Science Fund
of the Republic of Serbia

Joint Research Program of Scientists from the Republic of Serbia and the People's Republic of China

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1. PARTNERS

Joint Research Program of Scientists from the Republic of Serbia and the People's Republic of China (hereinafter referred to as the: "Program") is published within a collaboration between the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia and the National Natural Science Foundation of China.

Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia (SFRS) is a public organization that supports scientific and research activities. It was established in March 2019 to provide funding and create the conditions necessary for the development of scientific and research activities in the Republic of Serbia and the advancement of a knowledge-based society. The Fund's activities are carried out through research, as well as technological and developmental programs. These programs aim to achieve the strategic objectives of the scientific and technological development of the Republic of Serbia. Within the programs of the Fund, projects are funded through an open competitive process. The projects aim to provide high-level research, innovative results, competitiveness at an international level, and relevance to society in general.

The National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC) was established in February 1986. NSFC is a vice-ministerial level public institution responsible for managing the National Natural Science Fund of China.

The main responsibilities of NSFC include:

- Utilizing state financial allocations to support basic and applied basic research in natural sciences, thereby promoting scientific and technological progress as well as economic and social development.

- Managing the National Natural Science Fund by formulating and publishing guidelines for basic and applied basic research, accepting project applications, organizing expert evaluations, and providing funding on a competitive basis, with a focus on fostering a research environment conducive to innovation.

- Establishing connections and conducting international cooperation with foreign governmental science management agencies, scientific foundations, and relevant academic organizations.

2. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

2.1. Program Objectives

The objectives of the Program are: Improving scientific excellence and relevance of research in the Republic of Serbia and the People's Republic of China by establishing connections with researchers from Serbia and China, leveraging each other's competences and support through joint projects, as well as the development of international cooperation and transfer of knowledge and technology.

The program allows researchers to define their own research plans, form their own teams and cooperate with appropriate scientific and research organizations in Serbia, China and worldwide.

The expected results of the projects are new scientific knowledge, methodologies, intellectual property (IP), innovations, and attraction of investments in the scientific systems of Serbia and China. The results are presented through scientific publications and the publication of joint scientific works, patents, development of new services, development and commercialization of products, technology transfer, IP, preparation and submission of joint project proposals for applying to international funds or other potential sources of funding for scientific research work.

The project should enable the further development of the research goals defined in the project proposal and establish the foundations for long-term cooperation between researchers from the two countries.

2.2. Types of Projects that can be financed

The Program lends support to basic and applied research in the following fields of science: 1) natural sciences and mathematics, 2) engineering and technological sciences, 3) biotechnical sciences, 4) biomedical sciences, 5) artificial intelligence.

The Program enables researchers to define their own research plans, form their own teams and collaborate with relevant laboratories, research centres and industry in Serbia, China and worldwide.

2.3. Eligibility of Applicants

Each Application received by the deadline for submission of Applications will be reviewed for eligibility, in line with the following criteria:

One Principal Investigator should be from the Serbian, and one from the Chinese scientific research organization (SRO), each one coordinating national research team.

The Project consortium consists of at least one SRO from Serbia and one SRO from China.

a) Eligibility criteria for Principal Investigator

The person designated to lead a Project from the Serbian SRO (hereinafter referred to as the: "**Principal Investigator**"), must meet the following requirements:

For the Serbian side:

- s/he holds a Ph.D. and has published, peer-reviewed scientific papers and other scientific research results, that indicates that s/he is capable of independent scientific research work.
- s/he has been awarded a scientific title or an equivalent title according to the regulations on higher education[1] at the time of Project Proposal submission, i.e. on the closing day of the Public Call, as well as during the project implementation.
- s/he is employed, or will be employed, at an accredited Serbian scientific research organization (SRO) that is designated to lead the Project, with a minimum of 50% of monthly engagement during the project implementation.
- s/he must be employed at an SRO, with a monthly time commitment to the project of not less than 30% throughout the entire duration of the Project.
- A person may act as the Principal Investigator in only one Project Proposal within this Public Call.

The Principal Investigator must be employed at an SRO, with a monthly time commitment to the Project of not less than 30% throughout the project duration.

Participation of Team Members employed at different accredited SROs in the Republic of Serbia is permitted, provided that the Lead SRO is the SRO where the Principal Investigator from the Republic of Serbia is employed.

Team Members may be employed at an Innovation Centre, but the Innovation Centre cannot be the lead SRO.

[1] Research Associate, Senior Research Associate, or Principal Research Fellow, i.e. Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, or Full Professor.

