Pursuant to Article 13, paragraph 1, item 3) of the Law on the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia (Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, No. 95/18 - hereinafter: the Law) and Article 10, Paragraph 1, Item 4) of the Statute of the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia, No. UO 2/19 of 17 April 2019, to which the Government gave its consent by the decision 05 Number: 110-5430/2019 of 30 May 2019 ("Official Gazette of the RS", number 38/19), at the constitutive session of the second convocation of the Board of Directors held on 11 August 2023, the Board of Directors of the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia adopts this

Program of cooperation with the Serbian Scientific Diaspora - Joint Research Projects –

DIASPORA 2023 - Act on objectives, method of realisation and conditions of project financing

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# INTRODUCTORY PROVISIONS

# INTRODUCTION

**Article 1**

This Act regulates the objectives of the Cooperation with the Serbian Scientific Diaspora Support Programme - Joint Research Projects (hereinafter: The Programme) and the projects within this Programme (hereinafter: the Project), the conditions for announcing and the procedure for conducting public calls within the Programme, and in particular the procedure and conditions for the submission of Project Proposals (hereinafter: the Proposal), the Proposal evaluation procedure, the Proposal evaluation criteria, project implementation monitoring procedure, the procedure for evaluating the projects results, financing conditions, as well as the rights and obligations of the project funds beneficiaries.

**Article 2**

The Programme supports basic and applied research in all scientific fields. Projects within this Programme do not have predetermined topics.

This Programme of general interest for the Republic of Serbia is planned and implemented in accordance with the Law on the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia (hereinafter: the Law) and in accordance with all other regulations in the field of scientific research and innovation activities.

# PROGRAMME AND PROJECT OBJECTIVES

**Article 3**

The Programme goals include: improvement of scientific excellence and relevance of research in Serbia by establishing connections with Serbian diaspora researchers using their competences and support through joint projects in the country and abroad, as well as the development of international cooperation, the transfer of knowledge and technology and the inclusion of the scientific diaspora in scientific research and innovations in the Republic of Serbia.

The Programme allows researchers to define their own research programmes, to establish their own teams and cooperate with appropriate research and development institutions both in Serbia and globally.

The expected results of the projects are new scientific knowledge, methodologies, intellectual property, innovations, encouraging investments attraction in the scientific system of the Republic of Serbia. The results are presented through scientific publications and publication of joint scientific papers, patents, development of new services, development and commercialization of products, technology transfer, intellectual property, preparation and submission of joint project proposals for applying to foreign funds or other potential sources of funding for scientific research.

The project should enable the further development of the research goals determined in the project proposal and establish the grounds for long-term cooperation with researchers from the diaspora, foreign experts and the foreign SROs.

# CONDITIONS FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE PUBLIC CALL

## Project Lead Institution and Project Participants

**Article 4**

Accredited research and development institutions in the Republic of Serbia have the right to participate in this programme (hereinafter: SRO) either in the capacity of Project Lead Institution or Project Participant.

The Project Team consists of the Principal Investigator and Team Members who meet the requirements of this Act.

The Lead Institution is the SRO in which the Principal Investigator is employed, while the other SROs are Project Participants.

## Principal Investigator

**Article 5**

The Principal Investigator (thereinafter: PI) is a person meeting the following requirements:

* holds the scientific title of Doctor of Science, published, peer-reviewed scientific papers and other scientific research results, demonstrating his/her qualification for independent scientific research work with his/her overall scientific work;
* was awarded a scientific title or an equivalent teaching title according to the regulations on higher education;
* is or will be employed, in an accredited research and development institution (hereinafter: SRO)[[1]](#footnote-1) for the duration of the Project, which is the Project Proposal Lead Institution, whereby employment in that SRO on a monthly basis amounts to a minimum of 50% full-time engagement for the duration of the project.

A person can be the Principal Investigator for only one Project Proposal within the various programmes of this Public Call.

The Principal Investigator must be engaged on the project for a minimum of 30% of his/her full-time engagement for the entire duration of the Project implementation.

## Project Team

**Article 6**

The Project Team consists of two groups.

**The first group** consists of researchers from the Republic of Serbia, headed by the Principal Investigator.

**The second group** consists of the researchers from outside the Republic of Serbia from one or more foreign SROs. Each participating foreign SRO, must include one member of the diaspora, employed in that foreign SRO, who will coordinate project activities on behalf of its SRO. The second group can consist of several researchers from the diaspora who are employed in the same foreign SRO, or one researcher from the diaspora with team members who are employed in the same SRO as the member from the diaspora. This applies to all SRO Project participants from abroad individually.

## Team Members from the Republic of Serbia

**Article 7**

In one Project, the participation of Team Members who are employed in various accredited SROs in the Republic of Serbia is permitted, whereas the Project Lead is the SRO in which the Principal Investigator is employed.

Each Project Team Member must meet the following requirements:

* All Team Members must have a valid title at the moment of Project Proposal submission.
  + The exception regarding the requirement that all team members must have a valid title at the time of submitting the Project Proposal, i.e. on the Public Call closing date are the persons who are PhD students and who have never been elected for a teaching or research position until that point. They may apply as team members even though they do not have a title, while the SRO is obliged to nominate their appointment to a title as soon as they receive information about the acceptance of the Project Proposal. When preparing the budget for persons referred hereto, the fee is calculated according to the title they will acquire by the commencement of Project implementation.
* Project Team Members must be employed in an accredited SRO in the Republic of Serbia[[2]](#footnote-2) during his/her engagement in the Project implementation, whereby employment in that SRO on a monthly basis is equal to a minimum of 50% full-time engagement for the entire duration of his/her engagement on the Project;
* All Project Team Members must have a valid title during the entire engagement in the Project implementation. If a Project Team Member loses his title, he is not eligible for participating in the project as a team member.

