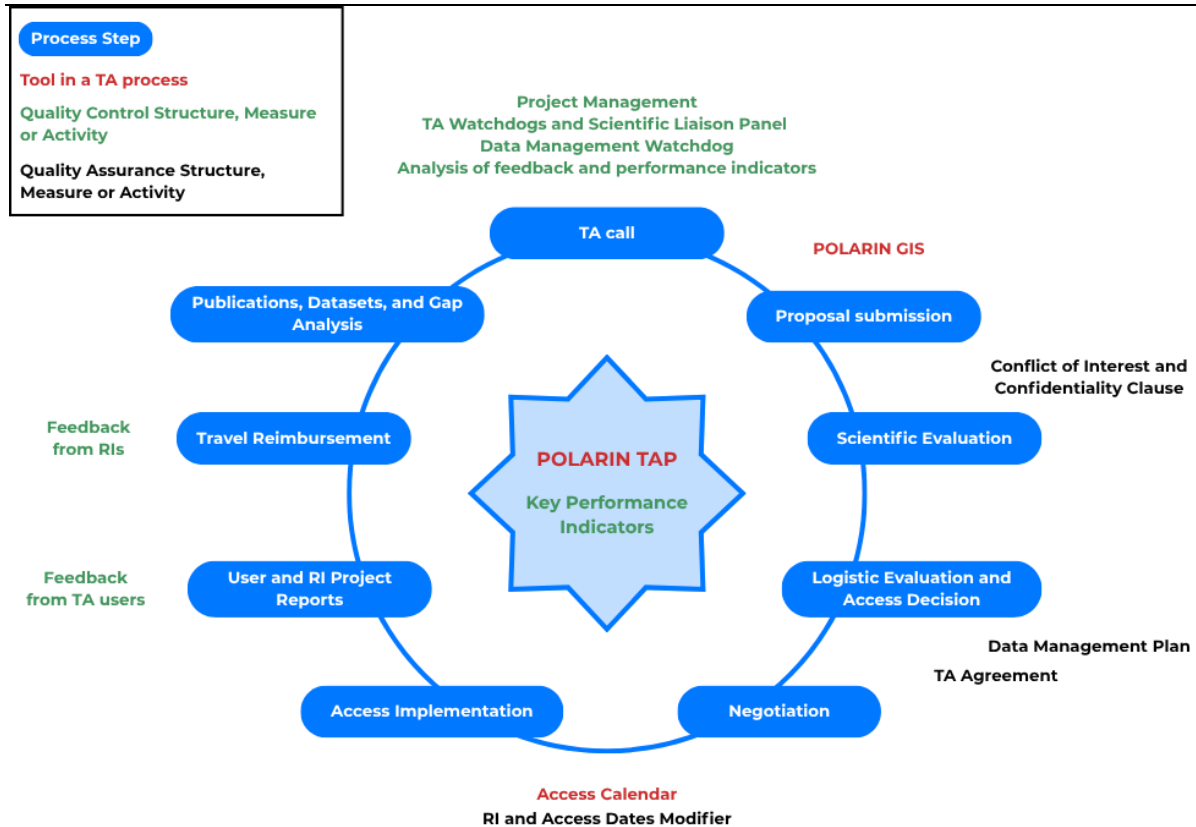


Figure 2. Tools, organizational structures and activities related to quality assessment and assurance along the TA provision chain.

3.1 Tools and measures related to quality assurance

3.1.1. Tools embedded into POLARIN TAP

The **Transnational Access Platform (TAP)** is an on-line application, evaluation, administration and reporting system used in the management of Transnational Access in POLARIN. The TAP system includes several tools to follow and assess the quality and performance of TA provision. As TAP is utilized by POLARIN TA Management Team (i.e. TA Coordination, Evaluation Secretariat) throughout the whole access provision chain. TAP has proved to be an excellent management tool to coordinate and oversee the whole TA process, i.e. from call opening to project reporting, therefore improving and facilitating quality assurance and quality assessment.

Quality assurance begins at the application stage, where applicants are supported on both administrative and technical aspects of proposal submission. TAP users have the option to easily contact the **helpdesk** through TAP. For each support request, a ticket is issued, and an email is sent to all email addresses in the support team, e.g. the POLARIN TAP system development and the POLARIN TA coordination. All tickets can be tracked and managed by the system development team at POLARIN partner INKODE.

During the scientific evaluation phase, evaluators are assigned proposals to review based on their expertise. POLARIN TAP gives the possibility to send email invitations to review proposals to external evaluators through the platform. The expert receiving the invitation needs to register with the system, accept a **confidentiality clause** and declare **no conflict of interest** with the proposal(s) assigned. The expert can view the full proposal only once they have declared no conflict of interest and accepted the confidentiality clause, before that they can only see the necessary information to make their judgement on the conflict of interest, i.e. project title and abstract, group members and RIs requested. This feature was developed to ensure the quality of **data protection** in strict compliance with EU-GDPR regulations to avoid sharing information about proposals outside of the TAP platform and to non-authorized individuals.

During the negotiation phase, the projects granted access must sign an agreement with the POLARIN consortium. The **agreement template** appears automatically in POLARIN TAP when the negotiation phase opens. The User Group Leader can download the template and upload the signed version, which the POLARIN coordination can countersign and upload the agreement back to TAP. The project can move to TA implementation only when the signed agreement is uploaded to TAP. This strengthens the **management of risks** by ensuring that TA implementation goes hand in hand with the significant liabilities at the often expensive polar Research Infrastructures.

At the negotiation phase, the User Group Leader is also required to upload a **Data Management Plan**, which is reviewed by the Data Watchdog (leader of WP4, responsible for data management in POLARIN). Assessment of the Data Management Plan before TA implementation is crucial to ensure proper data collection, storage and publication.

Furthermore, during the preparation to access implementation (e.g. confirming the date of the access implementation and making travel arrangements), POLARIN TAP helps the TA coordination record and keep track of any changes in access implementation. With the **Access Dates Modifier** and the **RI Modifier**, POLARIN Coordination can edit the implementation time of the project and even move the project to another RI if the requested RI is not available.

In addition to this, the Accesses Calendar serves as a **scheduling tool** that allows easy re-scheduling of TA project implementation times in case of e.g. project postponements, while still being able to see also the originally planned implementation time. The tool also enables the visualization of the project implementation times on a GANTT chart (Fig. 3) which helps to monitor project postponements, plan training and TA Ambassador Program activities, estimate duration of the peak field season, and optimize RI availability to avoid e.g. overbooking. The scheduling tool also allows filtering by e.g. project keywords, topics, and RIs allowing identification of possible synergies between TA User Groups to facilitate networking and collaboration between TA User Groups. E.g. a TA User Group going to one RI to study the same topic as another group at another RI could help each other by exchanging some samples or data to create comparative studies. Once the TA is completed, both users and RI operators are requested to report the used access. At this stage, POLARIN

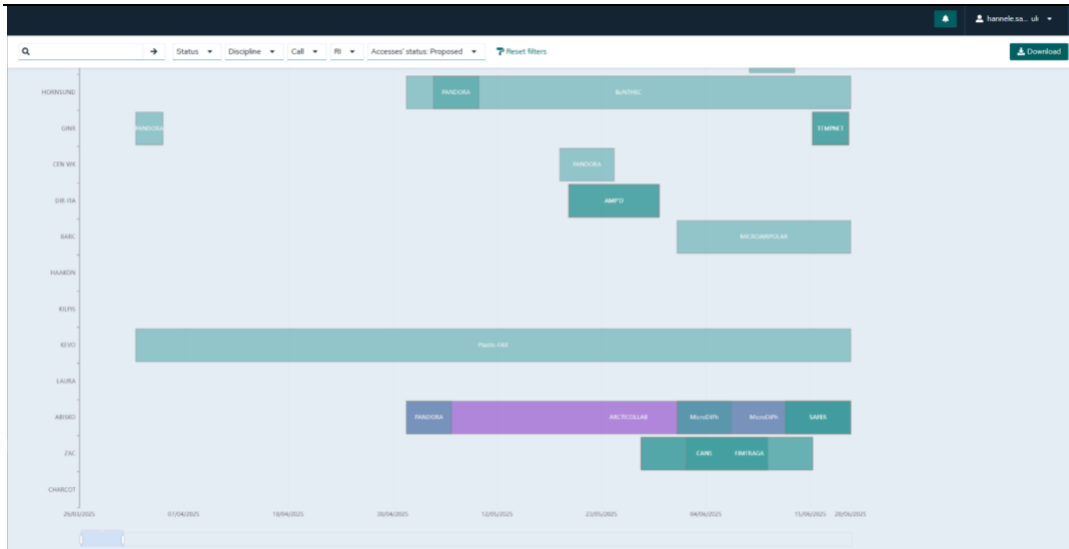


Figure 3. Example of the Accesses Calendar functionality in TAP, visualizing the TA project implementation times on a GANTT chart.

