

Serbia Accelerating Innovation and Growth Entrepreneurship Project
Consulting Services of Public Procurement Experts
to Support Scientific Research Organizations (SROs) under the Science for Industry
Program – AI Application in Industry through Scientific Partnership –
“From Lab to Market”

Terms of Reference

1. Background

Serbia has received a loan from the World Bank Group for the Serbia Accelerating Innovation and Growth Entrepreneurship (SAIGE) Project (Project)¹ to support the strengthening of the Serbian Innovation and Entrepreneurship ecosystem. The main objective of the Project is to improve (i) the relevance and excellence of scientific research; and (ii) innovative entrepreneurship and access to finance for enterprise growth, as a way of contributing to Serbia’s growth and competitiveness. The European Union Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA-II) is also providing complementary financing support for the SAIGE Project. The Project includes the following three components:

Component 1: Research Sector Reforms - (i) Operationalization of Science Fund (SF) including capacity building, and design and implementation of Science Fund grant instruments, and provision of competitive grants to researchers; (ii) Research and Development Institutes (RDIs) reforms through independent evaluation, preparation and implementation of transformation plans, as well as policy development support to Ministry; (iii) Design of Serbian Diaspora Facility and provision of grants for visits and joints projects with diaspora.

Component 2: Enterprise Acceleration - Establishment of Innovation Fund (IF) Programs, a co-investment fund and acceleration program, including the provision of technical assistance facility necessary for the program execution.

Component 3: Project Implementation, Monitoring, and Capacity Building

The Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation (NITRA, hereinafter: the Client) is responsible for the overall Project coordination, implementation, and execution of Component 1.2 RDI Reforms.

The SAIGE Project Additional Financing, which became operational in May 2025, also aims to scale up the ongoing SAIGE activities and to further enhance innovation capacity through better R&D and entrepreneurship in the areas of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and biotechnology, to increase the country’s competitiveness in global markets.

Under the framework of the Project, Component 1, the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia (the Science Fund, SF) is developing and implementing various technological and developmental programs, with a goal to achieve strategic objectives of scientific and technological development

of the Republic of Serbia, by supporting scientific and research activities. Projects are financed through grant Financing Agreements, while beneficiary SROs procure eligible goods and services required for project implementation in accordance with applicable procurement rules.

To support the successful implementation of the Programme, the Science Fund intends to engage consultants with demonstrated experience in public procurement under the Law on Public Procurement of the Republic of Serbia. Consultants will provide advisory and implementation support to beneficiary Scientific Research Organizations (SROs) throughout the procurement cycle and contribute to efficient utilization of Programme funds.

2. Objectives of Engagement

The Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia is implementing the Science for Industry Program – AI Application in Industry through Scientific Partnership – “From Lab to Market”, aimed at strengthening cooperation between SROs and industry, through application-oriented research and innovation projects. The Programme will be supported through engagement of Individual Consultants providing procurement expertise to beneficiary SROs.

Following the completion of the evaluation process, selected projects will be financed through Financing Agreements with accredited Scientific Research Organizations (SROs) in the Republic of Serbia. Most beneficiary SROs are contracting authorities under the Serbian Law on Public Procurement and are therefore required to procure goods and services in compliance with applicable public procurement legislation. All beneficiary SROs shall conduct procurements in accordance with the procurement rules applicable to them under national legislation, the Grant Manual, the Financing Agreement and other Programme requirements.

Experience from previous Science Fund programmes has demonstrated that procurement implementation represents a significant challenge for beneficiary institutions, often resulting in delays, procurement inefficiencies and underspending, which negatively affects achievement of project objectives.

The objective of this assignment is therefore to provide specialized procurement advisory and implementation support services to beneficiary SROs and the Science Fund, ensuring timely, efficient and legally compliant procurement processes throughout programme implementation.

The Science Fund therefore intends to engage up to (5) Individual Consultants (Public Procurement Experts) who will provide procurement advisory and support services to beneficiary SROs and the Science Fund, ensuring timely, efficient and legally compliant procurement processes throughout Programme implementation. Each Consultant will be selected individually and will enter into a separate Time-Based Individual Consultant contract with the Science Fund.

The Consultants will work independently and in parallel, each providing procurement support to a designated portfolio of Scientific Research Organizations (SROs), ensuring coverage of all beneficiary institutions during Programme implementation.

Support will be carried out by individual Consultants assigned to specific SROs by the Science Fund, in accordance with the following implementation phases:

Phase 1 – preparation of models of procurement documents and a short manual for implementation, in line with content of selected projects (September/October 2026).

Phase 2 – support in preparation of procurement plans (September - October 2026).

Phase 3 – support in implementation of public procurement procedures, changes of public procurement plans and contract realization (October 2026 – August 2027).

Phase 4 – monitoring and evaluation of reports related to public procurements (September 2027).