The same person may be a Team Member in only one Project Proposal within this Public Call.

There can be minimum three team members in the first group. The maximum number of team members is not limited. In one Project, the participation of team members who are employed in various accredited SROs in the Republic of Serbia is permitted, whereas the Project Lead is the SRO in which the Principal Investigator is employed.

In case of engagement of a person in various Science Fund programmes a Project Team Member or Principal Investigator, such person must comply with the legally prescribed restrictions related to engagement in Science Fund programmes, as well as the conditions prescribed in the Acts of individual programmes.

## 

## Engagement of Team Members from the Republic of Serbia

**Article 8**

A Project Team Member with full-time employment (including teaching and research, support through institutional or other types of funding) cannot be engaged by more than 30% of his full-time work per month on projects financed by the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia (including various programmes).

A Project Team Member can be project-financed, that is, employed and financed from the proposed Project up to 100% full-time engagement in accordance with other engagements and the Labour Law. A person who is engaged on the Project with 100% working time cannot have any other engagement in SRO.

Project Team Members may be engaged during the entire duration of the Project or only during certain time intervals, depending on the Project needs and in accordance with the proposed budget.

A person who is not employed by the SRO at the time of the Proposal submission may be included in the proposed Project as a team member only if the Principal Investigator and SRO submit a signed statement[[3]](#footnote-3) that, in the event that the Proposal is approved for financing, that person will be employed by that SRO for the duration of the Project, i.e. during the proposed period of engagement for that person, in accordance with the terms of this Act.

## Team Members outside the Republic of Serbia

**Article 9**

Researchers from outside the Republic of Serbia form the second mandatory group within the Project Team according to the propositions of this Programme.

The second group of the Project Team must include at least one researcher from the diaspora employed in SRO abroad, who is also a leader of a group from outside the Republic of Serbia. Other members of the second group may be researchers from the diaspora or foreign researchers employed in the same SRO abroad as a leader of a group from outside the Republic of Serbia. This applies to all SRO Project participants from abroad individually. There can be minimum three team members in the second group. The maximum number of team members is not limited.

The term Diaspora includes the citizens of the Republic of Serbia living abroad and Serbian nationals who are emigrants from the territory of the Republic of Serbia and their descendants.[[4]](#footnote-4)

A researcher from the diaspora who is a leader of a group from outside the Republic of Serbia must fulfil the following conditions:

* holds the scientific title of Doctor of Science, published scientific papers and other scientific research results, demonstrating his/her qualification for independent scientific research work with his/her overall scientific work;
* was awarded a scientific title or an equivalent teaching title according to the regulations on higher education, according to the regulations of the state in which he/she is employed;
* is employed and will be employed for the duration of the project in a scientific research organization abroad.

Team Members outside the Republic of Serbia (second group) are not entitled to remuneration for their engagement in the Project from the Project's budget funds\*, however, the costs of travel and stay in Serbia for project activities and knowledge exchange may be financed from the Project's funds.

## External Associates

**Article 10**

Exceptionally and if necessary for the successful implementation of the Project Proposal, technologists, engineers, entrepreneurs, and other experts who can influence the success of the project and have more than 5 years of relevant experience in the field of relevance to the project may be included as foreign collaborators. These experts are not entitled to remuneration for their work on the project, however, the costs of travel and stay in Serbia for project activities and knowledge exchange may be financed from the Project's funds.

## Project Partners

**Article 11**

The Project Proposal may be additionally supported by business partners. Support from business partners is implemented in the form of financial co-financing from the businesses (recommended), or support in the form of other resources such as equipment, consumables, data, available infrastructure for project implementation, or additional expertise required for the implementation of appropriate activities.

Project Partners can be the companies from Serbia or abroad, as well as other legal entities that are relevant for the implementation of the project topic.

Partners referred to under paragraph 1 hereto are not entitled to remuneration from the Project budget.

The Project Team that has partners in the Project implementation shall prove this by submitting a contract regulating the type of support, rights and obligations related to the project results. Specifically, it shall describe: the role and intellectual, financial and any other contribution of the partner, the agreement on the ownership of intellectual property that applies to the results derived from the project, as well as the obligation that the partnership agreement will not hinder the Principal Investigator from fulfilling his obligations according to the agreement with the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia.

## Project Duration

**Article 12**

The duration of the Project is up to two years (24 months).

## Gantt Chart

**Article 13**

The Plan of Project Activities (Gantt Chart) is prepared in such a way as to show the plan of project activities with time schedule for the realization of each specific activity and the participation of members of the Project Team in individual activities.

The percentage of a Project Team Member engagement must be in accordance with the allowed percentage of engagement for each specific team member and Principal Investigator, according to the rules of this Programme.

## Budget

**Article 14**

The maximum amount of the budget is EUR 200,000 in Serbian dinar equivalent per Project.

The programme budget is specified in the Public Call.

Co-financing of project activities from other sources, including co-financing by an SRO in which a leader of a group from outside the Republic of Serbia is employed, will be considered an advantage.