Coordination is interested in assessing the experience of users on the implemented TA. One of the tools employed is **on-line forms**, which are used to collect feedback from all TA User Groups and RIs offering access about the different stages of TA provision. User Group **feedback** including both structured and open questions is collected at the time when the group leader submits a project report in TAP. **Feedback related to TA provision** is collected from RI Managers at the time when they check the project report submitted by the TA User Group in TAP.

The **feedback statistics** functionality embedded into POLARIN TAP provides statistics on feedback responses and can be filtered by e.g. TA Call, RI and reporting period.

The **feedback is analyzed and discussed** jointly in the WP2 and WP1 teams - including representatives from the main coordination- at least once for each reporting period for continuous streamlining and improvement of the TA provision procedures and TAP functions. TAP also contains a **statistics section** including various reports (e.g. on TA proposals, TA User Projects, TA Users, RI use, financial statistics, publications, etc.) that are downloadable in Excel format and can be used to produce information and statistics on access provision and use for e.g. EU periodic reporting.

Another quality assessment tool embedded into POLARIN TAP is **key performance indicators (KPI)**. These are formed by time-lapses between the status changes of the TA applications in TAP (e.g. time lapses between application submission and submission of access decision), measuring the efficiency of the access provision process from call opening to reporting of publications resulting from used access. KPIs are calculated as an average per RI, per call, per reporting period, etc. KPIs obtained from different stages of the access provision chain indicate the performance of the Evaluation secretariat (e.g. time from closing of the call to sending applications to evaluation), RIs (e.g. time from access implementation to payment of travel reimbursement), and TA Users (e.g. time from access implementation to publications).

The KPI's help to monitor the efficiency (time used) of different stages of access provision. Comparison of e.g. RI-specific KPIs to the consortium average can alert Access Management to initiate supportive actions if e.g. some access provider's travel reimbursement payments are significantly delayed compared to the consortium average. Similarly, each access provider can monitor their performance by comparing their KPI to the consortium average. In addition, the KPI changes over time; both consortium-wise, RI-wise and by Access Management and Evaluation Secretariat can be used to monitor both the improvements in efficiency and speed of administrative processes and as a warning signal if significant delays or deviations occur.

Besides the regular quality assurance of the TA process, the POLARIN TA coordination and the TAP system development collaborate to continuously improve the user experience on POLARIN TAP and advance the capabilities of the system. Since the release of POLARIN TAP, several rounds of new developments and features have already been implemented in the system, based on the feedback received from the users of the system (e.g. system administrators, applicants, external evaluators, SLP members, RI operators).

3.2. Management structures related to quality assurance

There are several structures in place in the POLARIN project management to safeguard the quality of access provision.

Access Management team leader (WP2 leader) is a member of the **POLARIN Steering Board**, consisting of all WP leads, project manager and main coordinator of the POLARIN project. WP2 leader provides a **report on TA provision activities** at every Steering Board meeting and has regular meetings with **the POLARIN main coordination** to ensure all activities are proceeding as planned and to report any deviations and related corrective actions. POLARIN main coordination is closely following the progress of access provision and provides consultation when needed to guide the activities.

Scientific Liaison Panel (SLP) consists of members internal and external to POLARIN consortium. The SLP, together with additional external experts, conducts the scientific evaluation of TA proposals and recommends the excellent proposals for TA to the RIs. Furthermore, each TA proposal is assigned to a **TA Watchdog** from the SLP members, who follows the project throughout its implementation and project reporting and provides guidance and feedback as needed. Standard **scientific evaluation criteria and scoring**, together with **evaluation guidelines**, are used throughout the TA Calls to ensure scientific excellence of the projects granted TA, and the coherence of scientific evaluation across evaluators and between the TA calls.

The POLARIN **Evaluation Secretariat** foresees the implementation of scientific evaluation during the TA Calls and coordinates the SLP activities. Similarly, the **Infrastructure Operators Forum (IOF)** together with a set of **logistic evaluation criteria** safeguards the logistic evaluation of the recommended proposals, helping on the access decision process

conducted by the Research Infrastructure Operators. POLARIN Access management team coordinates and supports the IOF activities.

The **Data Watchdog** responsible for the Data Management Plan (DMP) template and reviewing the submitted DMPs from granted User Groups is also leading the development of POLARIN Virtual Access provision (free and open access to data). Assessment of the Data Management Plans of User Groups allows proper data collection and management and ensures compatibility with FAIR guidelines.

In addition to the above-mentioned management structures, other WPs also contribute to ensure high quality of access provision. The table below summarizes the activities conducted by different WPs related to TA quality assurance.

Table 1. Contribution of different POLARIN WPs to TA quality assurance.

Work Package	Management Structure	Quality Assurance Measures or Activities
WP1	Evaluation Secretariat	Preparation of evaluation criteria and guidelines, development of the external evaluation system to ensure impartiality. Coordination of the Scientific Liaison Panel (SLP) activities and scientific evaluation of TA proposals. Development of TA User Group access report template and analysis of the reports.
WP2	POLARIN Access Management Team	Development of POLARIN TAP and related quality assurance and assessment tools and measures (see section 3.1.1) Continuous support to applicants and granted TA users, preparation of guidelines. Information webinars for TA Users. Coordination of Infrastructure Operator (IOF) activities to facilitate logistic evaluation and access decisions. Preparation of logistic evaluation criteria and guidelines for RI to ensure quality, coherence of the

		logistic evaluation and access decisions. Preparation of Agreements to strengthen risk management regarding the liabilities of the User Groups, RIs and the POLARIN Consortium during the access implementation. Analysis of feedback reports and large-scale feedback survey results. Provision of statistics and reports on applied and used access for the main coordination and EU periodic reporting.
WP4	Data Watchdog (WP4 lead)	Data Quality Assurance by e.g. preparation of Data Management Plan (DMP) template, reviews of submitted DMPs to ensure proper data collection and management and their compatibility with Virtual Access data and metadata guidelines for TA data publication.
WP7	WP7 Team	Safeguarding the quality of the access implementation by arranging webinars and preparing training material for TA users, e.g. fieldwork safety.
WP9	POLARIN Main Coordination POLARIN Advisory Board	Safeguarding the quality of communication (e.g. centralized mailing lists for RI operators and TA User Groups, with required approval of the messages before delivery to recipients). External quality assessment review, ensuring impartiality and transparency of the TA process.

3.3. Large-scale feedback survey and related development actions

An **extensive survey** was developed by the POLARIN Access Management Team to collect feedback on various aspects of the POLARIN Transnational Access application and selection process, the effectiveness of the applicant and reviewer guidelines and the user experiences on the Transnational Access Platform (TAP) from the different users and stakeholders involved in the first POLARIN Transnational Access Call in 2024. The survey was conducted in April-May 2025, after the access decisions and negotiation phase of the 1st TA Call were completed.

The survey was directed to applicants, external reviewers, Scientific Liaison Panel (SLP) members and Research Infrastructures (RI) operators and consisted of both closed rating questions and open questions, including the possibility to provide recommendations for improvements in the access provision process. The responses were analyzed by using mixed quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods.

The survey received 101 responses from 98 unique respondents: 24 responses from applicants, 58 from external reviewers, 6 from the SLP members and 13 from RI operators. Considering the number of people involved in the first POLARIN TA call, this corresponds to 28% of total number of applicants, 28% of total number of reviewers, 32% of the total number of SLP members and 27% of RI operators involved in the 2024 TA call.

