

**CALL FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST FOR PROGRAM
BOARD MEMBERS FOR PROJECT EVALUATION – SPECIAL
COVID-19 RESEARCH PROGRAM**

Date of publication: May 27, 2020

Reference number **SFRS/Call/2020/02**

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NOTICE OF CALL FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

for the establishment of the Program Board of the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia

Date of publication: May 27, 2020

Reference number SFRS/Call/2020/02

1. Contracting Authority:

The Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia, Masarikova 5, 11 000 Belgrade

2. Reference number:

SFRS/Call/2020/02

3. Registration procedure

The objective of this Call for Expression of Interest is to set up a Program Board for the second-stage evaluation of Project Proposals that will be submitted to the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia (hereinafter referred as to the: "Science Fund") as a part of the Special COVID-19 Research Program (hereinafter referred as to the: "Program").

Interested candidates are invited to submit a filled-in Registration form and CV in the English language to the following email address: c19-pb@fondznanaku.gov.rs by 00:00 CET on Wednesday, June 10, 2020.

Submission forms received after the deadline stipulated above will not be taken into consideration.

4. Information to be provided

Interested candidates should submit an application that consists of a filled-in Registration form and CV to the following email address: c19-pb@fondznanaku.gov.rs.

The Science Fund reserves the right to request supporting documents that confirm the information provided in the Registration form and CV, such as copies of degrees or diplomas, employers' certificates, references etc.

5. General description of the procedure

Natural persons are invited to submit an Expression of Interest by sending an application in accordance with the rules set out in this Call. The Science Fund will perform an assessment of submitted applications for Program Board Members and invite those applicants who meet both inclusion and assessment criteria to sign a Contract with the Science Fund.

Candidates who meet the requirements defined in Section 11 will be considered as the potential Program Board Members. Further selection will be performed based on the criteria stipulated in Section 13 of this Call.

The Science Fund will sign contracts with the selected Program Board Members. The signed Contract entails no obligation on the part of the Science Fund concerning the allocation of Project Proposals for evaluation to the Program Board Members.

Based on the specification of the Public Call for Project Proposals within the Program, the Science Fund will contact the Program Board Members and check their availability, define deadlines, scope of work and send Evaluation guidelines for the Program.

The application procedure for Project Proposals is performed in English, due to the international evaluation process. The submitted Project Proposals are in English and the Program Board Members shall perform their work in English.

6. Engagement of Program Board Members resulting from this Call

Services of the Program Board Members resulting from this Call will be used for tasks to be carried out in accordance with the requirements stipulated in the Terms of Reference. The Program Board Members identified through this Call may be contacted in the future for additional expert tasks.

7. Program Description

The primary objective of the Program is to finance Projects that will contribute to an efficient scientific response to the COVID-19 pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus and that will enable society to be better prepared and to respond to this pandemic.

The secondary objective of the Program is to develop solutions which might, in the future, be of relevance in the event of other pandemics or natural disasters.

This Program should help contribute to the global research response to the current situation, through establishing international collaboration, fostering two-way mobility of experts and through joint scientific and development ventures.

The program supports applied scientific research, creation of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary teams and consortium submission of Project Proposals.

The Program is designed for scientists and researchers who are employed in scientific and research organizations (SROs) in the Republic of Serbia.

The Act on the Special COVID-19 Research Program (hereinafter referred as to the: "Program Act") regulates the Program goals, the announcement conditions and the procedure for implementation of public calls within the Program framework, and in particular the application procedure and conditions for the submission of Project Proposals, the procedure and the criteria for the evaluation of Proposals, the procedure for monitoring the Project outputs, the procedure for evaluating the Project results, terms of financing, as well as the rights and obligations of beneficiaries of Project funds.

The Program Act and all necessary documentation of the Program may be accessed [HERE](#).

8. Thematic areas covered by the Program

The Program is implemented within three thematic areas.

- 1) Biomedical Sciences, within the priority thematic areas:
 - Epidemiological studies of the COVID-19 pandemic (risk factors, virus transmission, contagiousness, susceptibility to infection, early detection, preventive measures, monitoring medically vulnerable groups, controlling intrahospital spread, epidemic control, methods for modelling the epidemic and prediction and other epidemiological studies);
 - Clinical studies of the infection caused by SARS-CoV-2 virus including using models determined by the World Health Organization (WHO), including therapeutic and diagnostic procedures;