## Eligible Expenses

**Article 15**

The following categories of Project costs are eligible for financing under the Programme:

1. **Fees for Team Members** 
   * the total costs of team members' fees including all fees established by the SRO’s internal acts with associated taxes and contributions;
2. **Procurement Costs**
   * **Equipment and Consumables**
     + equipment, software, consumables and other resources necessary for the implementation of the Project,
     + contingency expenses for equipment and consumables;
   * **Travels**
     + short-term trips in the country and abroad (up to 28 days per trip) that are necessary for the implementation of the Project;
     + trips for participation in national and international conferences of importance for the project implementation;
     + travel expenses to Serbia of researchers from the Second Group of the Project Team in SRO Project Participant from Serbia for a maximum duration of two months, for the purpose of implementing project activities and knowledge exchange. For this type of engagement, fees are envisaged in the form of accommodation and stay expenses or fees for employment\*;

* **Dissemination and visibility** 
  + Costs of publication of papers in journals,[[5]](#footnote-5) as well as in the open access journals, participation in conferences, publication of scientific monographs,
  + Organization of conferences and seminars and other costs of disseminating the results of the Project;
  + Patent application and intellectual property protection arising as a result of Project activities and the related costs;

1. **Costs of services and subcontractors**
   * external services of all individuals and legal entities[[6]](#footnote-6) required for the research and implementation of the Project, including services necessary for technology transfer, commercialization, engagement of experts for research and development and advisers in the field of the project;

**4) Indirect costs**

* + Compensation of SROs employing Project participants for administrative and other costs related to the Project;
  + The fee of SROs from abroad employing the Second Group Project Team Members for expenses related to the implementation of project activities (*bench fee*);
  + External audit costs at the end of the Project implementation period;
  + Other costs, such as bank guarantee costs, import costs, customs, postage, etc.

\* During the stay and work of the researchers from the Second Group of the Project Team in the Republic of Serbia and SRO from Serbia who are Project Participants, it is possible to provide remunerations for these team members in one of the following two ways in the appropriate budget categories:

* in the form of financing the costs of accommodation and per diems (envisage costs within the category Travel costs), or
* in the form of an employment or temporary service contract, in accordance with the contract concluded between these team members and Serbian SRO, which is a Project Participant, and for the activities that will be implemented during their stay in Serbia and their work in such Serbian SRO (in this case, costs should be envisaged within the category Costs for the Services and Subcontractors).

## Project Budget Distribution by Cost Categories

**Article 16**

Taking into account the specificity of each Project, the distribution of the Project Budget by cost categories should be such that it reflects the Project objectives and must be clearly justified in accordance with those objectives.

In the structure of the Project's budget, the costs of services and subcontractors referred to under Article 15 can contribute with a maximum of 15% of the total budget.

For the promotion and visibility of the project results, including publications, seminars, lectures, science fairs, or other means of promotion, it is necessary to provide from 5% to 10% of the total project budget.

Indirect costs referred to under Article 15 amount to 20% of the total planned costs of fees for Project Team Members and procurement costs. Indirect costs need not be justified when reporting, however, such costs must be used in accordance with the law, the rules of this programme, as well as in accordance with the SRO bylaws.

### Remuneration for team members

**Article 17**

The maximum allowed remuneration for the Principal Investigator and Team Member depends on the title and the percentage of involvement in the Project on a monthly basis, and according to the maximum net monthly fees for participation in the project specified in the document "Amount of remuneration (earnings and fees) of researchers financed through programmes of the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia", which was published on the website of the Science Fund ([*www.fondzanauku.gov.rs*](http://www.fondzanauku.gov.rs)).

The highest allowed remuneration for a Principal Investigator/Team Member corresponds to the maximum net amount of remuneration envisaged for the title of that person, and it is scaled proportionally to the percentage of his/her monthly engagement in the Project.

The engagement of team members can be budgeted with lower amounts. Also, it is possible to envisage different remunerations for persons with same title, in accordance with the experience and skills of those persons.

The remuneration model is determined by the SROs, in accordance with the Law and SRO’s internal acts.

### Equipment and Consumables

**Article 18**

The costs of equipment and consumables can be used for the procurement of equipment, software, consumables, as well as other resources that are necessary for the implementation of the Project. When preparing the budget, prices are planned and reported VAT inclusive.

### Contingency Expenses for equipment and consumables

**Article 19**

Contingencies can only be used for additional costs of equipment and consumables and/or a change in the amount of the envisaged equipment and consumables.

Contingencies can amount to 2% of the corresponding budget procurement category.

In case this cost category remains unspent until the end of the project implementation, these funds, as a rule, within the last quarter, can be used for professional development of young researchers engaged in the project, as well as short-term travel of young researchers for the purpose of training. In addition, these funds can be used for the realization of research activities of young researchers, as well as for the procurement of equipment and materials for young researchers (computers, etc.) who are members of the team.

### Travel, dissemination and visibility of the project

**Article 20**

The costs of publication, travel, organization of workshops, meetings and seminars, dissemination and visibility of the project incurred during the implementation of the Project are allowed.

Publication costs are accepted as project results only if the publications were published after the commencement with project implementation. Only publications that have clearly indicated the support of the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia, according to the rules of the Agreement, will be considered as the results of the Project, Programme and the support of the Science Fund.

### Services and subcontractors

**Article 21**

Subcontractors can be legal or natural persons.

SROs participating in the Project cannot be service providers, or persons employed in SROs participating in the Project. \*

The highest allowed fee for a natural person engaged for the performance of services corresponds to the market amount of the person's earnings for the specified service and is scaled proportionally to the percentage of his/her monthly engagement in the Project. In the case of hiring a natural person for specific services, the remuneration of the natural person is calculated over the market price for the procurement of a specific type of service.

When planning and procuring services from this category, it is necessary to adhere to the Law on Public Procurement, and prices must be planned and stated with all associated taxes and contributions.

### Financial compensation to SROs for administrative and other costs related to the Project

**Article 22**

Compensation for the SRO employing team members should be allocated for administrative and other costs related to the Project.