For the Chinese side:

For more information, please refer to the NSFC's call for proposals.

b) Eligibility criteria for **Team Members:**

For the Serbian side:

- s/he is employed at an accredited SRO with a minimum of 50% of full-time equivalent engagement throughout her/his engagement in the Project.
- s/he must have a valid scientific title or an equivalent title according to the regulations on higher education[2] at the time of Project Proposal submission, i.e. on the closing day of the Public Call, as well as during the project implementation. If a project Team Member loses her/his title, s/he cannot participate in the project as a Team Member.
    - Exception regarding the requirement that all Team Members must have a valid title at the time of submission of the Project Proposal, i.e., on the closing day of the Public Call are persons who are Ph.D. students, and who have never been elected to a teaching or research position until then. These persons can apply as Team Members even though they do not have a title, with the obligation of SRO to initiate their election to the title as soon as they receive information about the acceptance of the Project Proposal.

In case of engagement of a person in various programs of the Science Fund of Republic of Serbia as a member of the Project Team or Principal Investigator from Serbia, the person is obliged to respect the legal restrictions on engagement in programs of the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia, as well as the conditions prescribed in the Acts of individual programs.

The same person may be a member of the project team in only one Project Proposal submitted under this Public Call.

For the Chinese side:

For information on the Team Members on the Chinese side, please refer to the NSFC's call for proposals.

2.4. Principal Investigator

The Principal Investigator is obligated to manage the Project conscientiously, responsibly and in compliance with legal provisions regulating science and research, environmental protection, protection of intellectual property, personal data protection, prevention of conflict of interest and other provisions essential for the ethical and lawful implementation of Project activities.

The Principal Investigator submits information on the five most significant scientific results from the past five years, which will, among other things, be subject to evaluation.

A person may act as a Principal Investigator in only one Project Proposal within this Program. A person may act as a Principal Investigator in a maximum of two Project Proposals under different programs of the Science Fund.

[2] Junior Research Assistant, Research Assistant, Research Associate, Senior Research Associate, or Principal Investigator, i.e. Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, or Full Professor.

2.5. Project Team

The Project Team consists of the Principal Investigator and Team Members from the Republic of Serbia, and the Principal Investigator and Team Members from China.

The Project consortium consists of at least one SRO from the Republic of Serbia and one SRO from China.

For the Serbian side:

The minimum number of Team Members on a single Project is 3, while the maximum number is 9.

A person may act as a member of the Project Team in only one Project Proposal within this Program.

A full-time Team Member from Serbia (including teaching and research, support through institutional or other funding) may not be engaged with more than an additional **30%** of the full-time working hours on projects funded by the Science Fund (including different programs).

A Team Member may be employed and funded by the proposed Project up to 100% full-time, in line with their other engagements, and in compliance with the Labor Law.

A person who is currently not employed in an SRO can also be included in the proposed Project as a Team Member only if an SRO submits a signed declaration that s/he will be employed in the SRO if the Project Proposal is approved for financing.

A single Project may have Team Members employed at different accredited SROs in the Republic of Serbia, provided that the SRO employing the Principal Investigator is designated as the leading institution in Project implementation.

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

For the Chinese side:

The maximum number of Team Members on a single Project is 9.

The maximum number of institutions in one application is 3 (1 leading institution + maximum 2 participating institutions). For more information, please refer to the NSFC call text.

2.6. Project Duration

The Project and Project budget must be designed for duration of **three years (36 months).**

2.7. IP and know-how requirements

For the Serbian side:

Rights based on IP and know-how that may be created during the implementation of the Project shall belong to the SROs, in accordance with the regulations governing scientific research activities. In the event that members of different SROs, i.e. Team Members employed at different SROs, participate in the Project, the Lead SRO and participating SROs, as well as all Team Members must agree upon and mutually regulate their relations and the rights to IP to 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 is required to be submitted to the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia when submitting the Project Proposal.

Commercialization of results shall be achieved pursuant to the law and by-laws of the participating SROs. This can be regulated with the corresponding consortium agreement based on the needs of each Project individually.

The SRO is obligated to guarantee the rights to intellectual property and know-how in contracts concluded with any third party.

Project results are subject to open science principles, in accordance with UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science (2021), Guidelines to the Rules on Open Access to Scientific Publications and Open Access to Research Data in Horizon (2020) and other relevant international and national policies regulating this area.

For the Chinese side:

For IP and know-how requirements, the applicants must comply with laws in China and Serbia, as well as requirements from NSFC and SFRS. For Intellectual property rights, it should be described as one clause in the Joint Agreement to be signed by both PIs and participating SROs from Serbia submitted to SFRS and NSFC as an attachment to the proposal.