As a summary of the results, the external reviewers and RI operators seemed most satisfied with the TA process, with slightly higher distribution of “excellent” and “good” grades compared to applicants and SLP members. The open questions provided useful feedback on several aspects of the application and evaluation process, with some recurrent comments from the different types of users, such as the length of the application form and the timing of access decisions. Interesting suggestions were provided on how to improve the access-related services, including POLARIN TAP.

The feedback and suggestions provided in the responses were discussed in the POLARIN TA Management Team (WP2) and Evaluation Secretariat (WP1), which selected the most relevant recommendations to be implemented with the purpose of improving and further streamlining the application and evaluation process. These **development actions** will take place by the opening of the 2nd TA call on 1st September 2025.

Detailed **results of the survey, together with a list of recommendations for improvement**, are presented in the Report on the Feedback from 1st TA Call (Annex I).

As part of the Quality Assurance measures taken in POLARIN, the **survey will be repeated** in the mid-to-end term of the POLARIN project to assess the effectiveness of the development actions and benchmark the experiences of both TA Users, evaluators and access providers on POLARIN TA, and to create a **roadmap for future directions** on POLARIN access provision.

3.4. Development of POLARIN TA provision based on the QAP

POLARIN TA provision is strongly linked and shaped by the POLARIN QAP. As explained in the beginning of this document, POLARIN QAP encompasses not only the whole access provision chain, but the whole project life cycle, with multiple types of quality assessment conducted at different stages of POLARIN project and POLARIN TA provision (after every call, at every reporting period, after the large-scale feedback survey).

Every cycle involves a different level of quality control. During the Annual TA cycle, quality assessments are conducted in progression with the access provision and new measures and tools are developed in a close cooperation between the TA coordination and the POLARIN TAP system development. Examples of such developments include the Accesses' Dates Modifier and the RI Modifier tools, which were implemented in POLARIN TAP negotiation stage of the first call, to help the TA coordination in tracking changes in TA project implementation before the reporting stage.

In the end of every reporting period, the feedback reports submitted by TA users and RI operators at the reporting stage are gathered and analyzed to assess the quality of implemented TA and identify possible challenges and solutions to improve the TA provision based on the reported experience.

Finally, the large-scale feedback survey allows the following of the progress in quality assurance during the POLARIN lifetime, providing information on the effectiveness of actions implemented after the first large-scale feedback survey, and the effectiveness of the POLARIN QAP in general. The results of the large-scale survey also pave the way for the future with the creation of the roadmap for POLARIN TA provision after the EU funded project ends.

POLARIN QAP has largely benefited from the quality assurance programs and practices developed in previous projects related to TA provision and research infrastructure services, such as INTERACT and ARICE (Annex II, III and IV), which proved to be successful in offering excellent quality in access provision. Activities such as regular collection and analysis of feedback, quality assurance measures like key performance indicators, and most importantly project management tools like POLARIN TAP, are all based on the INTERACT QAP and further developed from there, whereas structures like e.g. SLP and TA Watchdogs have been adopted from ARICE. The ARICE Ships and Platform of Opportunity Program (Annex V) aimed to enhance observing capacities by engaging private sector operators in access provision and data collection provides potential for future development of access practices and quality assurance.

Additionally, the previous involvement of the TA Coordination in the eRImote project Expert Group on Quality Assurance and User Experience in Remote and Virtual Access provided an opportunity to learn about various solutions for quality assurance, as implemented in other RI domains. The results of the Expert Group were compiled into a Report on Quality Assurance and User Experience in Remote and Virtual Access (Annex VI), discussing challenges related to offering Remote and Virtual Access and listing solutions developed by the different RI consortia and networks. While many of the recommendations provided in the report are already taken into consideration in POLARIN QAP (e.g. TA agreements, feedback processes and project management tools) others could be considered for future developments in POLARIN QAP, including multi-factor authentication to improve cybersecurity, agreements with courier companies to improve reliability of shipping conditions and use of ISO standards in ensuring the quality of e.g. laboratory protocols.

4. Annexes

Annex I. Report on the feedback from 1st POLARIN TA Call

Annex II. [INTERACT Quality Assurance Program](#)

Annex III. [ARICE Deliverable 4.8. Performance Evaluation: satisfaction survey of the research cruises](#)

Annex IV. [ARICE Deliverable 4.9. Report on cruise implementation, post cruise assessment and lessons learned](#)

Annex V. [ARICE Deliverable 6.7 Assessment report of the “Programme of ships and opportunity” for the Arctic Ocean](#)

Annex VI. [eRImote Expert Group I Report on Quality Assurance and User Experience in Remote and Virtual Access](#)

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Results of POLARIN 2024 TA Call Feedback Survey

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Introduction

The Survey “Feedback on POLARIN 2024 Transnational Access Call” was developed by the POLARIN Transnational Access (TA) Management Team to collect feedback from the different users and stakeholders involved in the first POLARIN Transnational Access Call. The survey was published on EU Survey on the 29th April 2025 and remained open until 2nd June 2025. The survey was anonymous with no possibility to track respondents, while the EU Survey platform ensures compliance with EU GDPR regulations.

Objectives of the survey

The survey was designed to collect feedback on various aspects of the POLARIN Transnational Access application and selection process, the effectiveness of the applicant and reviewer guidelines and the user experiences on the Transnational Access Platform (TAP). The input received will help the POLARIN TA Management Team to identify areas for improvement and ensure that the services meet needs and expectations of different users. The survey was directed to applicants, external reviewers, Scientific Liaison Panel (SLP) members and Research Infrastructures (RI) operators.

Structure of the survey

The survey included both closed and open questions. The first closed question asked the respondent which role they covered in the POLARIN TA process (applicant, external reviewer, SLP member, RI operator, multiple choice allowed); based on the response, the survey showed the section dedicated to each of the selected roles. The survey contained one section per role. Each section included up to 7 closed questions, asking the respondent to rate their satisfaction with the respective service or process from 1 to 5 (1=weak; 2=satisfactory; 3=average; 4=good; 5= excellent). Following the rating questions, the respondent was asked to answer one open question, containing up to 7 sub-questions to guide the topics and services the POLARIN TA Management team wanted to assess. All questions were mandatory. To balance the feedback and verify the competence of the comments received, applicants were asked to respond to a closed question whether their proposal was granted or rejected, external reviewers were asked whether they evaluated at least one proposal, RI operators were asked if their RI received at least one recommended proposal to evaluate.

Hereafter the questions included in the survey, divided by sections (roles):

1. Applicant
 - a. Rating questions
 - i. Promotion of TA Calls
 - ii. Clarity and relevance of the scientific scope of the TA call
 - iii. Information on how to apply
 - iv. Support provided during the application process
 - v. Experience on using TAP
 - vi. Scientific evaluation
 - vii. Logistic evaluation and Access decision
 - b. Open question
 - i. What worked well in the TA application process? What did not?
Which aspects of the TA application process did you find clear

and efficient? Were there any steps that you found confusing or challenging?

- ii. Was the information and support provided for your TA application clear and sufficient?
- iii. Was your experience on using TAP friendly enough?
- iv. Did you contact the RI operator/manager beforehand and if so, was the contact useful?
- v. How effectively did the scientific and logistical evaluation statements address your proposal?
- vi. Any recommendations on how to improve the application process?
- vii. Any recommendations on how to improve the evaluation process?

2. External reviewer

a. Rating questions

- i. Communication with the Scientific Evaluation Secretariat
- ii. Information and guidance on how to conduct the evaluation
- iii. Scientific evaluation process
- iv. Evaluation criteria
- v. Evaluation timeline
- vi. Format of and requested information in the proposal document
- vii. Experience on using TAP

b. Open question

- i. What worked well in the scientific evaluation process? What did not? Were there any aspects in the scientific evaluation that you found confusing or challenging?
- ii. Was the information and support provided for the evaluation clear and sufficient?
- iii. Were the evaluation criteria comprehensive and clearly defined?
- iv. Was your experience on using TAP friendly enough?
- v. Any recommendations on how to improve the scientific evaluation process or criteria?

