Science Fund
of the Republic of Serbia

Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia

Guidelines for Peer reviewers

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

October 2026.

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1. Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia

1.1. General

The Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia (hereinafter referred to as: "SF") is a public organization that supports scientific and research activities. It was established in March 2019, with the aim of providing funds and supporting conditions for continuous development of scientific and research activities in the Republic of Serbia necessary for advancement of a knowledge-based society. The work of the SF is in line with and contributes to the strategic objectives of scientific and technological development of the Republic of Serbia.

1.2. Programs

Programs of the SF are devised to support research activities, including basic and applied scientific research and their commercial use and potential, as well as to boost technological development of the Republic of Serbia.

The programs of the SF are driven by scientific excellence and quality. They are realized through thematic public calls for project proposals. Projects are funded in the form of grants through public competition. The projects are expected to result in high-level research, innovative results, competitiveness at the international level, and relevance to society in general.

Information relating to the programs may be accessed on the SF WEBSITE.

1.3. Selection of projects

For each program, a public call is launched. All applications (project proposals) received before the deadline set in the call are first inspected through the administrative check procedure. Thereafter, generally, the evaluation procedure comprises of stage one of the evaluation, which is performed by Peer Reviewers (hereinafter referred to as: "Peer Reviewer"), and stage two of the evaluation, which is performed by members of the Program Board. As the rule, the evaluation is performed by international experts, who are carefully selected based on their outstanding results in research, experience in project participation and coordination, and experience in review of project proposals. The evaluation criteria are specific to each program, but they are always focused on excellence, impact and implementation of the proposed projects. Project proposals that pass the administrative check and both stages of the evaluation are shortlisted and only the proposals that are within the allocated budget are financed by the SF.

1.4. Conflict of interest

Regarding confidentiality rules and prevention of conflict of interest, the **Peer Reviewer shall act in accordance with the SF Confidentiality Policy and Prevention of Conflict-of-Interest Policy**, which is, **defined in the Contract** signed between the Peer Reviewer and SF.

Experts participating in the evaluation procedure shall take all necessary measures to prevent and terminate any situation that could compromise impartiality and objectiveness of the evaluation. They shall follow the SF Confidentiality Policy and Prevention of Conflict-of-Interest Policy, defined in the General terms for consultancy services referred to in the Contract signed with the SF, and inform the SF team if any issues exist.

In particular, the expert may not be the person who participated in any way in preparation of a project proposal within the SF's program for which s/he is hired to provide services, whether or not s/he reviews that particular project proposal. The expert may not be a participant in any project or project proposal

within the SF's programs for which s/he is hired to provide services, regardless of whether s/he reviews that particular project proposal.

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

2.1. Program Description

The Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia launched the Public Call (hereinafter referred to as: "Call") for the Joint Research Program of Scientists from the Republic of Serbia and the People's Republic of China (hereinafter referred to as: "Program") on August 24th, 2026. The Call is closed on September 25th, 2026. The Program documentation was published on the SF website and is available HERE.

The Program Manual for the Joint Research Program of Scientists from the Republic of Serbia and the People's Republic of China (hereinafter referred to as the "Grant Manual") defines the objectives of the Program and sets out the terms and conditions governing the Program and the projects implemented under it (hereinafter referred to as "Projects"). The Grant Manual is available HERE.

The objectives of the Program are to enhance scientific excellence and the relevance of research in the Republic of Serbia and the People's Republic of China by fostering links between researchers from the two countries through joint projects carried out in their respective countries and abroad; to develop new knowledge and technologies; to facilitate knowledge and technology transfer; and to strengthen international cooperation between research organisations, thereby increasing their visibility and supporting their development.

The Program enables researchers to define their own research agendas, form teams, and collaborate with relevant scientific research organisations in the Republic of Serbia, the People's Republic of China, and around the world.

The Program supports both fundamental and applied research in the following scientific fields:

- Natural Sciences and Mathematics;
- Engineering and Technology;
- Biotechnical Sciences;
- Biomedical Sciences;
- Artificial Intelligence.

This Program is open to qualified scientists and researchers affiliated with accredited research organizations in both the Republic of Serbia and the People's Republic of China, who may participate as either Project Leaders or Project Participants. To qualify for funding, proposals must be submitted by a collaborative project consortium that meets three evaluation criterias (excellence, impact and implementation).