2.8. Amount of Financing

The maximum Project budget amount is **€400,000.00 securing that SFRS covers total funding for Serbian part of the project in maximum of €200,000 and NSFC for Chinese part of the project around €200,000.**

The maximum Program budget amount is **€4,000,000.00**, which includes the part of the budget financed by the SFRS in the amount of €2,000,000 and the part of the budget financed by the NSFC in the amount of €2,000,000. About **10 projects** are expected to be funded.

2.9. Eligible Costs

For the Serbian side:

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

1) **Personnel cost**
    a. the overall personnel costs of Team Members including all remuneration determined by the internal acts of the SRO, with associated taxes and contributions.
2) **Procurement costs**
    a. **Equipment and consumables cost**
        i. Equipment, intangible assets (software, licenses and databases), consumables and other resources necessary for the implementation of the Project, including spare parts, other equipment and goods directly related to project activities.
    b. **Travel costs**
        i. Short-term domestic and international travel by the Team Members necessary for the implementation of the Project (up to 28 days per travel);
        ii. travel to participate in national and international conferences relevant to Project implementation;
        iii. Travel costs for researchers for the purpose of knowledge exchange and

implementation of project activities at participating SROs from the Republic of Serbia and the PRC, including transportation, accommodation, daily allowances, visas, travel insurance and other justified travel expenses necessary for the implementation of the Project, for a maximum period of two months per trip.

c. **Dissemination and visibility**
    i. costs of publishing in journals[3], as well as in journals with open access, participation in scientific conferences, publishing scientific monographs.
    ii. organization of conferences and seminars and other costs of disseminating the Project results;
    iii. Intellectual property protection costs, including patent applications and related costs arising from project activities.

3) **Services and sub-contracting costs**
    a. External services provided by individuals and legal entities necessary for the research and implementation of the Project. Engagement of individuals refers to persons who are not employed by the SROs participating in the Project and whose services are necessary for the implementation of project activities. Engaged individuals and legal entities shall be considered service providers or subcontractors and shall not be considered Project participants.

4) **Indirect costs**
    a. Compensation to the SROs employing Project participants for administrative and other Project-related costs, including other indirect costs such as bank fees and guarantee costs, import costs, customs duties, postage, foreign exchange differences and other indirect costs.
    b. external audit costs, that will be conducted at the end of the project implementation period.

5) **Contingency Reserve**
    a. The contingency reserve may be used for the budget categories Personnel cost and Procurement Costs.

In view of the specific nature of each Proposal, the Project budget distribution per category of costs defined above must reflect Project objectives and must be clearly justified in accordance with those objectives.

Procurement Costs listed in item 2) must account for at least 40% of the total Project budget.

Services and sub-contracting costs listed in item 3) must be represented in the Project budget with a minimum of 5% and a maximum of 10% of the total Project budget.

Indirect costs listed in item 4) are represented in the Project budget with up to 20% of a total amount of Personnel costs (listed in item 1) and Procurement costs (listed in item 2). Indirect costs related to compensation to SROs are not subject to justification during reporting; however, the Science Fund may request the relevant supporting documentation for inspection and verification at any time during the implementation of the Project.

The contingency reserve may be used exclusively to cover justified increases in costs incurred during the implementation of the Project under the budget categories Project Team Member Compensation Costs from the Republic of Serbia and Procurement Costs, which could not have been foreseen at the

[3] Journal category must be specified in Justification of the Budget. The researchers are suggested to aim for international journals ranked in top 10-30% journals at the JCR list, with the exceptions for research areas that do not have journals with these ranking.

time of budget planning and are necessary for the successful implementation of the Project. This includes increases in the prices of goods and services, increases in researchers' compensation costs resulting from promotion to a higher academic or research title, and other justified changes in costs, subject to the prior approval of the Science Fund.

The contingency reserve may amount to a maximum of 5% of the combined amount of the budget categories Project Team Member Compensation Costs from the Republic of Serbia and Procurement Costs. If the funds allocated to this budget category remain unused by the end of the Project implementation period, they may, as a rule, during the final quarter of the Project, be used for professional development of young researchers engaged in the Project, as well as for short-term travel of young researchers for professional development purposes. In addition, these funds may be used for the implementation of research activities by young researchers.

Contingencies for equipment and consumables may be used exclusively to cover justified cost increases incurred during the Project implementation under the Personnel and Purchase costs, which could not have been anticipated at the time of budget planning and are necessary for the successful Project implementation. Contingencies for equipment and consumables may be represented in the Project budget up to 5% of the total of the budget categories Personnel costs and Purchase costs.