3. SLP member

a. Rating questions

- i. Coordination and arrangements of the SLP activities
- ii. Information and guidance on how to conduct the watchdog review and consensus meetings
- iii. Support and communication provided by the Scientific Evaluation Secretariat
- iv. Experience on using TAP
- v. Scientific evaluation process
- vi. Relevance and complementarity of the SLP member expertise

- vii. Format of and requested information in the proposal document
- b. Open question
 - i. What worked well in the scientific evaluation process and SLP activities, e.g. in the coordination and arrangements of the SLP functions? What did not?
 - ii. Was the information and support provided for the watchdog review clear and sufficient?
 - iii. Did you find your role as a watchdog well-defined and manageable?
 - iv. Was the format of the consensus meetings suitable?
 - v. Was your experience on using TAP friendly enough?
 - vi. Any recommendations on how to improve the scientific evaluation process?
 - vii. Any recommendations on how to improve the SLP functions?
- 4. RI operator
 - a. Rating questions
 - i. Coordination and arrangements of the IOF activities (communication with the RIs, IOF meetings)
 - ii. Information and guidance on logistic evaluation, logistic evaluation statement and access decisions
 - iii. Support and communication provided by the TA Management team
 - iv. Experience on using TAP
 - v. Logistic evaluation process
 - b. Open question
 - i. What worked well in the logistic evaluation process? What did not? Were there any aspects of the logistic evaluation that you found difficult or challenging?
 - ii. Was the information and support provided for the logistic evaluation and access decisions, e.g. the budget advice, sufficient?
 - iii. Were the logistic evaluation criteria comprehensive and clearly defined?
 - iv. Was your experience on using TAP friendly enough?
 - v. Any recommendations on how to improve the logistic evaluation process or criteria?

Methodology

Results of the survey were exported from the EU Survey platform and analysed by the POLARIN TA Management Team utilising mixed quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods.

Responses to rating questions were compiled and pie charts were created to help visualise the different shares of satisfaction per each question.

Feedback from open questions was examined through content analysis, utilising a consistent vocabulary to summarize meaning units into key sentences or words that allow to identify common patterns and topics and to count responses conveying the same meaning. Meaning units stands for a sentence or more sentences that contains an unique or independent meaning within a response (interview, questionnaire, or general text). A response may contain multiple meaning units.

After the first screening and assignment of keywords/ key sentences to meaning units, keywords/ key sentences are scanned; same keywords/key sentences brought up by different respondents are compiled together and highlighted, although all different types of recommendations and comments (key sentences) are reported.

Statistics

The survey received 101 responses from 98 unique respondents, as 3 respondents identified and provided feedback for two different roles (applicant and reviewer, applicant and SLP member).

Among the 101 responses, 24 provided feedback for the role of applicants, 58 for external reviewers, 6 for the SLP members and 13 for RI operators. Considering the number of users involved in the first POLARIN TA call, 28% of total number of applicants, 28% of total number of reviewers, 32% of the total number of SLP members and 27% of RI operators involved in the 2024 TA call responded to the survey. Therefore, on average, between 1 out of 3 and 1 out of 4 of all persons involved in the POLARIN 2024 TA Call submitted their feedback to the survey.

The table below summarises the key figures on the responses to the questionnaire.

Table 1. Summary of responses to the survey by role.

Total responses	Applicants	External reviewers	SLP members	RI operators
101	24 (24%)	58 (57%)	6 (6%)	13 (13%)
of total in the category of respondents (%)	28%	28%	32%	27% (49 RIs offering TA in the 2024 Call)

Results

Applicants

Rating questions

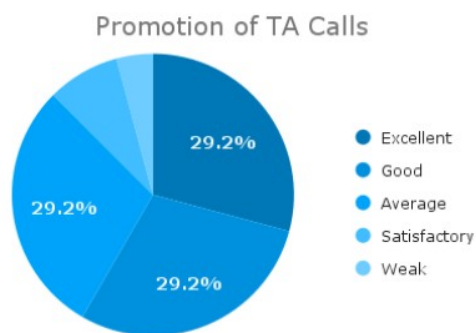
All applicants, granted and rejected, were invited to respond to the questionnaire. Among the 24 respondents who identified as applicants, 13 responded that their proposal was rejected (54% of total), while 11 responded that it was granted (46% of total).

Responses to the rating questions show that there is room for improvement in all aspects of application and evaluation stages, even though applicants are generally satisfied with the process, as on average 50-80% of applicants graded the closed question as “excellent” or “good”.

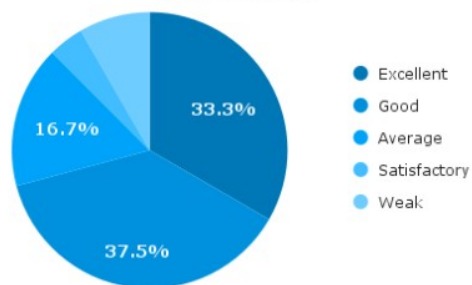
According to the applicants, the most problematic steps were the scientific and logistical evaluation, which were rated as “weak” by more than 20% of respondents.

Below Figure a-g provides the results to each of the closed questions, while Table 2 reports a summary of all closed questions and their responses, including the percentage of responses from rejected applicants among respondents for each question.

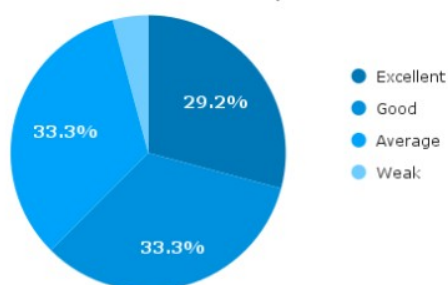
Indeed, it is important to highlight that all “weak” grades (100% of total) and most of “satisfactory” grades (50-100%) to all questions come from rejected applicants. This is particularly relevant to the questions concerning the scientific and logistical evaluation, which counts the highest share of “weak” grades.



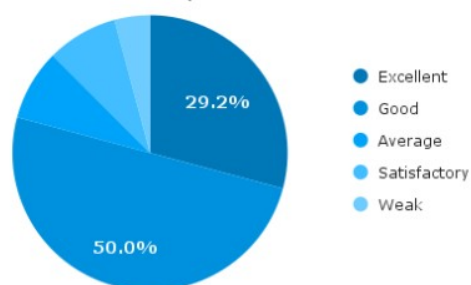
Clarity and relevance of the scientific scope of the TA call



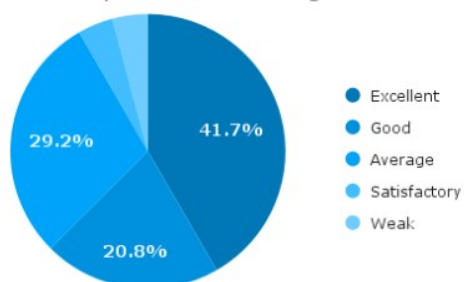
Information on how to apply, TA call conditions and requirements



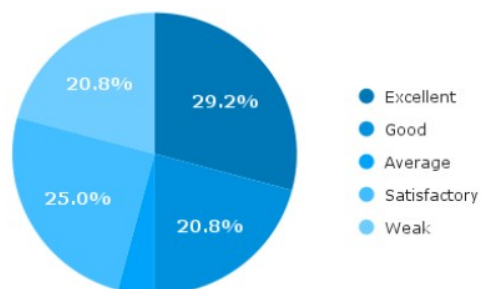
Support provided during the application process



Experience on using TAP



Scientific evaluation



Logistic evaluation and Access decision

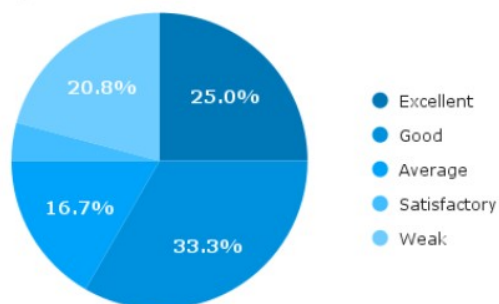


Figure a-g. Distribution of responses to the closed rating question assessing the quality of application and evaluation process to applicants, with ratings from 1 (Weak) to 5 (Excellent). The pie chart shows the percentage of respondents selecting each rating category.