Budgeting of technical or support staff of the SRO is possible within this category, which should be calculated based on the salary they receive in the SRO at the moment of submission of the Proposal, scaled to the percentage of their monthly engagement in project activities. If more than one SRO participates in the Proposal, this cost category should be allocated proportionally in accordance with the total requested budget for each SRO, unless the Principal Investigator and all SROs participating in the Project make a different agreement, with a written explanation provided in the Project Proposal Budget.

### External audit costs at the end of the Project implementation period

**Article 23**

In the budget, the Principal Investigator must envisage the cost of the external audit at the end of the project implementation period, which shall be borne by the Lead Institution.

The external audit is performed at the level of the entire Project and includes the audit of project documentation and financial management of the Project at the levels of all SROs participating in the Project.

### Ineligible Expenses

**Article 24**

The expenses not to be considered by the Science Fund for funding include, but are not limited to:

* Adaptation and furnishing of SRO premises and any construction or other works;
* Repair, servicing or maintenance of existing SRO equipment, unless that equipment is required for the Project and its necessity is explained and documented in the Project Proposal;
* Payment of interest or existing debt to any person, including such obligations incurred or assumed during the consideration of the Project application or after the approval of the Project financing;
* Costs for items that are already financed through another Programme, entity, or SRO;
* Costs/participation in the costs of procurement, lease, sublease or adaptation of land, buildings and/or other immovable property, including vehicles and movable property and equipment not intended for scientific research activities related to the implementation of the Project.

# APPLICATION TO PUBLIC CALL AND PREPARATION OF PROJECT PROPOSALS

## Public Call

**Article 25**

The first Public Call for the application of research and development projects within the framework of the Programme (hereinafter: "Public Call") shall include:

* Full name of the Programme;
* Programme Goals;
* Duration of the Projects;
* Conditions that must be met by the Principal Investigator and Team Members;
* Total budget available for the Programme implementation per Public Call;
* The maximum budget of individual Projects;
* Eligible categories of expenses for financing by the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia;
* Method of Proposal submission;
* Deadline for submitting Proposals;
* List of necessary documentation to be enclosed with the duly and complete application of the Proposal;
* Method and criteria for evaluation of Proposals;
* Expected duration of the evaluation procedure of the proposed Projects;
* Reporting requirements;
* Other data of relevance for the Programme implementation and realization.

The public call shall be published on the website of the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia ([*www.fondzanauku.gov.rs*](http://www.fondzanauku.gov.rs)).

## Project Proposal - Mandatory Content

**Article 26**

Mandatory elements of the Proposal are as follows:

* Title, acronym, scientific field (primary, secondary and tertiary), abstract and keywords of the Project (in English);
* Data related to the Principal Investigator, Team Members, SROs participating in the Project (in English);
* Project Description Part A and Part B based on the form provided in the Project documentation (in English, completed in accordance with the Instructions and the form provided);
* Total Project Budget (in English, completed in accordance with the Instructions and the form included in the documentation);
* Gantt Chart in English, completed according to the Instructions and the form included in the documentation);
* Environmental and Social Impact Screening Questionnaire;
* Ethical consent (if applicable for the Project);
* Annexes: statements of the SRO, joint statement of the Team and evidence of the compliance with the requirements for the Principal Investigator and Project Team Members stipulated by the Programme, in Serbian or English, prepared according to the Instructions and forms from the documentation, Statement of foreign Team Members and foreign SRO confirming agreement with the conditions of the Programme, participation in the project and the contract model of the project implementation, Statement on co-financing if the co-financing of the project is provided (issued by the source of co-financing, and in the case of participation of business partners, the Consortium Agreement on partnership, co-financing and regulation of rights to project results and intellectual property).

## Documentation Preparation

**Article 27**

The documentation, which is a mandatory element of the Project Proposal, is prepared in accordance with this Act, the Instructions for the Preparation and Submission of Project Proposals (hereinafter: "Instructions"), the Form and notes in the forms, which are published on the website of the Science Fund of the RS.

## Application to Public Call and Preparation of Project Proposals

**Article 28**

The application for the Public Call is submitted in electronic form exclusively, through the Portal for the application of scientific projects of the Science Fund, with the documentation specified in the Public Call and according to the Instructions published on the Science Fund website.

The proposal must be complete and contain all necessary attachments and must be prepared in accordance with the Instructions. Otherwise, the Project Proposal is excluded from further evaluation.

The proposal is submitted by the proposed Principal Investigator.

**Article 29**

When submitting the Proposal, a Statement signed by the SRO’s authorized persons and/or the Principal Investigator is enclosed confirming the fulfilment of the required conditions for the Principal Investigator and Project Team Members, signed under the penalty of perjury. If the Project is approved for financing, the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia may request evidence of the fulfilment of these conditions.

If, after the approval of the project, it is determined that this or other information from the Project Proposal is not true (data related to participants or SRO), the project will be disqualified, and the person who submitted the project will be barred from applying for the SF projects for the next two years.

The Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia reserves the right not to allow applications within the Fund's programme to those researchers whose applications contain incorrect data or whose content is formulated in a way calculated to lead to wrong conclusions, up to two years after such an event. If it is determined that a researcher has violated the code of ethics, the Ethics Committee, formed by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development, can propose a ban on funding on the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia research and development projects for that researcher for a period of up to five years.[[7]](#footnote-7)

**Article 30**

The Principal Investigator may submit a Proposal for only one Project within the Public Call. The Principal Investigator who submitted a Proposal for one Project may not be listed as a Project Team Member in other proposed Projects within the same Public Call.

A person not participating in the capacity of Principal Investigator registered for the Public Call, may have the capacity of a Project Team Member on one Project only within the same Public Call.

The number of Proposals per one SRO is not limited in the Public Call.