Institutional Requirements: The partnership must feature at least one accredited research institution from the Republic of Serbia and a minimum of one from the People's Republic of China.

Bilateral Team Composition: The overall project team is divided into two distinct national groups. The Serbian group is managed by a designated Principal Investigator (PI) from Serbia, and the Chinese group is managed by a designated PI from China.

Serbian Team Capacity: The Serbian segment of the research team must include a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 9 members.

The total budget of the Program is € 4,000,000.

The total budget consists of **EUR 2,000,000 funded by the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia** and EUR 2,000,000 funded by the National Natural Science Foundation of China.

The maximum total budget per Project is EUR 400,000.

The maximum budget per Project to be funded by the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia is EUR 200,000. The maximum budget per Project funded in the People's Republic of China is EUR 200,000.

The maximum project duration is 3 years (36 months).

Applicants from the Republic of Serbia must submit their applications to the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia (SF), while applicants from the People's Republic of China must submit their applications to the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC).

The evaluation of project proposals is performed separately in SF and NSFC.

Project Proposals (hereinafter referred to as: "Proposal") are submitted in English and the review process is also performed in English by international experts.

2.2. 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.

2.3. Eligible applicants

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

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

Project team - consists of the Principal Investigator and Team Members from the Republic of Serbia, and the Principal Investigator and Team Members from China. For the Serbian side, the minimum number of Team Members 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.

2.4. Eligible costs and budgetary limitations

The maximum Project budget amount is €400,000 per project, securing that SF 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 budget of a Project must be realistic and well-justified. It must fully be in accordance with the needs of the Project implementation, and it must not be prodigal.

The categories of eligible and ineligible costs, as well as the maximum allowable percentage share of each eligible category, are defined by the Grant manual.

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.

The SF has prescribed the maximal monthly net salaries and fees for the Team Members, who in accordance with the Program rules are entitled to such compensation (Table 1). These amounts (in Serbian dinars, RSD) are given in the following table, for various titles and percent of the engagement.

Table 1. Maximal monthly net salaries and fees for the Team Members participating in the Joint Research Program of Scientists from the Republic of Serbia and the People's Republic of China

Researcher's title	Percent of monthly engagement and corresponding NET amount in RSD (and EUR)	
	100%	30%
Junior Research Assistant / Junior Teaching Assistant	132,000	39,600
	(~1125 EUR)	(~337 EUR)
Research Assistant / Teaching Assistant, Teaching Assistant with PhD	144,000	43,200
	(~1227 EUR)	(~368 EUR)
Research Associate / Assistant Professor	172,000	51,600
	(~1465 EUR)	(~440 EUR)
Senior Research Associate / Associate Professor	186,000	55,800
	(~1585 EUR)	(~475 EUR)
Principal Research Fellow / Full Professor	198,000	59,400
	(~1687 EUR)	(~506 EUR)

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.

3. Project Proposal evaluation procedure

The evaluation procedure comprises of administrative check, stage one of the evaluation, which is performed by Peer Reviewers, and stage two of the evaluation, which is performed by members of the Program Board.

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

3.1. Administrative check of Project Proposals

The administrative and eligibility check includes a review of the application documentation submitted to the Call to:

- establish the timeliness of the submitted Proposal against the deadline stipulated in the Public Call;
- 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 Grant manual, including formal fulfilment of criteria for the Principal Investigator, Team Members, the SROs, as well as prescribed relations and proportions in the budget.

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.

3.2. Stage one of evaluation procedure – Peer Reviewers

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

In stage one of the evaluation, each Project Proposal that has fulfilled the criteria of the Administrative and eligibility check is **evaluated by two independent Reviewers**.

Each Peer Reviewer shall assess the Project Proposal in terms of the evaluation criteria: Excellence, Impact, and Implementation, as laid out in the Peer Reviewer Evaluation Form (Appendix 1) and provide numerical scores (awarding between 1 and 5 points for each question) and narrative description for each section of the Form.

- **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; maximum 50 points in evaluation process.
- **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; maximum 30 points in evaluation process.
- **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; maximum 20 points in evaluation process.

The **maximal score** that can be awarded by a Reviewer is **100 points** in line with the criteria specified above (Table 2). Each Reviewer also provides an explicit recommendation confirming or withholding her/his support for the Proposal.