Table 2. Summary of responses to rating questions for applicants by rating category.

	Promotion of TA Calls		Clarity and relevance of the scientific scope of the TA call		Information on how to apply		Support provided during the application process		Experience on using TAP		Scientific evaluation		Logistic evaluation and Access decision	
		Of which Rejected Applicants (%)		Of which Rejected Applicants (%)		Of which Rejected Applicants (%)		Of which Rejected Applicants (%)		Of which Rejected Applicants (%)		Of which Rejected Applicants (%)		Of which Rejected Applicants (%)
Excellent	29%	71%	33%	25%	29%	29%	29%	43%	42%	20%	29%	14%	25%	17%
Good	29%	57%	38%	44%	33%	63%	50%	50%	21%	80%	21%	20%	33%	25%
Average	29%	14%	17%	100%	33%	63%	8%	100%	29%	71%	4%	100%	17%	100%
Satisfactory	8%	100%	4%	100%	0%	0%	8%	50%	4%	100%	25%	83%	4%	100%
Weak	4%	100%	8%	100%	4%	100%	4%	100%	4%	100%	21%	100%	21%	100%

Open questions

1) What worked well in the TA application process? What did not? Which aspects of the TA application process did you find clear and efficient? Were there any steps that you found confusing or challenging?

14 respondents reported that they found the application process clear, while 5 respondents found some aspects of the application process unclear, in particular:

- Calculation of RI units in the application form (mentioned by 3),
- TA budget:
 - TA budget cap: there is no mention of a limit for the requested budget (mentioned by 2). Specifically, one applicant mentioned they were advised not to apply because the funding was not worth the effort of bureaucracy, while no maximum funding is mentioned anywhere.
 - TA covered costs: what is included in TA in terms of costs; unclear explanation on access costs.
 - Understanding and calculating proposed budget (access costs and travel budget);
- Contacting the RI operator, whether it was mandatory or not;
- Inconsistency between POLARIN guidelines and RI operator demands in their email exchanges;
- Timing of the access decision outcomes not matching station booking's requirements;

- f. Timeline during the acceptance stage: communications regarding the DMP were inconsistent, the applicants did not receive formal feedback by email, and acceptance of DMP was announced only via webinar.

The Data Management Plan was found challenging by one respondent, even though the guidelines were sufficient to complete the form.

2) Was the information and support provided for your TA application clear and sufficient?

10 respondents mentioned that the information provided was clear, however one respondent highlighted that the application form is complex and questions are sometimes confusing. All other comments related to the application process are provided in question #1.

3) Was your experience on using TAP friendly enough?

9 applicants replied that TAP was user friendly and easy to use. One applicant commented that they found the platform not convenient for large proposals to research vessels, and that the use of time period, i.e. specify number of days in a period, was confusing.

4) Did you contact the RI operator/manager beforehand and if so, was the contact useful?

8 applicants responded that they had contacted the RI operator and was very useful for them, 1 responded that they had contacted the RI manager but did not receive a response, while 1 replied that they hadn't contacted the RI manager before submission. Overall, contacting the RI operator was a positive experience for the applicants and was found beneficial to the proposal writing.

5) How effectively did the scientific and logistical evaluation statements address your proposal?

While 3 respondents explicitly mentioned that their proposal was well addressed in the evaluation statements, mentioning they were useful, detailed and constructive, 8 applicants responded that their evaluation statements did not appropriately address their proposal, with some applicants considering their evaluation "debatable", "opaque" and "unfair". Although most criticism comes from rejected applicants, one rejected applicant found their evaluation fair, while one granted applicant considered the statements not very effective. The feedback reported the following issues:

- a) External reviewers were not well informed about the proposal's research discipline, fieldwork techniques and methodology approaches (mentioned by

7 respondents). This point was the most recurrent issue reported by rejected applicants, based on the scientific evaluation statements they received. In their feedback, respondents provide details concerning the evaluation statement and explain why they found the review uncorrect and suggest that the reviewer was not well informed on the subject, methodology approaches or common logistic practices of the proposal.

- b) More in-depth scientific feedback (mentioned by 3, including a granted applicant): scientific evaluation statements were found not detailed enough in their feedback, in particular concerning the scientific aspects of the proposal. Respondents reported they would have appreciated it both to improve their granted proposal or to understand better the reasons for rejection. Avoid vague wording (e.g. “questionable methods”).
- c) Constraints posed by unpredictable or bad weather conditions should not be a ground for rejection (mentioned by 2): according to respondents, the scientific evaluation statement should not mention this issue as it is a default risk for any polar fieldwork activity.
- d) Unclear evaluation and selection criteria, especially with regards of how the trade-off between scientific quality and logistic costs were handled (mentioned by 1 respondent).
- e) No formal option to question the decision or request clarification, as the complaint policy does not allow to appeal the scientific evaluation statement (mentioned by 1 respondent): the applicant was felt uncertain of how they could improve their proposal for the future call.

Finally, one granted applicant commented that even though the statements were well addressing their proposals, the recommendations provided in the evaluation would require in any case further exchange and discussion with the RI operator.

6) Any recommendations on how to improve the application process?

Applicants provided the following recommendations on the application process:

- a) Improve call visibility and promotion, mentioning that they came across this opportunity by chance (mentioned by 2 respondents);
- b) RI operator should be more involved in the application process (mentioned by 2 respondents);
- c) Adjust timing of access decision to match with Arctic field season; Conditional approval with short revision window to allow Arctic field season preparation;
- d) Provide station-specific rules information;
- e) Allow extra funds to be found to be added to enable execution of the cruise or combine with existing planned cruises so to cut the transit (for research vessels);
- f) Facilitate contact with RI operators;

- g) Clarify the level of detail requested for the project description (methods, logistics, and post-fieldwork plans) so to space for critical technical information;
- h) Include visa application information and relevant contacts information in the FAQ.

7) Any recommendations on how to improve the evaluation process?

Applicants provided the following recommendations on the scientific and logistical evaluation:

- a) More detailed scientific review (scientific evaluation statement) with in-depth explanations of critical points of the proposal (mentioned by 3 respondents); no vague terminology;
- b) Ensure appropriate and relevant expertise of selected reviewers (mentioned by 2 respondents);
- c) More space for logistical evaluation;
- d) Notify applicants about the delays in their proposals' access decisions;
- e) Dedicated channel to give possibility to discuss evaluation outcomes;
- f) Create a reserve list for highly scientific reviewed proposals where timing logistics were the issue, especially for research vessels where the transits cannot be known well in advance;
- g) Strict enforcement of Conflict of Interest rules;
- h) Provide scientific and logistical evaluation statement as separate downloadable files (TAP);
- i) Evaluation aligned with call priorities and constraints of guidelines;
- j) Provide a RI operator contact list for travel arrangement and logistics.

External reviewers

Rating questions

Results from closed rating questions to reviewers were overall very positive. Reviewers found the communication with and the information and support provided by the Evaluation Secretariat very valuable and exhaustive. Most reviewers had a positive experience with the scientific evaluation process and the scientific evaluation criteria appeared to be well defined and comprehensive. Improvements could be implemented in the format of the proposal document and in the TAP interface, where some reviewers rated slightly lower grades. Below Figure h-m show the charts reporting the distribution of grades to each question from the 58 respondents who identified as reviewers. Table 3 provides a summary of the results. All reviewers had evaluated at least one proposal.

