REvaluation Conference 2027

"Scouting Paths on Shifting Maps"

February 25 - February 26, 2027, Vienna, Austria

Special Session:

Title Session: ***Future Funding Governance: Funding organisations and agentic AI***

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Abstract/ Description:

If an AI agent can orchestrate a physical, expertise-intensive process such as brewing beer—from recipe development to production and marketing—why should it not also be able to coordinate a highly standardised funding process? After all, a core function of funding organisations, particularly those operating through strongly standardised procedures, is to orchestrate processes through which resources are allocated to advance defined public goals, such as fostering innovation. If we assume that agentic AI could take over substantial parts of this operational value proposition, the question arises as to what distinctive value funding organisations would continue to provide.

The aim of this special session, however, is not to assume the disappearance of human expertise or the replacement of funding organisations. Rather, it is to discuss how their role might shift from performing and administering processes towards functions in which their distinctive public value may increasingly lie: enabling communities and institutional learning, defining strategic goals, setting boundaries, and authorising or taking responsibility for critical decisions.

This is particularly relevant because many funding systems rely on procedures that are (1) repetitive, (2) highly standardised, and (3) partly depersonalised. Their repetitive character reflects the need to process large numbers of applications through recurring stages, decisions, and administrative routines. Standardisation is intended to increase consistency, fairness, transparency, and reliability by ensuring that comparable cases are treated according to common rules. Depersonalisation, in turn, seeks to reduce dependence on individual discretion and preferences, personal relationships, and the judgement of particular staff members. Yet precisely these features - recurrence, formalisation, and reduced reliance on individual actors - also make funding processes particularly accessible to automation. What was developed to manage the limitations and variability of human decision-making may therefore become the foundation for reducing the human component of funding systems.

Even if such a transformation remains partial, it can be seen as opportunity to ask fundamental questions for funding organisations and the evaluation system surrounding them. Once these processes can credibly be organised and delivered through different combinations of human and artificial agency, funding organisations must clarify how they deliver their distinctive public value, while actors in the evaluation ecosystem must reconsider alternative ways of organizing as well as benchmarks against which their performance is assessed.

Against this background, the special session treats agentic AI not merely as another tool to be integrated into existing funding organisations, but as an institutional counterfactual through which future roles can be reconsidered. It does not assume that funding systems will become fully automated. Rather, it takes human, hybrid, and largely automated arrangements seriously as alternative ways of organising public funding. This perspective allows the session to move beyond incremental questions of AI adoption and to examine, which functions may be automated, where human involvement contributes to achieve distinctive public value, and how evaluation can help to compare and shape future institutional choices - at the process, organisational and evaluation levels. Hence, the aim is not to predict the replacement of funding organisations, but to open a more fundamental debate about their purpose, processes how they achieve this, and how their performance should be assessed in the future.

Specifically, the session invites for submissions of case studies, experiences and strategic considerations of funding agencies tackling these emerging institutional choices at three interconnected levels:

- **Process level**: Which activities involved in designing, administering, and monitoring funding programmes can be supported, transformed, or largely automated by agentic AI?
- **Organisational level**: What distinctive public value do funding organisations provide beyond the implementation of standardised processes, and which of their functions cannot - or should not - be substituted by automated systems?
- **Evaluation level**: How should the performance of funding organisations be assessed when human organisations are no longer the only credible benchmark, but must be compared with hybrid and largely automated institutional alternatives?

By introducing a new institutional counterfactual, agentic AI changes not only how funding organisations may operate, but also the standards against which their costs, complexity, speed, legitimacy, and public value can - and must – be evaluated.

Extended abstracts are welcomed, please see the submission guidelines: Call for Contributions.
To directly submit your extended abstract, click here.
Deadline for abstract submission: July 31, 2026

Strand 3 and area "Coping with Uncertainty"

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