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. Maximum net monthly fees are specified in the document "Amount of remuneration (earnings and fees) of researchers financed through programs of the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia" which was published on the website of the Science Fund. Document is available HERE.

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 her/his monthly engagement in the Project. The Principal Investigator is entitled to an increased compensation amounting to 20% of the monthly net remuneration allocated in the Project Budget, for the purpose of carrying out activities related to project and project team management.

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

For the Chinese side:

The eligible costs include direct costs and indirect costs. The direct costs include equipment cost, operation cost and labour costs, with no requirements on their percentages.

2.10. Ineligible Costs

For the Serbian side:

Costs ineligible for financing by the Science Fund include, but are not limited to the following:

- all costs that are not documented by appropriate accounting and other credible documentation;
- renovation and equipping of SRO premises and any type of construction or other works;

- repair, servicing, or maintenance of the SRO's existing equipment, unless the equipment is required for the Project and justified in the Proposal;
- payment of interest or current debt to any party, including commitments made or undertaken during consideration of Project application, or upon approval of Project financing;
- fines, penalties, late payment interest, and litigation costs;
- costs of items or services that are already being financed by another program, entity, or SRO;
- costs/participation in the costs of purchase, lease, sub-lease or adaptation of land, facilities and/or other real estate, including vehicles and movable assets and equipment not designated exclusively for Project related scientific and research activities;
- costs defined by the sources of funding under the Public Call.

For the Chinese side:

Costs falling outside the eligible cost listed in 2.9 will be ineligible.

3. HOW TO APPLY AND WHICH PROCEDURES TO FOLLOW

3.1. Terms of Application

Applications need to be submitted simultaneously in both countries, namely: Project Proposal applicants from Republic of Serbia to the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia and Project Proposal applicants from People's Republic of China to National Natural Science Foundation of China.

For a successful and complete application, applicants are required to familiarize themselves with the specific requirements of the Public Call applicable to both sides. Applications submitted by only one party will be considered incomplete and shall be excluded from further evaluation.

The Serbian Project Proposal applicant should have established contacts and cooperation and to maintain a good relationship of mutual trust with her/his partner from the People's Republic of China.

The parties are expected to sign the Consortium Agreement that further regulates the rights and obligations of both parties, the distribution of intellectual property, and other issues relevant to the establishment of cooperation, which constitutes a mandatory element of the Project Proposal application.

Applicants should have research potential as well as opportunities and resources to carry out the planned research within a scientific research institution.

3.2. Public Call Application

The Serbian and Chinese Project Teams shall submit their Project Proposals separately in their respective countries exclusively in electronic form, through the online portal.

For the Serbian side:

Project application must be submitted in English language through the SFRS Application Submission Platform.

The Proposal must be complete and include all the required annexes, and it must be prepared in line with the Instructions; otherwise, the Proposal shall be excluded from further evaluation.

The Proposal is submitted by the prospective Principal Investigator.

A single SRO may apply with an unlimited number of Proposals in a Public Call.

Project Proposal structure is as follows:

Joint project documentation includes:

- NSFC-SFRS Joint Research Application Form;
- Consortium Agreement (Joint Research Agreement).

Documentation submitted by the Serbian Project Team to the SFRS:

- **F1a Project Description Part A** – contains the Project description, objectives, methodology, goals, resources, and expected Project results.
- **F1b Project Description Part B** – contains the following information:
  - Participants from the Republic of Serbia - short biographies of the Principal Investigator and key Team Members (Work Packages coordinators) of the Serbian research group, with up to 5 most important scientific results related to the research topic of the project in the last five years
  - Participants from the People's Republic of China - short biographies of the Principal Investigator and key Team Members (Work Packages coordinators) of the Chinese research group
  - Ethics and Security;
  - Gender dimension of the Project, Open science, and how project addresses mission and policy of the Science Fund.
- F2 Budget
- F3 Gantt Chart
- F4 Applicant info
- F5 SRO Statement
- F6 Joint statement of all participants
- F7 PI Statement
- F8 Letter of Consent for an External Collaborator, if applicable
- F9 Environmental and Social Risk Questionnaire
- Ethical approval (if applicable to the Project)

For the Chinese side:

A Chinese application submitted in NSFC's Grants system.

A Joint English application co-written by the Serbian and Chinese PI.

A Consortium Agreement between the two applicants.