# PROJECT PROPOSALS EVALUATION PROCEDURE

**Article 31**

Received Proposals with competitive documentation are verified and evaluated through a procedure consisting of an administrative check and two stages of evaluation.

In the first stage of evaluation, independent reviewers (hereinafter: Reviewer) evaluate the Proposals of all submitted projects. A rankings list of Proposals is compiled based on the descending order of points assigned by the Reviewers to those Proposals, and based on it, a Preliminary Ranking List of project proposals is made.

In the second stage of evaluation, the Programme Board for Project Evaluation (hereinafter: The Programme Board) evaluates the Proposals from the Preliminary Ranking List and compiles the Proposal for the Final Ranking List.

The evaluation of the Proposal is carried out according to the procedure set out by the relevant Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia acts and in accordance with the criteria specified in the Programme.

**Article 32**

Reviewers are, as a rule, foreign experts, and exceptionally domestic experts with an internationally recognized professional career. The Reviewers are selected by way of matching their areas of expertise with the scientific field of the proposed Project, as a rule based on the key words specified in the Proposal.

Programme Board Members are international experts or members of the Serbian scientific diaspora with international experience.

The selection and appointment of the Programme Board Members is regulated by the relevant acts of the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia.

## Administrative Check

**Article 33**

All received Proposals undergo an administrative check, which includes a review of the documentation submitted to the Public Call, in order to determine:

* the timeliness of the submitted Proposal in relation to the deadline set in the announced Public Call;
* technical correctness and completeness of the Proposal documentation, including all enclosed appendices, confirmations and signatures;
* fulfilment of the general conditions of the competition prescribed in the Public Call within the Programme, including formal compliance with the criteria for the Principal Investigator, Team Members and SRO.

A Proposal that has passed the administrative check is then referred to the first stage of the evaluation procedure.

The Science Fund may request clarification or additional information from the applicant if it deems it necessary to perform a complete administrative check. If the Proposal did not meet the criteria of the administrative review, the Science Fund excludes the Proposal from further evaluation and informs the applicant of the Public Call about the reasons for rejecting the Proposal in the administrative review procedure.

## Project Evaluation - General Rules

**Article 34**

In the evaluation process, the Proposal grades are given numerically and descriptively, according to the appropriate form available in the Programme documentation on the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia website.

The evaluation criteria are:

* **Excellence** - quality, relevance and topicality of the proposed topic, scientific grounding innovation, realistic objectives, significance of the research, applicability of the research results and the perspective of the proposed research, assessment of the implementation of open scientific practice in the proposed methodology, assessment of the competence of the Principal Investigator and other Project Team Members;
* **Impact** - contribution to science, businesses and society in the Republic of Serbia, the impact of scientific research on businesses, society, climate changes, the environment, health care, education and other aspects of social development at the international and national level, the effectiveness of the proposed measures for the promotion and visibility of the Project and application of the Project results, assessment of whether the scientific research clearly identifies potential stakeholders and users who will be affected by the Project;
* **Realization** - realistic effect of the implementation plan, possible risks and measures for risks mitigation, realistic and balanced budget, availability of existing resources, additional project financing provided, including co-financing by SRO participants from abroad, assessment of the defined roles of project team members and partners, as well as the complementarity of their expertise with the project topic.

## First stage of evaluation

**Article 35**

In the first stage of evaluation, each Project Proposal is evaluated by Reviewers.

The Reviewer evaluates each question both numerically (giving from 1 to 5 points) and descriptively. The Reviewer gives an explicit recommendation whether he/she supports the Proposal or not.

At the end of the reviews, they are summed up and the mean ratings of the reviews for each criterion and the overall mean rating are calculated.

In the event that the highest and lowest total score given by the Reviewers differs by more than 30 points, a discrepancy is noted, and the project is referred to the consensus-building procedure during which the Reviewers can change or confirm the originally submitted score.

The maximum score that a Reviewer can give is 100 points, in accordance with the evaluation criteria from Table 2 of this Act. In order for the Proposal to pass the Reviewers' evaluation, the number of points assigned to the average score for each evaluation criterion must not be lower than the minimum number of points specified in Table 2 of this Act and the total average score must not be lower than 70 points.

Table 2 - Criteria for Project evaluation; maximum (and minimum) number of points.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Criteria** | **First degree (points)** |
| **Excellence** | **50** (min. **30**) |
| **Impact** | **30** (min. **18**) |
| **Realization** | **20** (min. **12**) |
| **Total** | **100** (min. **70**) |

Upon completion of the first stage of evaluation, each Principal Investigator will receive a notification about the evaluation result.

## Forming Preliminary Ranking List

**Article 36**

Before the start of the second stage of evaluation, a preliminary ranking list of Project Proposals is drawn up, based on the ranking list of all submitted Project Proposals, arranged in descending order of the value of the reviewers' evaluation after the first stage of evaluation. The Preliminary ranking list of Proposals contains only the highest ranked Proposals that have met the criteria from Table 2 hereto and whose total budget, cumulatively, does not exceed twice the amount of the Programme budget.

After the first stage of evaluation, all Principal Investigators who are on the Preliminary Ranking List have the opportunity to submit to the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia a short written response (up to 500 words) with comments on the results of the first stage of evaluation, which are then referred to the Programme Board and used during the second stage of evaluation.

The answer should only include the facts from the Project Proposal that the Reviewers did not notice and/or that are contrary to the statements in the review.

## Second stage of evaluation

**Article 37**

In the second stage of evaluation, the Programme Board for Project Evaluation (hereinafter: The Programme Board) evaluates the Proposals from the Preliminary Ranking List and compiles the Proposal for the Final Ranking List. The evaluation of the Proposal is carried out according to the procedure set out by the relevant Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia acts and in accordance with the criteria specified in the Programme.