- The molecular basis for prevention and therapy of the infection caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus (pathophysiological, immunological and immunological-pathological mechanisms, research of the virus, improving and developing serodiagnosis and molecular/genetic tests, new drug design, vaccine development and other research);
 - Safety aspects in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic (decontaminations, support to the healthcare system in stopping and controlling the infection, protection of healthcare workers and other safety aspects).
- 2) Biomedical Engineering and Information Technologies, within the priority thematic areas:
- U Applications of interdisciplinary approaches, scientific methods, engineering principles and suitable technologies in the development of new procedures, tools, means and systems as part of the prevention and fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery from its consequences, as well as for reacting in other natural disasters;
 - Application of information technologies in systems which are used in the prevention, fight against the pandemic and in the process of recovering from its consequences as well as in the case of other natural disasters, primarily in all segments of the healthcare system: health informatics, biomedical informatics, clinical informatics and nursing informatics.
- 3) Economic, Sociological, Psychological Research and Management of complex systems, within the priority thematic areas:
- Challenges of economic policies, modelling and rating the effects on economic growth and functioning of individual economic actors, developing strategies for alleviating the negative effects, effects on the labor force, analysis of international economic relations and global coordination under the COVID-19 pandemic;
 - Challenges of social policies and national health under the COVID-19 pandemic and defining countermeasures, health management and management of other complex systems and critical structures of vital importance, social measures in the function of maintaining the healthcare system, social cohesion and common values in extreme circumstances, psychological consequences of the pandemic and mechanisms for addressing them.

Besides the abovementioned, researchers may submit other topics which address the overall goals of the Program, provided they submit a proper justification.

9. Composition and expertise of the Program Board

Interested candidates for Program Board Members within the thematic areas that responds to the objectives of the Program are invited to apply within their respective areas of expertise. The Science Fund will select seven Program Board Members whose areas of expertise mostly match the thematic areas.

The Program Board will consist of seven members, from the following areas:

1. Expert from Biomedical Sciences - Molecular biology (with experience in Molecular Genetics),
2. Expert from Biomedical Sciences - Epidemiology,
3. Expert from Biomedical Sciences - Infectiology (with experience in Pulmonology, alternatively),
4. Expert from Biomedical Sciences - Immunology,
5. Expert from Technical and Technological Sciences – Engineering Sciences or Information Technology,

6. Expert from the field of Economy (primarily with a focus on quantitative methods in Economics),
7. Expert from Humanities and Social Sciences (preferably from Sociology or Psychology, but experts from other Humanities and Social Sciences are also eligible for this position).

One of the members will be selected as the chairperson of the Program Board.

10. Place of delivery

The services performed by the Program Board Members will be provided remotely.

The Science Fund will organize and host online periodical meetings of the Program Board Members through online platforms.

The Program Board assignment for the Special COVID-19 Research Program is expected to start on June 15, 2020 and finish no later than August 15, 2020.

11. Inclusion criteria

Minimum required qualifications of the Program Board Members are:

Education:

University degree – PhD;

Work experience:

- at least 5 years of relevant working experience (universities, research organizations, for members in the field of Biomedical Sciences, clinical and/or labs experience);
- relevant scientific experience within the thematic areas that responds to the objectives of the Program;
- published scientific papers in international journals within the thematic areas that responds to the objectives of the Program;
- experience in project management;
- experience in international cooperation;
- experience in evaluation of the project proposals within international and/or national research programs, overall and within the thematic areas that respond to the objectives of the Program (peer reviewer, expert panel member/president or director of program or project proposals evaluation committee in national and international funds, research agency, ministry or another funding source);
- industry R&D experience is an asset.

Language proficiency:

- Excellence in English.

All applicants who meet the listed criteria will be considered as candidates for the Program Board Members for Project Evaluation.

12. Exclusion criteria

Candidates shall be excluded from participation if:

- a) they have a conflict of interest in connection with the Contract (a conflict of interest could arise in particular as a result of economic interests, political or national affinities, family or emotional ties or any other relevant connection or shared interest);
- b) they have been convicted of an offence concerning their professional conduct by a judgment of a competent authority which has the force of res judicata;
- c) they have been guilty of grave professional misconduct proven by any means which the Science Fund can justify including by decisions of international organizations;
- d) they have been the subject of a judgment which has the force of res judicata for fraud, corruption, involvement in a criminal organization, money laundering or any other illegal activity, where such an illegal activity is detrimental to Serbia's and EU financial interests;
- e) they are subject to an administrative penalty for being guilty of misrepresentation in supplying the information required by the Science Fund as a condition of participation in a procurement procedure or failing to supply information, or being declared to be in serious breach of their obligation under a Contract covered by the budget.

Before signing a Contract, the Program Board Members shall provide a declaration on their honor stating that they are not in one of the situations of exclusion listed above. In case of doubt, they may be requested to provide supporting evidence of non-exclusion.