4. EVALUATION PROCEDURE

4.1. Administrative and Eligibility Check

All received Proposals, including the specified supporting documentation, shall undergo an administrative and eligibility check, which includes a review of the submitted application documentation in order to:

- establish the timeliness of the submitted Proposal against the deadline stipulated.
- establish that the Proposal is administratively accurate and complete, including all annexes, confirmations, and signatures.
- confirm that the Proposal fulfils the general conditions defined in the Program, including formal fulfilment of criteria for the Principal Investigator, members of the Team and the SROs.

- confirm that the Proposal fulfils the eligibility criteria specified in Section 2.3. of this document.

The administrative and eligibility check is performed by employees of the Science Fund for applications received from the Serbian side and the National Natural Science Foundation of China for applications from the Chinese side.

A Proposal that passes the administrative check on both sides shall qualify for the first stage of Evaluation.

If a Proposal fails the administrative check in the Republic of Serbia or in the People's Republic of China, it shall be excluded from further evaluation, and the applicant shall be notified of the reasons for rejection of the Proposal.

The Science Fund may request clarifications or additional information from applicants if deemed necessary for completing the administrative check.

4.2. Evaluation of Submitted Proposals

The Evaluation Procedure is split into two stages.

In stage one of the Evaluation, independent peer reviewers (hereinafter referred to as the: "Reviewer") evaluate the Project Proposals that has fulfilled the criteria of the Administrative and eligibility check. The ranking list of Proposals is compiled based on the decreasing number of points awarded by the Reviewers to those Proposals, and based on it, the Joint preliminary ranking list of Project Proposals is formed.

In stage two of the Evaluation, the Program Board for Project Evaluation (hereinafter referred to as the: "Program Board") evaluates the Proposals from the Joint preliminary ranking list and creates the Proposal for the Joint Final Ranking List.

Evaluation of the Proposals is performed in line with the procedure defined by relevant acts of the Science Fund and according to the criteria defined in the Program.

Reviewers

Reviewers are international experts, and, in specific cases where international relevant expertise is unavailable, exceptionally qualified local experts with internationally recognized professional careers. The Reviewers are selected according to the principle of having individual expertise that corresponds to the scientific field and topic of the proposed Project, mainly based on the keywords stated in the Proposal. Selection of Reviewers is done through the procedure regulated by the relevant acts of SFRS.

Program Board

Program Board members are international experts, or members of the Serbian scientific diaspora with established international careers. Selection of Program Board members is done through the procedure regulated by relevant acts of SFRS.

4.3. Evaluation Criteria and Procedure

During the course of the evaluation, the Proposals are scored both numerically and descriptively, in line with the relevant templates available in the Program documentation on the website of the Science Fund.

The Evaluation criteria are:

- **Excellence** – quality, relevance, and contemporary significance of the proposed topic, scientific merit, innovativeness, rationality of objectives, importance of the research, applicability of the results and future prospects of the proposed research, assessment of the implementation of open scientific practice in the proposed methodology; **Impact** – contribution to science,

economy and society in the Republic of Serbia and People's Republic of China, impact of scientific research on economy, society, climate change, environment, health care, education and other aspects of social development at the national and international level, efficacy of the proposed measures for Project promotion and visibility, and application of the Project results, assessment whether the proposed research identifies potential stakeholders and beneficiaries who will be impacted by the Project, added value of bilateral cooperation and impact on science and society;

- **Implementation** – rationality of the implementation plan, possible risks and mitigation measures, budget rationality and balance, assessment of the defined roles of project team members and partners, as well as the complementarity of their expertise with the project topic; assessment of competence of the Principal Investigator and other members of the Team.

The Chinese Evaluation will be conducted according to NSFC's evaluation regulations.

Stage One

The first stage of the evaluation is performed separately in SFRS and NSFC.

In stage one of the Evaluation in SFRS, each Project Proposal that has fulfilled the criteria of the Administrative and eligibility check in SFRS and NSFC **is evaluated by up to two Reviewers.** A Reviewer scores each question with a numerical value (awarding between 1 and 5 points) and descriptively. The Reviewer also provides an explicit recommendation confirming or withholding his/hers support for the Proposal.

The maximum score that can be awarded by a Reviewer is 100 points, in line with the criteria specified above.

Table 1. Criteria for the evaluation of Projects; the maximum (and minimum) number of points

Criterion	Stage one (pts)
Excellence	**50** (min. **35**)
Impact	**30** (min. **21**)
Implementation	**20** (min. **14**)
Total	**100** (min. **70)**

At the end of stage one of the evaluation, the reviews are summed up and the average scores for each criterion are calculated as well as the overall average score. In the situation when there is a discrepancy of more than 20 points in the overall score between individual reviews, the reviewers are invited to consider their evaluation once again through the consensus procedure.