The quality of the project is evaluated according to the criteria of scientific excellence, impact and realization, taking into account the objectives and conditions of the programme. Projects are initially classified into three groups based on the position on the preliminary ranking list, i.e. the grade after the first stage of evaluation:

* group I – the highest ranked Project Proposals (30% of the highest ranked Project Proposals);
* group II – medium-ranked Project Proposals (next 40% of Project Proposals);
* group III – the lowest ranked Project Proposals (the last 30% of Project Proposals from the Preliminary Ranking List).

Each project from the Preliminary Ranking List is assigned to one member of the respective panel who becomes the Rapporteur for that Project. The Rapporteurs review the project proposals and the results of the first stage of evaluation and report to the members of the Programme Board based on that.

If the Rapporteur and panel members have no objections to the Project Proposals from group I, nor to the results or content of the evaluation from the first stage of the evaluation, the Proposals from group I are proposed for financing in the order found. If the Rapporteur believes that the group I project proposal has important shortcomings or that there are inconsistencies in the results of the first stage of evaluation, he will inform the panel members thereof, i.e. the Programme Board and propose a more detailed analysis and discussion of that Project Proposal in consultations with the Reviewers of the Project Proposal for clarification. This additional quality check of the project can result in the confirmation of quality, after which the project remains in the line for funding, or in a reasoned decision on a new evaluation result and ranking.

If the Rapporteur or Panel Members, i.e. the Programme Board has no objections to the scores of Project Proposals from group III, nor to the results or content of the evaluation from the first stage of evaluation, then the Proposals from group III are not proposed for funding. If the Reporter believes that the group III Project Proposal has significant qualities, or that there are inconsistencies or oversights in the results of the first stage of evaluation, he will inform the panel members thereof, i.e. The Programme Board and propose a more detailed analysis and discussion of that Project Proposal. If necessary, it is possible to consult the Reviewers of the Project Proposal for clarification. This additional quality check of the project can result in the confirmation of quality with a statement of grounds, after which the Project remains in the line for funding, or in a reasoned decision on a new evaluation result and ranking.

After checking the projects at the suggestion of the panel members and possible changes in the Preliminary Ranking List, the list of projects is updated by groups, as explained above.

The focus of the analysis of the Programme Board is on all projects from group II, which are analysed in detail and discussed during the work of the Programme Board, after which they are ranked among themselves, and a decision is made on the projects that will be supported for financing.

The Programme Board can ask the Principal Investigator to rebalance the proposed budget of the Project as a whole or in individual items. In addition, the Programme Board can request from the Principal Investigator to correct and/or clarify key points of the Proposal, or another type of modification of the project proposal with all associated elements.

## Draft Final Ranking List

**Article 38**

At the end of the work of the Programme Board, based on the results of the second stage of evaluation, as well as expert analysis of environmental and social impacts and ethical checks, Project Proposals are ranked and classified into categories A, AB, B, C and D according to project quality and project budgets.

Table 3 - Results of the second stage of evaluation

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Project rating (category) | Description\* |
| А | The highest ranked Project Proposals after the second stage of evaluation with a budget that makes up 20% of the Programme budget, and which are **supported for financing**, |
| AB | The next ranked Project Proposals after the second stage of evaluation with a budget that makes up 40% of the Programme budget, which are **supported for financing**, |
| B | The following ranked Project Proposals after the second stage of evaluation with a budget that makes the remaining 40% of the Programme budget, which are **supported for financing**, |
| C | The Project Proposals ranked below the Project budget limit after the second stage of evaluation, which are **not supported for financing**, |
| D | Projects where a deficiency or irregularity has been identified, due to which they cannot be supported for financing. |

\* *In the event that the budget limit that determines the difference between two categories does not include the entire number of projects, the classification of projects into categories is performed by rounding up to the full number of projects, taking into account that the sum of the budgets of projects from categories A, AB and B cannot exceed the available budget.*

The total required budget for all Projects accepted for financing cannot exceed the total budget of the Programme defined by the Public Call.

**Article 39**

In accordance with the rules from Table 3, the Programme Board creates a Draft Final Ranking List of projects proposed for funding under the Public Call based on this Programme and submits it to the Science Fund Scientific Council, together with the Report on the Programme Board's work.

The Scientific Council considers the Proposal of the Final Ranking List together with the Programme Board Report and submits the Proposal of the Final Ranking List of projects proposed for funding, along with its opinion on procedural correctness, to the Science Fund Managing Board for decision-making.

**Article 40**

Based on the Final Ranking List Proposal of projects proposed for funding through the Public Call under this Programme and the opinion of the Scientific Council of the Science Fund referred to under the previous article, the Science Fund Managing Board issues a decision on the adoption of the Final List of Projects approved for financing with the funds of the Science Fund under the Public Call based on this Programme, as well as on the amount of funds allocated to each Project that has been approved for funding.

**Article 41**

After the decision of the Science Fund Managing Board on the adoption of the Final Ranking List of Projects, the Science Fund publishes the final lists of proposals approved for funding on its website.

Upon completion of the second stage of evaluation, each Principal Investigator will receive a notification about its outcome.

## Filing complaint

**Article 42**

Applicants of Proposals under this Programme have the right to submit a fact-based complaint to the result:

a) administrative checks specified under Article 31 hereto (referring to obvious omissions, oversights or material errors on the part of the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia);

b) the evaluation procedure in the second stage of evaluation (referring to obvious omissions, oversights or material errors on the part of the Programme Committee).