Upon completion of the reviews, they are summarized, and the average scores of the reviews are calculated for each criterion, as well as the overall average score.

In case that the highest and the lowest total score awarded by the reviewers differ by more than 20 points, Commission of the Science Fund notes the discord and coordinates the reviewers to reach consensus or justify the difference of opinions. 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. 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 is calculated as the average score of the two remaining reviews.

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 2.

Table 2. Criteria for the evaluation of Projects in stage one; the maximum (and minimum) number of points

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

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.

3.4. Stage two of evaluation procedure – Program Board

During stage two of evaluation, the Program Board for Project proposal evaluation (hereinafter referred to as: "Program board") evaluates the proposals from the Joint preliminary ranking list are evaluated and the Proposal of the final ranking list is created.

The quality of Project proposals in stage two is evaluated according to evaluation criteria - excellence, impact and implementation, in line with defined Program rules and conditions.

Project proposal evaluation is carried out in accordance with procedure defined by the relevant Science Fund Acts and in accordance with criteria defined by the Grant manual.

3.5. Final Decision and Financing Agreements

Based on the results of the stage two 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 3.

Table 3 - Results of the stage two 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 SF 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 SF 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 SF 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 SF and NSFC.

3.6. 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. SF 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.

4. Roles and responsibilities of Peer Reviewers

Peer Review is the cornerstone of the work of the SF as a funding organization. The time and effort that Peer Reviewers commit to the SF peer review procedure is invaluable in helping the Program Board make funding decisions in stage three of the evaluation.

The Peer Reviewer shall comply with the following rules:

- The Peer Reviewer shall **answer all invitations** issued by the SF **in a timely manner** and **in accordance with the signed Contract**, regardless of whether s/he accepts or rejects to evaluate a Project Proposal.
- Upon submitting the review prepared by the Peer Reviewer, the SF shall examine and verify each document. If issues are identified during the verification, the SF team will request the **Reviewer to edit the submitted review** within the deadline allocated by the SF.
- The **Peer Reviewer shall maintain the confidentiality of all information**, including files with data about the Projects, and personal information, in particular. S/he shall comply with all rules and regulations of the signed Contract.

The roles and responsibilities of the Peer Reviewer are as follows:

1. Confirm the Declaration of impartiality and confidentiality provided by the SF.
2. Within two days of receiving an invitation to review a project proposal and relevant parts of the Project Proposal for review:
   - Examine the abstract of the assigned Project Proposal to verify that the Project Proposal matches the Reviewer's area of expertise and inform the SF of any concerns.
   - Review the documentation of the assigned Project Proposal for conflicts of interest or the appearance of conflicts of interest in accordance with the General terms for consultancy services referred to in the Contract signed with the SF and inform the SF team if any issues exist.
   - Respond to the invitation to review by filling in the invitation form at the Project Proposal Evaluation Module.

   Following this the Reviewer who has accepted the invitation to review and stated to have no Conflict of interest will receive access to the full documentation of Project Proposal(s) to be reviewed.
3. **Prepare a written review of the project proposal within the deadline stipulated within the invitation to perform the review,** by using the Peer Review Evaluation Form (shown in Annex 1), based on defined evaluation criteria and judgment of merit.

Within the Evaluation form Peer Review must give **concise, pertinent, and well justified comments in a wording that may be given directly to the applicant**. **Strong and weak points must be reflected in the narrative comments**.

Comments shall include not only the summary of the project proposal but shall provide a short critical analysis of the project proposal's strong and weak points.

The written review must contain **fact-based narrative, that is in line with the numerical scores**. The written review contains **narrative focused on argumentation supporting a positive or negative assessment of the Project Proposal, for each evaluation section - Excellence, Impact, and Implementation.**

4. Prepare a written response to complaints, if any.

5. Instructions for Peer Reviewers

The evaluation process is performed using a Project Proposal Evaluation Module (hereinafter referred as: “module”).

Notifications will be sent to the Reviewer by e-mail and posted on the module.

The steps of the stage one evaluation process, and instructions for Peer reviewer are described below.

5.1 Project documentation

Evaluation of project proposals in stage two is done by examination of the project documentation and preparing a written review based on this.

Project documentation consists of:

- **Main documentation** - **mandatory for assessment of each project proposal** consists of:
    - Applicant info – Information on project participants (team members and external collaborators) and consortium (participating Scientific research organizations – SROs)
    - Project description part A
    - Project description part B
    - Budget
    - Gantt chart
- **Additional documentation** - even though not mandatory for review of the project proposal may be informative in case further information is needed for assessment and preparation of written review. Additional documentation consists of Consortium Agreement (Joint Research Agreement), ethics and other committees’ decisions, administrative forms, etc.

Stated project documentation is available for download at the Project proposal evaluation module after the reviewer has accepted the invitation to review the project proposal and the SF has granted access to it (*download all* button).

5.2 Receiving an invitation to perform a peer review

SF sends an invitation to Peer reviewer to perform a project proposal evaluation through the module, and the invited reviewer receives it via e-mail and the module.

At this point the reviewer will have access to the basic information on the project proposal - Project abstract and Applicant info, necessary to

- make an informed decision on whether to accept the invitation to review

- assess for the possibility of Conflict of interest.

After receiving an invitation to perform a peer review, in accordance with these Guidelines, please examine the assigned project proposal and the project participants **within two days to**:

- verify that the project proposal matches your area of expertise and

- check for possibility of Conflict of interest with any of the project participants (team members) and organizations.

- **inform the SF of any concerns, particularly conflicts of interest and deadlines**.

In the case that there is no conflict of interest, and you are available to carry out the review, the SF will send you a confirmation that you have been assigned as a Peer Reviewer, and you will receive access to the entire project documentation.

5.3 Performing evaluations of the project proposals

1. For a successful evaluation procedure, it is very important to meet the deadlines. If you cannot complete the evaluation within the stipulated deadline, please notify the SF as soon as possible and propose a new deadline by which the task will have been completed. The proposed deadline must be approved by the SF.

2. All fields in the Evaluation Form must be filled. Please double check your Evaluation Form before submitting your review. The SF cannot accept incomplete or evaluations which are not in accordance with Program rules and Guidelines for Peer reviewers. Therefore, the SF will be obliged to request a correction if the submitted review is incomplete, data is missing or the submitted review is not in line with the program rules and guidelines.

3. Provide your judgment on the Project Proposal by choosing one of the proposed options. Please, select the relevant option that reflects your opinion and the overall (total) score given to the Project Proposal.

4. Compare the Proposed Project with the previous work of Team members and give your opinion on the novelty of the Project by selecting one of the options available in the table at the top of the Evaluation Form.

5. You will be required to enter numerical points and textual description for three evaluation sections that follow the evaluation criteria: 1) Excellence, 2) Impact and 3) Implementation.

6. For each evaluation criterion, you should answer a set of questions (sub-criteria) and assign numerical scores as follows: 1 (poor), 2 (fair), 3 (good), 4 (very good), and 5 (excellent). The assigned points must be presented in round (integer) numbers. Scores assigned in decimals are not admissible. The total number of points for Excellence, Impact, and Implementation are automatically calculated, as well as the overall score.

7. Along with the numerical score, please provide concise, pertinent, and well justified narrative comments for each sub-criterion of the evaluation grid, in a wording that may be shown to the applicant. The minimal number of characters for each textual field is 500, and the maximal number is 4000.

8. Please comment concisely on each evaluation sub-criterion to the best of your abilities, professional skills, knowledge, and in line with the code of ethics. **Strong and weak points of the Project Proposal assessment must be elaborated on in narrative comments**.

9. Comments should provide a short critical and constructive analysis in line with (but not limited to) the respective questions of the evaluation grid (evaluation sub-criteria) and should not only include the summary of the Project Proposal.

10. Provide brief, constructive, and instructive comments, specific for the Project Proposal, which fully justify the provided quantitative evaluation.

11. Assigned numerical points should be in alignment with your descriptive assessment of each evaluation criterion as much as possible. The applicant should receive unambiguous information on the given score and Reviewer's opinion on the Project Proposal.

12. When expressing your opinion in the form of a critical analysis, please aim to be as objective and constructive as possible. Statements in the form of personal remarks should be avoided. Please be sure to check all information in the Project Proposal and make sure that your judgment and comments are driven by data and facts.

13. Summarize your view of the Project Proposal within the limited number of characters – **minimum 500 and maximum 4000** – stating both strengths and weaknesses of the Proposal, and

14. Explicitly provide a recommendation for the Program Board on whether you suggest the Project Proposal for further evaluation or not. If you suggest that the Project Proposal should not be funded in the proposed form or within this Program, your comments should include recommendations for future improvements of the Proposal.

15. Provide the information on your expertise. Please indicate the areas of expertise that are relevant to your assessment. Make sure not to enter any personal information that would enable the identification of the reviewer (name, institutional affiliation, etc.). The Evaluation Form is to be filled out anonymously and may be viewed by the applicant(s) or made accessible to the public.

16. Please submit the Peer Review Evaluation Form within the stipulated deadline and help us complete this complex, and crucial phase of the program cycle in due time.

5.4 Reaching consensus (if necessary)

1. After all reviews of a project proposal are submitted, the system automatically registers if there is a large numerical discrepancy among given scores.

2. If total scores given by the Peer Reviewers of the Project Proposal differ by **more than 20 points** the SF contacts the Peer Reviewers and asks for consensus or justification of differing opinions.

3. The reviewers will gain insight into all reviews of the project proposal and have the opportunity to edit their assigned scores and comments and resubmit the review.

4. In the case that a reviewer decides not to amend their judgement and the discrepancy between total scores remains larger than 20 points, the SF 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 is calculated as the average score of the remaining reviews. In case that

the total points of the additional review is equidistant from the total points of the other reviews, the final score is calculated by considering the two reviews which are most favourable.

5.5 Verification of a submitted written review by the Science fund

After submitting each written review, you will be notified if your review has been verified and accepted. Otherwise, if issues are identified during the verification, the SF team shall contact you asking for edits of the submitted form.

The SF reserves the right to return the project evaluation to a reviewer for required corrections, clarifications, and justification of the assigned scores in case of but not limited to the following: the evaluation form was not completed in line with the Program rules and the Guidelines for Peer reviewers, the initial narrative of the evaluation is not clear and instructive, the narrative does not include comments based on the facts and data provided by the proposed Project, the comments are presented in a too general way or only consist of summary of the Project proposal, the narrative is not aligned with the assigned scores.

5.6 Deadlines

Deadlines that should be met by Peer Reviewers are as follows:

Task	Deadline
Accepting invitation to review and declaring no conflict of interest	2 days
Performing the peer review	14 days
Consensus review	3 days

If you should require an extension of a deadline, please inform the SF. If the SF grants an extension, you will be notified about the new deadline. Otherwise, the SF will notify you that it is not possible to grant an extension and your access to the Project Proposal may be blocked.

Please note that you cannot be reimbursed for a review that you have not completed properly in due time.

6. Project Evaluation Module

The evaluation process (stage two and stage three of evaluation) is performed through the Project Proposal Evaluation Module at the following link: https://evaluation.fondzanauku.gov.rs/fzn/login

Please log into your account to access your dedicated evaluation space.

In case of any issues, please contact the SF by e-mail. Project acronym should be stated in the subject line of the e-mails if the issue is related to a particular Project Proposal.

Within the module you will find notifications about the progress of the evaluation process. You will also receive notifications from the evaluation module through e-mail.

The module contains an overview of all Project Proposals you were invited to or are currently reviewing. The module shows basic information on each of those Project Proposals: Program name, Project acronym, title and application number, set deadline, and status of the review. This page provides access to the Project Proposal page.

In order to keep track of the review process, you can monitor status of each Project Proposal assigned to you. The table below lists all stages and statuses of the process.

Project status	Description
Request for review	Request to review a Project Proposal is sent to the Reviewer, and his/her reply is pending
Review request accepted	Reviewer has informed the SF that he/she is willing to perform the review
Review request rejected	Reviewer has informed the SF that he/she is not willing to perform the review
Review in progress	Reviewer that has accepted to perform the review has been approved by the SF Admin; deadline for review submission has been set
Review overdue	The submission deadline has not been met by the Reviewer
Review submitted	Review of the Project Proposal has been submitted
Review accepted	The submitted review of the Project Proposal has been verified and accepted by the SF as completed in line with the Guidelines
Review edit requested	Submitted review is not in line with the Guidelines and edits have been requested
Consensus requested	There is a large discrepancy among total scores of the reviews, which should be amended or justified by the Reviewers
Consensus submitted	The Consensus review has been submitted by Reviewer
Project evaluation completed	All reviews of the project have been completed, verified, and accepted by the SF; Consensus (where necessary) has been reached

6.1. Performing Project review and access to Project Proposal(s)

In accordance with your expertise, you will be invited to review one or more Project Proposal(s). At this point the basic information on the Project Proposal will be made available at the module: Project title, acronym, application number, abstract, and information on project team.

After receiving an invitation to perform a peer review, please examine the assigned Project Proposal within **two days** to verify that the Project Proposal matches your area of expertise and inform the SF of any concerns, particularly conflicts of interest and deadlines.

In case there are no conflicts of interest, and you are available to carry out the review, please fill in the Invitation form and accept the invitation. The SF will review the Invitation form, and if everything is in line with the Guidelines you will be appointed reviewer of the project and be given access to the entire project documentation. You will receive an email confirming that you have been assigned as a Peer Reviewer of the project by the SF.

The documentation of the Project Proposal in its entirety will be made available to you. The Project proposal documentation can be downloaded complete or as individual files.

You will be using the Evaluation Form for evaluation of the assigned project proposal(s). You should enter scores and comments for each evaluation criterion and sub-criterion. Most fields in the form are mandatory[1] and should be filled in for the review to be considered complete.

At the bottom of the Evaluation Form, two options are available:

- ***Save Only*** - In the case you need to save changes made to the Evaluation Form and continue to review the Project Proposal later, please use the ***Save Only*** option.
- ***Save and Submit*** - If you have filled in all the mandatory fields in the Evaluation Form, and you consider the review to be complete, please use the ***Save and Submit*** option. By using this option, the Review will be submitted, and the SF will assess the review to make sure it was completed in line with these Guidelines and Program rules. At this point your access to the complete Project Proposal documentation will be locked.

6.2. Editing your review

Each submitted review is assessed by the SF to make sure all mandatory fields were filled in, and that the evaluation of the Project Proposal was completed in line with these Guidelines and Program rules.

In case issues are identified within the submitted review, you will be asked by the SF to edit your review accordingly, and access to the entire Project Proposal documentation will be provided. Please follow the steps laid out in the previous section for editing the project review.

6.3. Consensus review

If total scores given by Reviewers of the project differ by more than 20 points, the SF contacts the Peer Reviewers and asks for consensus or justification of differing opinions.

Reviewers of the project proposal will be given access to all reviews. You will be asked to consider editing assigned scores and comments to lessen the discord and resubmit your review. Please follow the steps laid out in the previous section(s) for editing the project review.

In the case that a reviewer decides not to amend their judgement and the discrepancy between total scores remains larger than 20 points, 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 is calculated as the average score of the remaining reviews. In case that the total points of the additional review is equidistant from the total points of the other reviews, the final score is calculated by considering the two reviews which are most favourable.

7. Technical assistance

In case any issues arise, do not hesitate to contact s by e-mail: experts-sfrs@fondzanauku.gov.rs

[1] All fields, except for the ***Private message to SF***, are mandatory. Any message to SF you enter is strictly confidential and will not be made available to applicants or other participants in the evaluation process

Appendix 1. Peer Review Evaluation Form

Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia **Joint Research Program of Scientists from the Republic of Serbia and the People's Republic of China**			
Project Grant Peer Review	**Project Reference No.**	**Excellence Score:**	
	Scientific field:	**Impact Score:**	
		Implementation Score:	
	Project Acronym:	**Total Score:**	

Title of Proposed Project

Excellence

Please score and comment on the excellence of the proposed research.

1.Excellence Assessment	**Points (1-5)**
1.1. Are the specific objectives for the Project clear and measurable?	
1.2. Are the specific objectives realistic and achievable within the duration of the Project?	
1.3. Is the proposed research scientifically founded in recent scientific publications?	
1.4. Is the proposed research work ambitious and goes beyond the state-of-the-art?	
1.5. Are the planned results of the proposed research likely to be significant and (where relevant) applicable?	
1.6. Is the proposed research likely to lead to publications in high-impact journals/books and other scholarly publications relevant for the scientific field of the proposal?	
1.7. Is the proposed research methodology appropriate to achieve the goals of the Project?	
1.8. To what extent is the proposed research original and novel, not just an extension of previous results? (Briefly justify in the description of the Excellence score your judgment about the novelty of the Proposed Project compared to the previous work of the applicants)	
1.9. Are Open Science principles and practices adequately integrated into the proposed research methodology?	
1.10. Does the proposed research offer credible perspectives for further scientific advancement through the generation of new knowledge and/or the development of new technologies, and provide a sound basis for further research?	
Total (max 50 points)	

Note: Assign points using the following range: 1 (poor), 2 (fair), 3 (good), 4 (very good) and 5 (excellent).

Description of the Excellence score (maximum 4000 characters)

Please justify the given score and provide argumentation. Make sure you state both strengths and weaknesses in the Excellence of the proposal.

Strengths:
Weaknesses:

Impact

Please score and comment on the pathway to impact identified for this work.

2. Impact Assessment	**Points (1-5)**
2.1. Does the proposed research have the potential to have a global impact on society, economy, industry, climate change, environment, healthcare, education and other aspects of social development?	
2.2. Does the proposed research have the potential to contribute to the development of a specific scientific field?	
2.3. Does the proposed research have a potential to contribute to the science, economy or society at the national level in the Republic of Serbia and the People's Republic of China?	
2.4. Are the proposed measures for promotion, visibility, dissemination and application of the Project results adequate and well planned?	
2.5. Does the project clearly demonstrate the added value of bilateral cooperation between the Republic of Serbia and the People's Republic of China?	
2.6. Does the proposed research identify stakeholders and beneficiaries who will be impacted by the Project?	
Total (max 30 points)	

Note: Assign points using the following range: 1 (poor), 2 (fair), 3 (good), 4 (very good) and 5 (excellent).

Description of the Impact score (maximum 4,000 characters)

Please justify the given score and provide argumentation. Make sure you state both strengths and weaknesses in the Impact of the proposal.

Strengths:
Weaknesses:

Implementation

Please comment on the applicants' ability and commitment to deliver the proposed project, the effectiveness of the proposed planning and management and on whether the requested resources are appropriate and have been fully justified.

3. Implementation Assessment	**Points (1-5)**
3.1. Is the implementation plan realistic, coherent, and feasible, with well-defined work packages, tasks, deliverables, milestones, appropriate timing, balanced team effort, adequate resource allocation, and an effective bilateral workflow?	
3.2. Do the PI and key team members from the Republic of Serbia demonstrate the necessary scientific/scholarly credentials, and the leadership, are the roles of the Project team members and consortium partners clearly outlined, and are their fields of expertise complementary? Does the Project team have all the necessary know-how and access to critical infrastructure needed to carry out the project activities?	
3.3. Is the risk management properly implemented and are the mitigation measures well planned?	
3.4. Is the budget realistic and well balanced?	
Total (max 20 points)	

Note: Assign points using the following range: 1 (poor), 2 (fair), 3 (good), 4 (very good) and 5 (excellent).

Description of the Implementation score (maximum 4000 characters)

Please justify the given score and provide argumentation. Make sure you state both strengths and weaknesses in the Implementation of the proposal.

Strengths:
Weaknesses:

Novelty in relation to the previous work of the applicants

Compared to the previous work of the applicants, mark the novelty of the proposed idea (Place an **X** next to the relevant option):

It is a completely novel idea for the applicants	
It is a novel idea but based on their previous work	
It is partially investigated/developed in their previous work and represents justified extension	
It is incremental research compared to their previous work	
This idea has been implemented by one part of the applicants, but its application is novel	
The idea is concurrently developed and/or financed in other project(s) by the applicants	
The idea of the Proposed Project has already been implemented and/or published by the applicants	
Other (provide comment in the narrative section of the excellence score)	

Overall judgment

Mark the overall judgment of the project proposal (Place an **X** next to the relevant option):

This is a very strong proposal that fully meets all assessment criteria	
This is a strong proposal that broadly meets all assessment criteria	
This is a good proposal that meets all assessment criteria but with minor weaknesses	
This proposal meets all assessment criteria but with clear weaknesses	
This proposal does not meet one or more of the assessment criteria	
This proposal is scientifically or technically flawed	

Summary Assessment

Please summarize your view of the proposal (maximum 4000 characters). Make sure you state both strengths and weaknesses of the proposal.