The consensus procedure is initiated by making all submitted reviews available to reviewers for comparative analysis of the reviewers' point of view and difference in opinions. As a result, the reviewers may change their scores and/or narrative and resubmit evaluation, or they can decide not to change their initial evaluation and provide justification.

If consensus is not reached, the Science Fund will request an additional independent review of the

Project Proposal. After obtaining the additional review, the one score which represents the outlier is discarded, and the final score after this stage of evaluation is calculated as the average score of the two remaining reviews. If the overall score of the additional independent review is equally different from the overall scores of the initial reviews, the two reviews more favorable to the project are taken into account for calculation of the final score after the first stage of evaluation.

In order to pass the evaluation by the Reviewers, the average scores of the reviews calculated for each criterion, as well as the overall average score, must be greater than the corresponding minimum numbers specified in Table 1.

Determination of Joint Preliminary Ranking List

Prior to stage two of the Evaluation, the Program Board aligns the Preliminary Ranking List from the RS side with the Preliminary list of projects that passed the first-stage evaluation in China. The Joint Preliminary Ranking List will include Project Proposals that have successfully passed the first stage of evaluation in both countries and appear on the Preliminary ranking lists of both Serbia and China, provided that their combined budgets do not cumulatively exceed twice the total budget of the Program.

Any Project Proposal that fails to meet the first-stage evaluation criteria in China and is not included on the Chinese Preliminary Ranking list will not be included in the Joint Preliminary Ranking List, regardless of its ranking on the Serbian list. The Principal Investigator receives a notification on the outcome of the first stage of evaluation.

Stage Two

The second stage of the evaluation is performed separately in SFRS and NSFC.

In the second stage of evaluation, the proposals from the Joint preliminary ranking list are evaluated and the Proposal of the final ranking list is created.

The quality of the project is assessed according to the criteria of scientific excellence, impact and implementation, taking into account the goals and conditions of the program.

Each project from the Joint Preliminary Ranking List is assigned to one member of the Program Board who becomes the Rapporteur for that project. The Rapporteurs review the project proposals and the results of the stage one of evaluation, and in accordance with that, report to the members of the Program Board. If the Rapporteur deems that any project proposal has important shortcomings or that there are inconsistencies in the results of the stage one of evaluation, he/she will inform the members of the panel, i.e. Program Board and propose a more detailed analysis and discussion on this Project Proposal. If necessary, it is possible to consult the reviewers of the Project Proposal for clarification. The Rapporteur can nominate up to two projects for this type of quality control and more detailed discussion. The result of this additional quality control of the project may be a confirmation of the quality, after which the project retains its position on the ranking list, or a justified decision on a new result of the evaluation and ranking.

The Program Board may request from the Principal Investigator a rebalance of the proposed Project budget. The Program Board may also request from the PI to correct and/or clarify the key points of the Proposal, or another type of modification of the Project Proposal with all relevant elements.

Final Decision and Financing Agreements

Based on the results of the second stage of evaluation, the Program Board ranks and classifies Project proposals into categories A, B, and C based on the total points awarded, in line with the Table 2.

Table 2 - Results of the second stage of evaluation

Project Rating (Category):	Description	Points
A	**Highest-ranked Project proposals**	**≥85**
B	**Mid-ranked Project proposals**	**71-84**
C	**Project proposals not recommended for funding**	**≤70**

The Program Board from SFRS and the Program Board from NSFC form the Proposal for the Joint Final Ranking List by harmonizing the grades assigned (categories A, B, and C) in RS and in People's Republic of China. During the result harmonization process, projects will be proposed for funding according to the following priority: AA > AB/BA > BB, where:

• **AA** - project evaluated as A on both lists,

• **AB/BA** - project evaluated as A on one list and as B on the other,

• **BB** - project evaluated as B on both lists.

Projects evaluated as C on at least one list have not met the evaluation criteria and will not be proposed for funding. The amount of funds provided by the Science Fund for the RS portion of projects proposed for funding cannot exceed the Program budget established by the Public Call.

The total budget for all projects accepted for funding cannot exceed the total Program budget defined by the Public Call.

The Scientific Council considers the Report of the Program Board and submitted Proposal for the Joint Final Ranking List and together with its opinion on procedural correctness, submits to the Managing Board of SFRS the Proposal for the Joint Final Ranking List of projects proposed for funding under the Public Call under this Program.