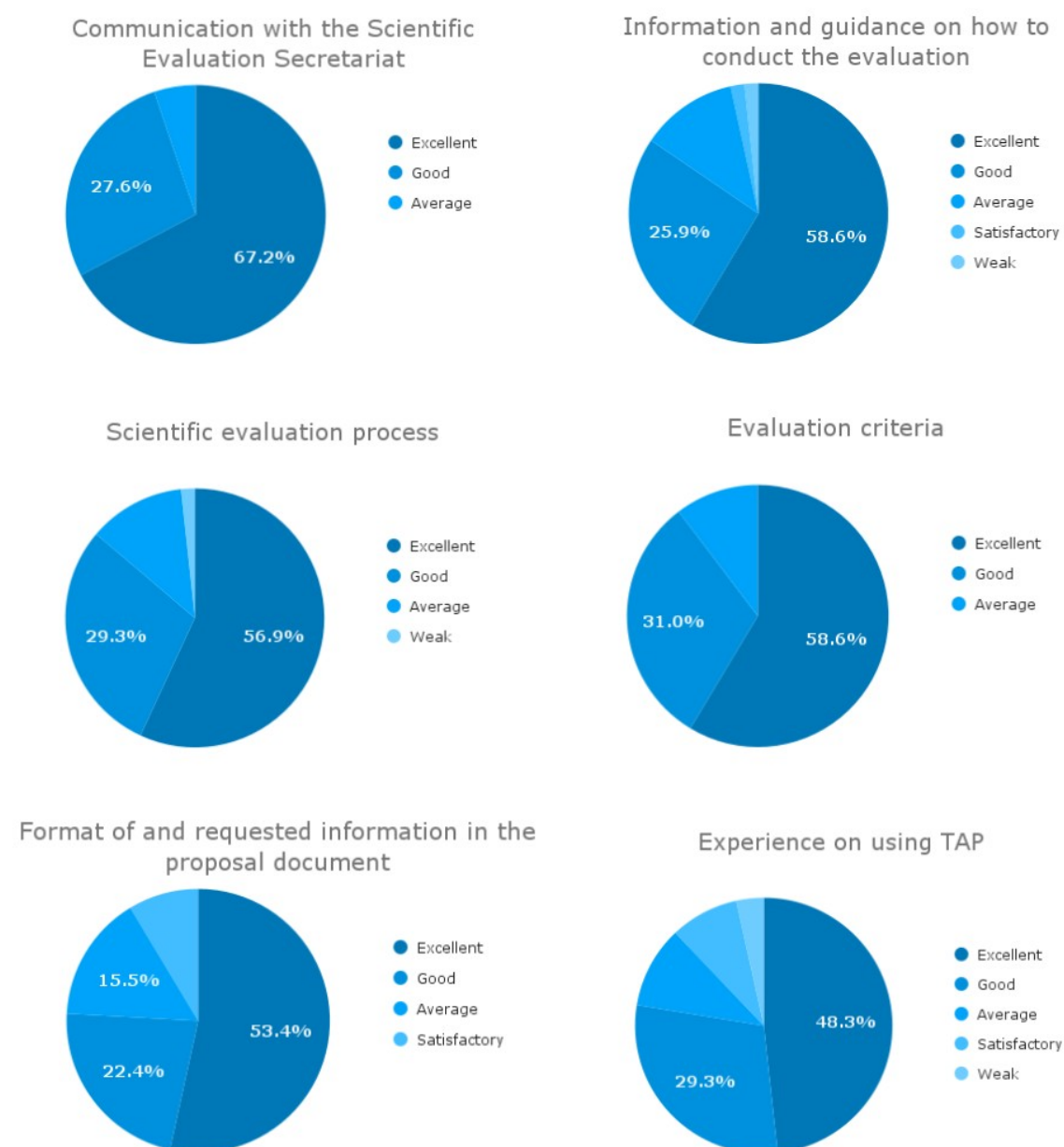


Figure h-m. Distribution of responses to the closed rating question assessing the quality of the scientific evaluation process to external reviewers, with ratings from 1 (Weak) to 5 (Excellent). The pie chart shows the percentage of respondents selecting each rating category.

Table 3. Summary of responses to rating questions for external reviewers by rating category.

	Communication with the Scientific Evaluation Secretariat	Information and guidance on how to conduct the evaluation	Scientific evaluation process	Evaluation criteria	Evaluation timeline	Format of and requested information in the proposal document	Experience on using TAP
Excellent	67%	59%	57%	57%	59%	53%	48%
Good	28%	26%	29%	29%	31%	22%	29%
Average	5%	12%	12%	12%	10%	16%	10%
Satisfactory	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	9%	9%
Weak	0%	2%	2%	2%	0%	0%	3%

Open questions

1) What worked well in the scientific evaluation process? What did not? Were there any aspects in the scientific evaluation that you found confusing or challenging?

37 reviewers reported a positive experience with the evaluation process, defining it straightforward, smooth, well structured and well defined. 6 reviewers specifically mentioned that the evaluation timeline allowed them to have plenty of time to review. Few reviewers experienced some issues or found some aspects unclear, in particular:

- Redundant content in different part of the application (e.g. application form and attachments): the reviewer found time confusing to double-check consistency in the various part of the application;
- Missing information on call objectives and on RI logistical practices;
- Need to ensure stronger link between infrastructure and scientific proposal;
- Difficulty in balancing between feasibility of the proposal and support to Early-Career researchers;
- TAP allowed to view all the application before accepting Col (already solved in TAP);
- Complex evaluation process.

2) Was the information and support provided for the evaluation clear and sufficient?

20 reviewers commented that the information provided was clear and sufficient, and 7 respondents reported a good support from the Evaluation Secretariat. One respondent mentioned that the guidelines were exhaustive and clear, while one respondent suggested reducing the information provided on POLARIN itself (this

suggestion is although inconsistent with feedback provided by other reviewers in the question #5).

3) Were the evaluation criteria comprehensive and clearly defined?

17 reviewers responded that the evaluation criteria were clearly defined, 8 mentioned that they were comprehensive and 2 found them relevant to the call priorities, only one reviewer found them complex. Few reviewers had comments on the evaluation criteria:

- a. Evaluation criteria and grading system lead easily to rate top grades, the evaluation scale should be harsher;
- b. Repetitive evaluation criteria;
- c. Not intuitive to understand the reasoning behind the selection of criteria;
- d. Mismatch between the information in the proposal's project description and evaluation criteria.

4) Was your experience on using TAP friendly enough?

21 reviewers responded that TAP was user friendly, although 3 respondents reported a bad experience and found the platform not very intuitive. In particular,

- a) Small boxes for each category to fill in;
- b) Difficult to evaluate if you don't complete the review in the same session;
- c) TAP proposal format with proposal information on the left side is not easy to read.

5) Any recommendations on how to improve the scientific evaluation process or criteria?

External reviewers provided several recommendations to improve the scientific evaluation process:

- a) Inform evaluators about the results of access decision (mentioned by 4) (number of reviewers, decision outcome, statement provided to the applicant);
- b) Streamline application process, shorten the application form and streamline submission files to avoid redundancy (mentioned by 4);
- c) Improve training for evaluators: explain methods of evaluation, provide short training (webinar) to reviewers, create a TAP manual for reviewers, clarify reviewer tasks (mentioned by 4);
- d) TAP interface:
 - i) Show/notify that work is completed when evaluation is submitted but the evaluation period is still open (mentioned by 3);
 - ii) Either add a text field for each criteria, or number the evaluation criteria so to refer to them more easily in the open text field (joined 2 comments);
 - iii) Broaden the left section about the proposal for better overview and ease reading;

- iv) Add option to download the full proposal, attachments included;
- v) Too much personal information requested in the registration form;
- vi) Possibility to download PDF of submitted review for the records;
- e) Evaluation criteria: evaluation scale/criteria should be harsher to avoid all applications scoring top grades; evaluation criteria should be more specific (large deviation between reviewers of the same proposal) (joined 2 comments);
- f) Review process:
 - i) Improve 1st contact email to avoid being confused as phishing, by improving the formatting, title, and potentially changing the return address;
 - ii) Include all members names in the invitation to review for Col check;
 - iii) Improve initial screening of proposals;
 - iv) Meeting with reviewers of same applications to discuss scientific evaluation;
 - v) Provide more than one proposal per reviewer (for more balanced assessment);
- g) SLP statement: Ask reviewer to check the SLP statement;
- h) Information on POLARIN and the call: Missing information on the call in TAP, provide information on POLARIN project to evaluators unfamiliar to the consortium;
- i) Format of documents: Add a minimum font size for project description (already implemented);

Finally, one evaluator commented that there were too many steps before seeing the proposal and another one suggested avoiding external reviewer evaluation as it is too much effort for relatively small proposals. Eventually, one reviewer noted limited understanding of social science processes in the review process.