3. Scope of Work

The Consultants will provide technical support to the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia in the preparation and implementation of procurement procedures under the Programme, and in providing procurement support to beneficiary Scientific Research Organizations (SROs) throughout all phases of procurement implementation.

The Consultants shall provide advisory and technical support. Each beneficiary SRO shall retain full legal, fiduciary and decision-making responsibility for its procurement procedures, including approval of procurement documents, evaluation of bids, award decisions, contract signature and contract management.

Each Consultant will be responsible for providing procurement support to a designated portfolio of SROs assigned by the Science Fund. The SF may, at any time during the implementation of the Contract, modify the designated portfolio of SROs and reassign SROs to a Consultant, as it deems necessary, by written instruction.

Specifically, Consultants will:

- Prepare models of procurement documentation in line with Programme requirements and applicable public procurement legislation;
- Develop a short implementation manual including timelines to ensure timely procurement execution;
- Provide support to SROs in preparation of procurement plans and amendments of those plans in accordance with Programme requirements and the Law on Public Procurement;
- Provide support to SROs in preparation of tender documentation and publication of procurement notices for goods and services, with exception of technical specifications;
- Provide support to SROs in opening and evaluation of bids, preparation of evaluation reports, and preparation of contract award decisions;
- Provide support to SROs during contract implementation;
- Conduct desk review of completed procurement procedures to review the documentation, identify apparent compliance gaps and risks, and recommend corrective measures;
- Provide capacity building activities to enhance capabilities of SROs throughout whole implementation period (workshops before launching of procedures, training sessions related to public procurement procedures and contract implementation, online consultations).

Science Fund will provide access to all relevant documents and provide support in engagement with SROs.

Each Consultant will be responsible for supporting a designated portfolio of SROs as assigned by the Science Fund and will work independently while coordinating with other Consultants to ensure consistency and harmonized implementation of procurement support across all beneficiary institutions. The Consultants will provide support remotely, as appropriate, and will travel within the Republic of Serbia, as needed, to visit SRO premises and provide on-site support.

The Consultants will perform their duties ensuring full coverage of all beneficiary SROs under the Programme. The Science Fund will designate a Programme focal point responsible for assigning SRO portfolios, coordinating the Consultants and ensuring consistent and harmonized support. One of the Consultants may be designated as the lead technical focal point, if required.

The Science Fund and consultants will organize regular meetings in order to secure realization of the process and provide equal support to all SROs.

4. Experience and Qualifications

The Consultants shall possess the following minimum qualifications:

- Advanced university degree in law, economics or technical field;
- Minimum 7 years of professional experience in public procurement in Serbia;
- Extensive experience in implementation of procurement procedures under the Serbian Law on Public Procurement;
- Certificate for a public procurement officer;
- Experience in supporting contracting authorities' procurement implementation and/or working as procurement staff for contracting authorities;
- Excellent communication and coordination skills;
- Knowledge of Serbian and working knowledge of English;
- Specific experience in the support or implementation of procurement of goods and services relevant for the assignment, such as procurement in IT sector, medical sector and procurement of equipment for research purposes, will be considered as advantage.

Selection criteria:

The candidates will be evaluated by applying the following evaluation criteria:

- General experience (40 Points)
- Specific Experience relevant to the Assignment (60 Points)

5. Timeframe and Duration

The Consultants will be engaged on a part-time basis until September 30, 2027.

The expected time effort for each Consultant for this assignment is up to 15 days (i.e., 120 hours) per month depending on the distribution of SROs and implementation needs.

6. Reporting Requirements

Consultants will work under the supervision of the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia to whom he/she directly reports.

Each Consultant shall prepare monthly activity reports (timesheets) in which he/she will summarize key issues and emerging and day-to-day tasks undertaken. In addition, Consultants will prepare progress and ad hoc reports and documents where so required by the Client (such as verification documents: Procurement Templates, Manual and Checklists, Training Materials and Practical Sessions, Q&A, etc.). These reports will be provided on paper (when necessary) and electronically in English/Serbian language.

Monthly timesheets shall be subject to review and approval by the Science Fund prior to payment. Consultants will prepare Final Report at the end of the process.

7. Input by the Science Fund

The Science Fund will facilitate access to programme documentation which is required to provide technical support in the public procurement process, beneficiary SROs, project documentation and other relevant information to the extent required for implementation of the assignment.

8. Terms of Payment

The contract, in the form of the Standard World Bank Time-Based Contract for Individual Consultants, will be entered into between the Consultant and the Science Fund. Payment for services rendered will be made monthly in accordance with the approved Monthly timesheets. Each monthly timesheet must be approved by the SF Acting Director. The Science Fund will administer the contract and make payments.

9. Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest

The Consultant will maintain confidentiality on all information that is not in the public domain and shall not be involved in another assignment that represents a conflict of interest to the prevailing assignment.