The complaint is submitted by the applicant in writing on the form of the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia, in 500 words maximum, within five days from the date of receipt of the notification from the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia on the outcome of the administrative check/evaluation results.

The content of the objection must be limited to clarifying the data that already exists in the Proposal and cannot in any way suggest or imply a change in the content of the proposed Project in any segment.

The Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia will submit an official response to the objection within 30 days from the date of receiving the timely objection.

# PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

## Agreement

**Article 43**

For Proposals that have been approved for funding, the Principal Investigator, Project Lead Institution and Project Participants sign an Agreement with the Science Fund.

## Payments and Reporting

**Article 44**

The Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia pays funds to SRO, in accordance with the approved budget of the Project and the signed Agreement.

The Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia makes the first payment in advance, within 45 days from the date of signing the Agreement.

Payments are made in accordance with the Payment Schedule, which is an integral part of the Agreement. Equipment and consumables are purchased, as a rule, at the beginning of the Project implementation.

All payments are made in dinars (RSD), to a special SRO current account (or a special sub-account) that is used only for the purposes of the Project within this Program.

The Principal Investigator is obliged to provide the Science Fund with information on the progress of the Project on a six-monthly basis, prepared on the Science Fund's forms. No accompanying documentation is submitted with the information on the progress of the Project, and the PI and authorized persons of the Project Lead and Participants are responsible for the truthfulness of the data and the intended and legal spending of funds.

The Principal Investigator submits to the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia the Annual Report on the progress of the Project at the end of each Project year, and the Final Report of the Project upon completion of the Project implementation. The reports are prepared on the prescribed forms, in accordance with the instructions and deadlines set by the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia. For each reporting period, the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia will check in detail the complete administrative and financial documentation of a certain number of projects, which are selected by random sampling. A random sample for each reporting period will include, as a rule, 10% of approved projects.

The Principal Investigator is obliged to obtain and keep in the archive all the accompanying administrative and financial documentation of the Project and, if requested, submit it to the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia for inspection and verification. The Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia may ask for inspection and verification of documentation at any time in the duration of the Project.

The Principal Investigator is obliged to provide appropriate information and documents for the external audit of the Project. The Principal Investigator and SRO ensure that the use of funds is in accordance with the law and the agreed conditions and obligations. SRO will pay funds to third parties in accordance with the implementation of activities on the Project.

## Procurement of goods and services

**Article 45**

Procurement of goods and services related to the implementation of the Project, the financing of which is approved under the Program, is carried out in accordance with the law and the Agreement on the financing of the implementation of the scientific research Project of the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia (hereinafter: the Agreement) entered into by the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia and the Project Lead Institution and Project Participants, and in accordance with the procedures required by the funding source, which will be specified in the Agreement.

The Principal Investigator is obliged to submit the appropriate documentation related to the completed procurements from paragraph 1 of this Article to the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia in accordance with the Program, Agreement or upon written request of the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia.

## Project Management

**Article 46**

The Principal Investigator is obliged to manage the Project conscientiously, responsibly and in accordance with the regulations governing science and research, environmental protection, protection of intellectual property, protection of personal data, prevention of conflicts of interest and other regulations of importance for the ethical and legal implementation of the Project activities.

**Article 47**

The Principal Investigator must be engaged on the Project during the entire duration of the Project. Members of the Project Team may be engaged in the entire duration of the Project or only during certain time intervals, depending on the needs of the Project and in accordance with the proposed budget.

If during the implementation of the Project it is necessary for the Principal Investigator to replace a member of the Project Team with another member or to change the percentage of his involvement in the Project, the Principal Investigator shall submit to the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia an explained proposal on the change and for this he must obtain the written consent of the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia before as soon as the change is made. A member of the Project Team who replaces the previous one must fulfil all the requirements from Article 7 of this Act.

**Article 48**

During the implementation of the Project, if there is a justified and objective need, the Principal Investigator can propose changes to the Project budget within the same budget category, as well as changes to the Project budget between budget categories. All proposed changes must be for the needs of the realization of Project activities and in accordance with the rules of the Program regarding the allowed costs.

**Article 49**

The rights based on all new intellectual property and know-how, which may be created during the implementation of the Project, belong to SRO, according to the regulations governing scientific and research activities. In the event that members of different SROs participate in the Project, i.e. members of the Project Team who are employed in different SROs, it is necessary for the Lead Institution and Participants of the Project, and all members of the Project Team to agree and mutually regulate the relations and rights to intellectual property that will be created during the implementation of the Project, The documentation that regulates relations within the consortium and rights to intellectual property that will arise during the duration of the Project, must be submitted to the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia when submitting the Project proposal.

The commercialization of the results is realized based on the law and regulations of the SROs from the Republic of Serbia, which are participants in the project, however, it can be defined differently, in accordance with the needs of the project implementation, which must be indicated in the project proposal and accordingly foreseen in the corresponding consortium agreement. SRO is obliged to ensure intellectual property rights and know-how in contracts concluded with any third party.

The principles of open science apply to the results of the Project, in accordance with the Open Science Platform of the Ministry responsible for scientific and research activities (hereinafter: the Ministry).

**Article 50**

The Principal Investigator is obliged to manage the project conscientiously, responsibly and in accordance with the regulations governing science and research, protection of intellectual property, protection of personal data, prevention of conflicts of interest, protection of the environment and other regulations of importance for the ethical and legal realization of the project activities.

The Principal Investigator and Team Members are obliged to implement the Project activities in accordance with the standards for environmental protection and social impact defined in the Environmental and Social Management Framework within the „Serbia Accelerating Innovation and Growth Entrepreneurship Project” - SAIGE Project, which is supported by the World Bank (Official Gazette of the RS" - International Agreements, No. 3/20).

## Monitoring and evaluation of projects during implementation

**Article 51**

The Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia regularly supervises and monitors the implementation of the Project by evaluating submitted reports, monitoring visits to Project participants, direct monitoring of individual Project activities, as well as evaluating Final Reports on Project results. If it is established that the funds of the Project have been spent inappropriately, the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia reserves the right to suspend the implementation and financing of the Project, demand the return of the funds, and undertake other activities that it deems appropriate.

The Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia can periodically organize an audit of the expenditure of funds during the implementation of projects, in accordance with the acts of the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia.

**Article 52**

In order to monitor and evaluate the Programme, the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia can organize an independent analysis of the beneficiaries of the funds during the duration of the Project, as well as at the end of the implementation of the Program by Public Call, based on clearly defined key points and results. In order to achieve the stated goal, the beneficiaries of the funds provide the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia with all the necessary information and documentation and provide access to relevant locations and facilities.

**Article 53**

The achieved results of the Project are evaluated through annual, exceptional evaluation and evaluation at the end of the Project implementation. Evaluation may also include audit.

Project evaluation includes a comparison of the proposed and realized research objectives, achieved scientific results, evaluation of the realization of funds and other relevant indicators. If, during the implementation of the Project, it is established that the Project was not fully implemented according to the Proposal, the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia will inform the competent authorities within the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia about this. Based on the findings, a decision can be made to reduce the budget determined by the Agreement or to completely suspend the financing of the Project, including the initiation of a procedure for the return of funds received for non-purposeful or illegal use, or any other procedure considered appropriate.

## Project Results

**Article 54**

The achieved results of the Project are monitored and evaluated during the implementation of the Project in accordance with the rules of this Act. If necessary, the implementation and dedicated spending of funds in accordance with the approved budget of the Project can be evaluated on an exceptional basis at the initiative of the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia or based on a reasoned request from the SRO or the Principal Investigator.

For the purpose of evaluation, the Principal Investigator reports the results of the Project by submitting an appropriate report.

## External audit

**Article 55**

At the end of the implementation of the Project, the Project Lead Institution is obliged to organize an external audit at the cost of the Project, from the share of the budget planned within the Project Lead institution budget, and the findings and opinion of the authorized auditor are attached to the Final Report.

The external audit is performed at the level of the entire Project and includes the audit of the Project documentation and financial management of the Project of all SROs participating in the Project.

## Archives

**Article 56**

The Project Lead Institution and Project Participants form the Project archives, within which they keep accurate and regular records related to the implementation of the Project, using appropriate systems in accordance with accounting regulations, financial regulations and other regulations.

The Project archives must be available to the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia.

# PROMOTION AND VISIBILITY OF PROJECT RESULTS

**Article 57**

The obligation of the Principal Investigator is to ensure the promotion of the Project and the visibility of the results during the implementation of the Project by participating in conferences, publishing scientific publications, organizing gatherings and seminars, promotion in the media and on social networks, organizing visits to the Project Team and the laboratory and in other ways. Publication of papers in journals from the JCR list category M21 (or higher) is suggested, with the exception of research areas that do not have journals in this category (including journals that apply the principle of open science), as well as announcements at scientific international conferences, with a focus on announcements from scientific international conferences by invitation and announcements from international conferences that are printed in entirety.

In all papers published in journals and presented at conferences, the Principal Investigator and Team Members are obliged to state that the results stemmed from the Project financed by the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia, as defined by the Agreement.

The Principal Investigator and Team Members are obliged to document all joint project activities of cooperation, especially visits to partners from diaspora, or Team Members’ from abroad visits to Serbia, in the form of multimedia content, including short videos and photos.

The Principal Investigator is obliged to provide interested parties with access to the results of the Project at any time during the duration of the Project, as well as at least one year after the end of the Project.

Additional rules on visibility and announcements are defined in the Agreement.

It is recommended that the primary data collected during the implementation of the Project be systematized, structured and electronically formatted and that open access be made available (*open data*).

# FINAL PROVISIONS

**Article 58**

This Act shall enter into force on the eighth day from the date of its publication on the website of the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| The Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia | MANAGING BOARD |
|  | President |
|  | \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |
|  | Mihailo Vesović |

This Act is published on the website of the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia upon receipt of the decision of the Government of the Republic of Serbia 05 Number: 451-1033/2023-1 from 03th November 2023 on giving consent to the Program for exceptional projects of young researchers and scientists in the early stages of their career ("Official Gazette of RS", number 97/2023 of 03th November 2023).

1. If it is a researcher employed in an innovation centre (as a registered innovation organization in accordance with the regulations on scientific research activity, i.e. on science and research, whose founder is an accredited SRO), such organization may not be the Project Lead, nor can a person be appointed as Principal Investigator therefrom.

   Project Team Members may be the persons employed in the same or in different organizations. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Project Team Member can also be employed in an innovation centre whose founder is an accredited SRO, however, such innovation centre cannot be the Project Lead Intuition. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Declaration form is available within the project documentation (F5 - SRO Statement [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The term diaspora in this Programme shall not include the territory of the former Yugoslavia. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The journal category must be defined in the budget justification. Researchers are suggested to aspire to publish papers in the journals from the JCR list of M21 category (or above), with the exception of research areas that do not have journals in this category. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Hiring of natural persons refers to persons who are not employed within SRO participating in the project, and are necessary for the implementation of Project activities. These persons will be considered service providers or subcontractors and not participants in the Project.\* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. As prescribed by Articles 94 and 95 of the Law on Science and Research, "Official Gazette of RS", No. 49 of July 8, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)