SLP members

Rating questions

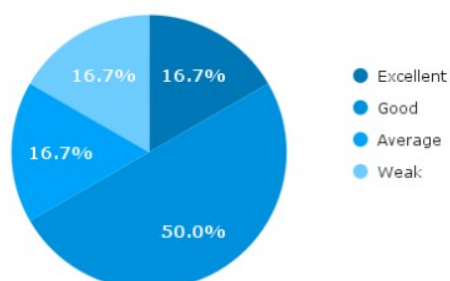
Results from closed questions suggest room for improvement in the SLP activities, e.g. in the format of proposal documents, which none of the respondents rated as “excellent”. Although, while the results may give indication that some practices may be improved, the low number responses (6) does not allow further reasoning on the statistics.

Among the 6 respondents who identified as SLP members, one has used the feedback survey to raise complaints for a rejection of a proposal where he was included as a user member, and graded all rating questions as “weak”, which are the only “weak” grades recorded to the closed questions. Considering the nature of the

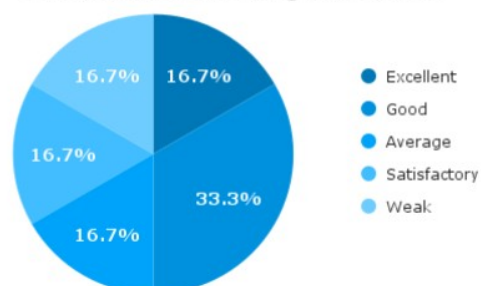
feedback provided by the respondent, the responses are not relevant to evaluate the activities of the SLP.

Figures n-t report the charts compiling results from the closed questions, followed by Table 4 summarising the distribution of grades to each question..

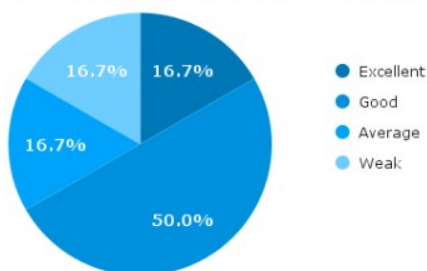
Coordination and arrangements of the SLP activities



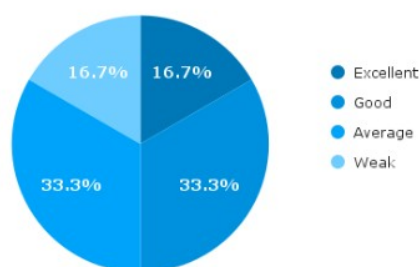
Information and guidance on how to conduct the watchdog review and



Support and communication provided by the Scientific Evaluation Secretariat



Experience on using TAP



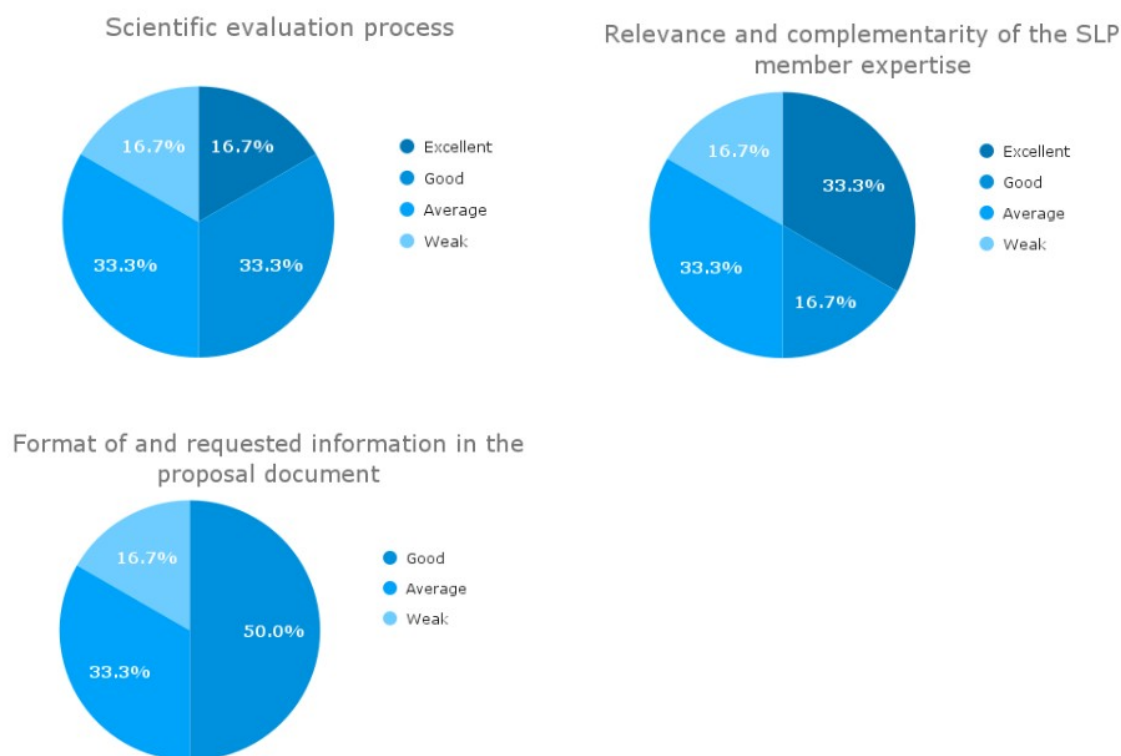


Figure n-t. Distribution of responses to the closed rating question assessing the quality of the scientific evaluation process to SLP members, with ratings from 1 (Weak) to 5 (Excellent). The pie chart shows the percentage of respondents selecting each rating category.

Table 3. Summary of responses to rating questions for SLP members by rating category.

	Coordination and arrangements of the SLP activities	Information and guidance on how to conduct the watchdog review and consensus meetings	Support and communication provided by the Scientific Evaluation Secretariat	Experience on using TAP	Scientific evaluation process	Relevance and complementarity of the SLP member expertise	Format of and requested information in the proposal document
Excellent	17%	17%	17%	17%	17%	33%	0%
Good	50%	33%	50%	33%	33%	17%	50%
Average	17%	17%	17%	33%	33%	33%	33%
Satisfactory	0%	17%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Weak	17%	17%	17%	17%	17%	17%	17%

Open questions

1) What worked well in the scientific evaluation process and SLP activities, e.g. in the coordination and arrangements of the SLP functions? What did not?

4 respondents provided an overall positive feedback on the SLP evaluation process, mentioning that was “interesting and informative” and “well explained”, while one respondent provided a constructive comment on issues experienced during the process:

- a) Clear expectations on what evaluators had to do would have speed up the process;
- b) The benefit of having watchdogs is unclear: only one person in the SLP read the reviews and the proposal, making it difficult to discuss the proposal during the SLP meetings;
- c) Decoupling scientific and logistical evaluation made the evaluation process very long, with access decision outcomes not matching the timing for the Arctic field season.

2) Was the information and support provided for the watchdog review clear and sufficient?

4 respondents found the information clear, and one respondent commented that the support provided was very helpful in case doubts arose. One respondent found the information unclear or not sufficient, so that they had to request additional information to the evaluation secretariat, and information on the tasks of and instructions for watch dogs came later in the process, and they seemed to be shaped by the questions they had received from watch dogs.

3) Did you find your role as a watchdog well-defined and manageable?

2 respondents found the role of watchdog well defined and manageable, one respondent found it not well defined, while 3 SLP members considered that the workload was higher than announced. In particular, one respondent commented that the role was still manageable because the number of proposal was little, another was not aware that they had to screen and discuss all proposals requesting the same RIs, making it more time consuming than expected, and a third one proposed to shorten the length of the application form and documents to reduce the workload and time effort for the watchdog.

4) Was the format of the consensus meetings suitable?

The respondents agree that the format of the consensus meeting is suitable. However, they raised the following issues:

- a) Lacking fruitful discussion because of limited number of members in the meeting;
- b) Lacking fruitful discussion because the watchdog in charge of the proposal was the only one who read the proposal;
- c) Difficult to make recommendations to proposals with one review only or with contrasting reviews.

5) Was your experience on using TAP friendly enough?