Based on the Proposal for the Joint Final Ranking List and the expert bodies' opinion, the Managing Board of SFRS make the decision on adoption of the Joint Final Ranking List of projects approved for funding under this Program, as well as decision on the amount of funds allocated to each Project approved for funding. The adoption of the Joint Final Ranking List is also subject to approval by the relevant authorities in the People's Republic of China.

Following the adoption of the decisions on the approval of the Proposal for the Joint Final Ranking list, the Final lists of projects approved for funding shall be announced in accordance with the usual practice of both funds. The Principal Investigators shall receive notification on the final outcome of the evaluation.

Proposals that have been approved for funding shall sign financing agreements with SFRS and NSFC.

4.4. Grievance Redress Mechanism

For the Serbian side:

Applicants within the Program have the right to file an evidence-based complaint on the outcome of:

a. the administrative check (invoking evident omissions, oversights or errors made by the Science Fund);

b. the evaluation procedure (invoking evident omissions, oversights or errors made during the evaluation process);

The appeal shall be submitted in writing in English, with a 500-word limit, within 5 days upon the date of receiving the notification about the outcome of the administrative check/evaluation. The content of the appeal must be limited to clarification of data already existing in the Proposal, and may in no manner modify the content of the proposed Project. SFRS shall provide an acknowledgment of receipt of appeal within 3 business days upon the date of receipt. An official response to the objection will be provided within 30 calendar days upon the date of receipt.

The written appeal shall be submitted by email at: serbia.china@fondzanauku.gov.rs. All appeals will be documented in a central grievance log with relevant information (date of receipt, name or email of the sender, background for the appeal, date of response and answer provided).

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

5.1. General Implementation Principles

The Awardee is required to implement the Project in accordance with the signed Project Financing Agreement and the Project Description accompanied with the Project Budget, which represents one of the annexes of the Financing Agreement.

All Project implementation rules should be in accordance with the national regulations of both funding agencies and the national legislation applicable to scientific research projects.

The Principal Investigator is required to manage the Project conscientiously and responsibly and in compliance with the regulations governing science and research, environmental protection, intellectual property protection, personal data protection, prevention of conflicts of interest and other regulations relevant to the ethical and lawful implementation of Project activities.

For the Serbian side:

For Projects approved for financing, the Principal Investigator, the Lead SRO and the participating SROs from the Republic of Serbia shall sign a Project Financing Agreement with the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia (SFRS).

For the Chinese side:

The Awardee shall follow the requirements stipulated in NSFC's Regulations on Collaborative Joint Research Program.

5.2. Payments, Disbursement and Reporting

For the Serbian side:

SFRS shall disburse the funds to the SRO in compliance with the approved Project budget and the signed Project Financing Agreement.

The first payment shall be made in advance, within 45 days from the date of signing the Project Financing Agreement, in an amount corresponding to the sum of the funds planned for the first and second quarters of Project implementation. Further payments shall be made in accordance with the Payment Schedule, which forms an integral part of the Project Financing Agreement. As a rule, equipment and consumables shall be procured at the beginning of Project implementation.

SFRS may retain up to 5% of the total approved Project budget until the Final Report is approved. In such case, the final payment shall be made within 30 days after SFRS confirms acceptance of the Final

Report.

In Serbia, all disbursements shall be made in Serbian Dinars (RSD), at the official average exchange rate of the National Bank of Serbia applicable on the date of opening of the Public Call, to a separate current account of the SROs, or to a sub-account whose transactions are recorded on the Project's evidence account, earmarked solely for the purposes of the Project within this Program.

The Principal Investigator is required to regularly report on Project implementation.

Reports shall be prepared on the prescribed templates, in accordance with the instructions and deadlines set by SFRS. The Principal Investigator and the authorised persons of the Lead SRO and participating SROs are responsible for the accuracy of the data and for the purposeful and lawful use of funds.

For each reporting period, SFRS shall conduct a detailed review of the complete administrative and financial documentation of a number of Projects selected by random sampling. As a rule, the random sample for each reporting period shall include 10% of the approved Projects.

The Principal Investigator shall obtain and keep all supporting administrative and financial documentation related to the Project and shall provide it to SFRS for inspection and verification when requested. SFRS may request access to and verification of Project documentation at any time during Project implementation.

The Principal Investigator must provide relevant information and documents for the external audit of the Project. The Principal Investigator and the SRO shall ensure that funds are used in compliance with the law and the contracted conditions and obligations. The SRO shall disburse funds to third parties in accordance with the Project activities.

For the Chinese side:

Payments and reporting shall follow the requirements stipulated in NSFC's Regulations on Collaborative Joint Research Program.