13. Assessment criteria

The candidates will be assessed based on the following criteria:

- Areas of expertise within the thematic areas that responds to the objectives of the Program;
- Education;
- Work experience (overall and within the thematic areas that responds to the objectives of the Program - number of years);
- Language proficiency;
- Type of work experience (academia, research, clinic, industry);
- Scientific experience within the thematic areas that respond to the objectives of the Program (number of scientific publications and other scientific results);
- Project management experience (overall and within the thematic areas that respond to the objectives of the Program - number of coordinated projects, types of projects including funding sources, duration, and budget);
- Experience in international cooperation;
- Peer review experience within the thematic areas that responds to the objectives of the Program (number of performed peer reviews, project types and budgets of the reviewed projects);
- Experience as an expert panel member/president or director of program or project proposals evaluation committee in national and international funds, research agency, ministry or another funding source (number of participation as an expert panel member/ president or director of program or project proposals evaluation committee in national and international funds, research agency, ministry or another funding source, overall and within the thematic areas that responds to the objectives of the Program).

Candidates should apply within their respective areas of expertise defined in Section 9 of this Call. Criteria for each area will be considered specifically.

Selection of the Program Board Members will be performed by the Science Fund in two stages:

1. Assessment of the expertise and experience of the identified candidates for Program Board Members according to the criteria listed in this section and section 10 and ranking the candidates accordingly.
2. The Science Fund will select the best seven ranked candidates, one for each position in the Program Board.

The selected candidates will be invited to negotiate Contract as the Program Board Members of the Science Fund.

14. Conditions of remuneration

The payments for services will be made based on a daily fee (8 working hours). The Program Board Members shall keep their track and submit timesheets to the Science Fund indicating their amount of work.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

for

Program Board Members of the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia

COVID-19

Date of publication: May 27, 2020

Reference number SFRS/Call/2020/02

1. Background

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

The Science Fund's programs are devised to support research activities, including basic scientific research and applied scientific research and its commercial use and potential, as well as to boost technological development of the Republic of Serbia.

The Science Fund's programs also focus on developing human resources, stimulating international cooperation, collaboration and exchange, investment in the scientific and research organizations in Serbia (SROs) infrastructure by providing equipment and core support, as well as assisting the development of laboratories and institutions of strategic importance. In addition, the Science Fund is supporting the publishing of scientific and research and development (R&D) findings and results in internationally acclaimed publications and those of strategic importance for the Republic of Serbia.

The Science Fund's programs are driven by scientific excellence and quality. They are realized through public calls for Project Proposals, and projects are funded in the form of grants through public competition. The aim of the projects is to provide high-level research, innovative results, competitiveness at international level and relevance to society in general.

Information relating to the programs may be accessed on the [Science Fund website](#).

The Science Fund has established a two-stage evaluation process for the Special COVID-19 Research Program. Both the first stage and the second stage are performed by the Program Board. The points given in the first stage of the evaluation will not be transferred to the second stage of the evaluation.

The Program Board is an independent expert body which will consist of seven members.

In order to secure objectivity, transparency and quality of the evaluation of Project Proposals submitted within the Program, the Science Fund has established a selection process for the Program Board Members.

The Program Board is to be established in accordance with the best international practices and in accordance with the Science Fund's internal acts. It is to be an independent decision-making body comprised of highly qualified individuals. The function of the Program Board is that of an independent body within the Science Fund's evaluation process. The Program Board is responsible for making the shortlist of Abbreviated Project Proposals after the first stage of evaluation process and the final list of Project Proposals which are qualified in both stages of the evaluation and which will be financed within the available funds of the Program. There will be seven Program Board Members who will evaluate Project Proposals submitted within the Program.

2. Scope of work

The general functions and responsibilities of the Program Board Members are:

- Evaluation of Project Proposals in both stages of the evaluation process based on the evaluation criteria listed in the Evaluation Guidelines for the Program;
- Submitting comments and scores for Project Proposals in the Program Board Evaluation Form via email (except where and if requested otherwise);
- Participation in meetings of the Program Board (organized remotely).

Each Program Board Member must declare any conflict of interest prior to undertaking the evaluation of a particular Project Proposal.

The role and responsibilities of the Program Board Members are as follows:

- Sign the Declaration of impartiality and confidentiality provided by the Science Fund.
- Receive access to the Abbreviated Project Proposal to be evaluated through email in the first stage of evaluation process.
- Examine Short Project Proposal documents.
- Within three working days of receiving the Short Project Proposal for evaluation, examine the assigned Short Project Proposal and inform the Science Fund for any concern.
- Evaluate all Short Project Proposals assigned to them for conflicts of interest or the appearance of conflicts of interest in accordance with the Science Fund Confidentiality and Prevention of Conflict of Interest Policy and inform the Science Fund team if any issues exist.
- Prepare a written evaluation (using the Program Board Evaluation Form), based on the defined evaluation criteria and judgment of merit. Assign numerical scores according to the Evaluation Guidelines of the Program. Besides numerical scores, the evaluation must give concise, pertinent and well justified comments for each criterion of the evaluation grid, in a wording that may be given directly to the applicant, if requested. Strong and weak points must be reflected. In particular, comments should not include only the summary of the Short Project Proposal but should provide short critical analysis in line with (not limited to) the respective questions of the evaluation grid.
- Form a preliminary shortlist of Abbreviated Project Proposals based on the performed scoring.
- Receive access to the Full Project Proposal to be evaluated through email in the second stage of evaluation process.
- Examine Full Project Proposal documents.
- Prepare a written evaluation (using the Program Board Evaluation Form), based on the defined evaluation criteria and judgment of merit. Assign numerical scores according to the Evaluation

Guidelines of the Program. Besides numerical scores, the evaluation must give concise, pertinent and well justified comments for each criterion of the evaluation grid, in a wording that may be given directly to the applicant, if requested. Strong and weak points must be reflected. In particular, comments should not include only the summary of the Project Proposal but should provide short critical analysis in line with (not limited to) the respective questions of the evaluation grid. Within the evaluation, in second stage, the Program Board Members may require clarifications from the applicant and/or suggest a rebalance of the proposed budget in its entirety or in individual items specified in Article 8 of the Program Act.

- Form a preliminary shortlist of Project Proposals which are qualified in both stages of the evaluation and which will be financed within the available funds of the Program.
- Complete and send the Final Evaluation Report for each Project Proposal according to the described procedure.

The preliminary shortlist is a part of the Final Evaluation Report, which is to be signed by the Chair and Program Board Members and forwarded to the Scientific Council of the Science Fund, which gives an opinion about the shortlist.

The shortlist is thereafter forwarded to the Management Board of the Science Fund. The Management Board makes the final decision on adoption of the final list of Projects that are approved for financing by the Science Fund under the Program and on the amount of funds allocated to each Project.

3. Experience and qualifications

Minimum required qualifications of the Program Board Members are:

Education: University degree – PhD;

Work experience:

- at least 5 years of relevant working experience (universities, research organizations, for members in the field of Biomedical Sciences, clinical and/or labs experience);
- relevant scientific experience within the thematic areas that responds to the objectives of the Program;
- published scientific papers in international journals within the thematic areas that respond to the objectives of the Program;
- experience in project management;
- experience in international cooperation;
- experience in evaluation of the project proposals within international and/or national research programs (overall and within the thematic areas that respond to the objectives of the Program - peer reviewer, expert panel member/president or director of program or committee for project proposals evaluation in national and international funds, research agency, ministry or another funding source);
- industry R&D experience is an asset.

Language proficiency: Excellence in English.

The application process for Project Proposals is performed in English, due to the international evaluation process. Submitted Project Proposals are in English and the Program Board Members shall perform their work in English. Therefore, the Program Board Members must be able to work in English.

4. Timing and duration

The Program Board assignment for the Special COVID-19 Research Program is expected to start on June 15, 2020 and finish no later than August 15, 2020. The project evaluation will be performed in two phases:

- 1) evaluation of short project proposals is expected to last from June 15 until July 3;
- 2) evaluation of full project proposals is expected to last from July 22 until August 15.

The Science Fund reserves rights to make a minor change of the schedule due to any unexpected circumstance and notify the Program Board as soon as possible.

Generally, the Program Board Members are expected to provide their services upon the timely notification by the Science Fund team.

The Program Board work will be done remotely, and the transfer of documents will be sent via email.

The time of effort per Program is 20 working days of remote work.

5. Reporting obligations

The Program Board Members shall report directly to the Science Fund team in the following manner:

- After receiving the Project Proposal for evaluation, the Program Board Members shall provide the results of the evaluation of the Project Proposal along with comprehensive comments and relevant scores, in written form via email, within specified deadlines – using the Program Board Evaluation Form.
- Following the evaluation process, each Program Board Member is obliged to submit a filled-in Time sheet, demonstrating the engagement in the evaluation of Project Proposals.

6. Input by the Science Fund

The Science Fund team will provide necessary documentation and templates, as well as access to the Project Proposals to be evaluated.

The Evaluation Guidelines will be provided to Program Board Members. The Evaluation Guidelines will serve as guidance on how to conduct the evaluation and how to provide adequate feedback for the Project Proposals.

7. Processing of personal data

If processing replies to the present Call for Expression of Interest involves recording and processing of personal data (such as: name, address and CV), such data will be processed pursuant to Regulation (EC) No 2018/1725 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data by the Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies and on the free movement of such data.

8. Call documentation

The following documents are annexed to the Call and form an integral part of it:

Annex 1: Registration form for the Program Board Members, which should be filled in and sent by email together with an updated CV.