2 respondents found TAP user friendly, while other 2 experienced some issues, in particular one SLP member noted that scrolling long reviews in the platform was unpleasant and suggested implementing the possibility to download reviews as one pdf jointly.

6) Any recommendations on how to improve the scientific evaluation process?

SLP members proposed the following improvements:

- a) SLP consensus meetings joined by more or all SLP members together for more discussion and cross-consensus, and a better overview of all proposals (mentioned by 2);
- b) Simplify the process, as the watchdog should not act as reviewer;
- c) Clear expectations on what evaluators have to do to speed up the process;
- d) Shorten the external evaluations as the watchdog have long texts to review;
- e) 2-3 watchdogs assigned to the same proposal, plus one external evaluator;
- f) Streamline the application form by providing one document to look at, as it is time consuming to check several documents;
- g) Shorten the proposal;
- h) Provide reviews as one PDF to download in TAP.

7) Any recommendations on how to improve the SLP functions?

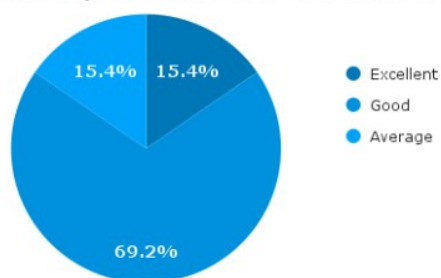
Responses joined with question #6.

RI operators

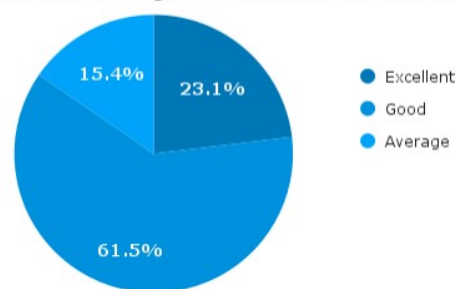
Rating questions

Feedback from RI operators to closed questions was generally quite positive, with the majority of votes ranging from “excellent” to “average”. RI operators especially appreciated the support from and communication with the POLARIN coordination. Below Figures u-y show results from closed questions, followed by Table 5 compiling the respective statistics.

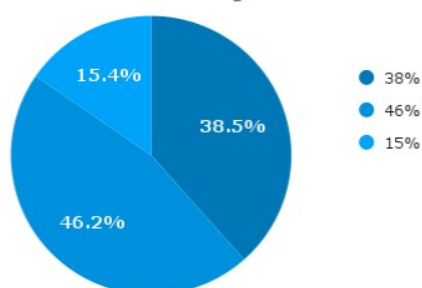
Coordination and arrangements of the IOF activities (communication with the RIs, IOF



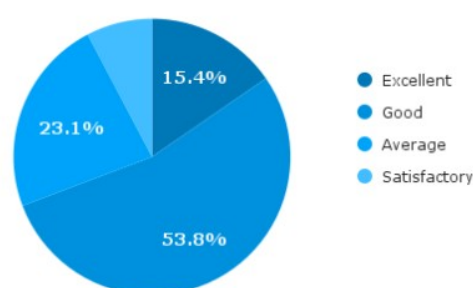
Information and guidance on logistic evaluation, logistic evaluation statement



Support and communication provided by the TA Management team



Experience on using TAP



Logistic evaluation process

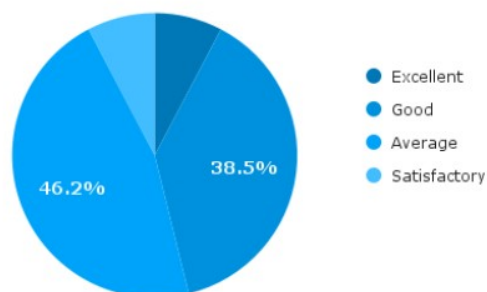


Figure u-y. Distribution of responses to the closed rating question assessing the quality of the logistical evaluation process to RI operators, with ratings from 1 (Weak) to 5 (Excellent). The pie chart shows the percentage of respondents selecting each rating category.

Table 3. Summary of responses to rating questions for RI operators by rating category.

Coordination and arrangements of the IOF activities (communication with the RIs, IOF	Information and guidance on logistic evaluation, logistic	Support and communication provided by the TA Management team	Experience on using TAP	Logistic evaluation process
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meetings)		evaluation statement and access decisions			
Excellent	15%	23%	38%	15%	8%
Good	69%	62%	46%	54%	38%
Average	15%	15%	15%	23%	46%
Satisfactory	0%	0%	0%	8%	8%
Weak	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

Open questions

1) What worked well in the logistic evaluation process? What did not? Were there any aspects of the logistic evaluation that you found difficult or challenging?

5 RI operators commented that the logistic evaluation process worked well for them, one mentioning that it was very professional and another commenting that the application form was well structured allowing them to see clearly all necessary information on the application. The RI operators also noted some aspects that they found challenging:

- a) Timeline of access decisions: too short timing for access preparation for the Arctic field season, mentioned by 3 (permit approval, field season already planned);
- b) The scientific evaluation statement does not include a ranking/rating system for RI operator to distinguish between or evaluate recommended proposals;
- c) Applicants should be stressed to contact RI operator before applying;
- d) Exaggerated amount of paperwork;
- e) Difficulty to communicate preparation tasks for fieldwork;
- f) Difficulty to prioritise and assess equally pre-proposal inquiries.

2) Was the information and support provided for the logistic evaluation and access decisions, e.g. the budget advice, sufficient?

6 RI operators found the information and support provided sufficient, 2 of them highlighting that the budget advice was very helpful and 2 underlining that the webinar was very useful, while one respondent mentioned that they received very good support from the coordination. One RI operator suggested asking for a more detailed description of field activities to applicants.

3) Were the logistic evaluation criteria comprehensive and clearly defined?

5 RI operators responded that the criteria were comprehensive and well defined, while one respondent found that the training for the logistical evaluation was generic and suggested a training documentation tailored to each area and type of RI.

4) Was your experience on using TAP friendly enough?

6 RI operators found TAP user friendly, while 2 respondents encountered issues with the platform (unable to access TAP, need for more RI administrators viewing the proposal). One respondent mentioned they could see the watchdog name and recommended making sure that the applicant could not see it.

5) Any recommendations on how to improve the logistic evaluation process or criteria?

RI operators provided the following recommendations for improvement:

- a) Shorten evaluation period, trying to send access decision outcomes earlier to allow RI to plan the field season (mentioned by 2);
- b) Add a standardised ranking/rating system of recommended proposal to allow RI operator to distinguish among equally well scientifically evaluated and recommended proposals;
- c) Provided tailored training documentation for logistic evaluation, e.g. for each area and type of RI;
- d) Add function in TAP for the time period: "Accept as proposed" / "Accepted with adapted time schedule", plus calendar function to propose a new period;
- e) Demand a more detailed description of field activities;
- f) Provide information on received proposals to RI operators (submitted, rejected).

Conclusion

The survey received a good amount of responses (101), with the number of responses well distributed among the different users and stakeholders involved in the first POLARIN TA call. Overall, between 27% to 32% of total users for each category (applicant, external reviewer, SLP member, RI operator) responded to the questionnaire.

The structure of the survey including both closed rating questions and open question allowed the POLARIN TA Management Team to have an overview of the satisfaction rate of different categories of users in the application and evaluation process they were involved in and their related services, while also assessing challenges encountered by the different users and compiling recommendations for improvement.

Considering the closed questions, external reviewers and RI operators appear to be the most satisfied by the process, with higher distribution of “excellent” and “good” grades compared to applicants and SLP members.

Open questions provided useful feedback on several aspects of the application and evaluation process, with some recurrent comments from the different types of users, such as the length of the application form and the timing of access decisions. Interesting suggestions were provided on how to improve services, including POLARIN TAP.

The feedback and suggestions reported by the survey were presented to and discussed by the POLARIN TA Management Team, which selected most relevant recommendations to be implemented and/or revised, with the purpose of improving and further streamlining the application and evaluation process. The revision of feedback received, development of solutions, and modification of current practices or implementation of new features will take place during the summer 2025, in the light of opening the 2nd call on the 1st September 2025.