5.3. Procurement

For the Serbian side:

Procurement of goods and services related to Project implementation shall be carried out in accordance with applicable legislation, the Project Financing Agreement and the procedures required by the source of financing, as specified in the Project Financing Agreement.

The Principal Investigator shall provide SFRS with the relevant documentation concerning completed procurements in accordance with the Program, the Project Financing Agreement or upon written request of SFRS.

5.4. Project Management and Changes to the Project Team

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

If it is necessary during Project implementation to replace a Team Member with another person or to change the percentage of his/her engagement, the Principal Investigator shall submit a reasoned proposal to SFRS and must obtain SFRS's written consent before the change is made. A Team Member who replaces a previous one must meet all conditions for Team Members set out in this Grant Manual.

If replacement of the Principal Investigator is required, because the current Principal Investigator does not fulfil the obligations under the Project Financing Agreement or for another justified reason, the

decision on appointing another person is made by SFRS, based on the reasoned written opinions of the authorised persons of all Project participants. The new Principal Investigator must meet all conditions for the Principal Investigator set out in this Grant Manual.

Where there is a justified and objective need, the Principal Investigator may propose changes to the Project budget within the same budget category, as well as between budget categories. All proposed changes must serve the implementation of Project activities and comply with the Program rules on eligible costs.

5.5. Monitoring and Evaluation during Project Implementation

SFRS regularly supervises and monitors Project implementation through the review of submitted reports, monitoring visits to Project participants, direct monitoring of individual Project activities, and the review of the Final Report on Project results. SFRS may periodically organise an audit of the use of funds during Project implementation, in accordance with SFRS acts.

Project results are evaluated through annual, extraordinary and end-of-Project evaluation. The evaluation may include an audit. For the purposes of evaluation, the Principal Investigator reports the Project results by submitting the relevant report.

Project monitoring and evaluation include a comparison between the proposed and achieved research objectives, the scientific results achieved, the assessment of the utilisation of funds and other relevant indicators. If it is established during implementation that the Project has not been fully realised in accordance with the Proposal, SFRS shall notify the competent bodies within SFRS. Based on the findings, a decision may be made to suspend the next payment until the reasons for the deviation from the Project plan are identified and removed, to reduce the budget defined by the Project Financing Agreement, to temporarily or fully suspend Project financing, including initiating a procedure for the reimbursement of funds spent for other than intended purposes or unlawfully, or any other procedure deemed appropriate.

If it is established that Project funds have been spent for other than intended purposes, SFRS reserves the right to suspend Project implementation and financing, to request the reimbursement of funds and to take other actions it deems appropriate.

As needed, Project implementation and the purposeful use of funds in line with the approved Project budget may also be evaluated on an extraordinary basis, at the initiative of SFRS or upon a reasoned request of the SRO or the Principal Investigator.

For the purposes of Program monitoring and evaluation, SFRS may organise an independent analysis of beneficiaries during Project implementation, as well as at the end of the Program's implementation under the Public Call, based on clearly defined milestones and results. To this end, beneficiaries shall provide SFRS with all necessary information and documentation and enable access to relevant sites and facilities.

5.6. Project Archive

The Lead SRO and the participating SROs shall establish a Project archive, in which they keep precise and regular records related to Project implementation, using appropriate systems in accordance with accounting, financial and other regulations.

6. PROMOTION AND VISIBILITY OF PROJECT RESULTS

The Principal Investigator is obliged to ensure, during Project implementation, the promotion of the Project and the visibility of its results by participating in conferences, publishing scientific publications,

organising meetings and seminars, promotion in the media and on social media, organising visits to the Project Team and laboratory, and in other ways. Publishing papers in leading scientific journals, including journals that apply the principle of open science, and presenting papers at leading international scientific conferences is recommended.

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

In line with generally accepted principles of scientific and academic practice, acknowledgements and other accompanying content in publications resulting from the Project serve solely to recognise direct contributions to the research work, including scientific, technical, professional, organisational or financial support. Publications and other Project results may not be used to express, promote or affirm social, ideological, political or other views and messages that are not directly related to the subject and objectives of the Project. In case of acting contrary to this provision, SFRS may suspend further financing of the Project.

The Principal Investigator is obliged to enable interested persons access to the Project results at any time during the Project, and for at least one year after the Project ends.

Additional rules on visibility and communications are defined by the Project Financing Agreement.

This Grant Manual is created in accordance with the Act on Goals, Implementation Method and Project Financing Terms of the Joint Research Program China-Serbia and adopted by the Managing Board of the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia.