



**Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia  
The Program for Excellent Projects of Young  
Researchers and Early Career Scientists –  
PROMIS 2023**

GRANT MANUAL

February, 2023

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Dear Applicant,

The Program for Excellent Projects of Young Researchers and Early Career Scientists – PROMIS 2023 is designed to empower young doctors of science to manage projects, strengthen the professional capacities of young researchers and scientists at the beginning of their careers, involve excellent young researchers in scientific research work, empower young researchers to apply for research and development projects at the national and international level, especially in the European Union, to create new project teams for excellent scientific research, as well as to support the scientific research work of the young academic community, that will have an impact on social development and the economy.

Through this Program, the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia (SF) aims to support basic and applied research in all fields of science. There are no pre-defined topics for projects within the Program. The Program enables young researchers to define their own research ideas and plans, form their own teams and collaborate with relevant laboratories, research centers and industry in Serbia and worldwide.

Financing decisions will be made on a competitive basis through a two-step independent international evaluation process, led by the SF's independent Program Board (PB) and supported by independent technical peer reviewers. The number of awards will be determined by the quality of the proposals and the total funds allocated to the PROMIS 2023 Program.

We hope the information provided here will help you navigate easily through the process. Additional information and the timetable with the application deadlines will be available through the SF website (<http://fondznanauku.gov.rs>). Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions you may have.

Wishing you much success,

Milica Djuric Jovicic, PhD

Acting Director  
Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia

## 1. DEFINITIONS

<b>Applicant</b>	SRO applying for the PROMIS 2023 Program
<b>Project Proposal</b>	The package of all necessary documents and data submitted by the Applicant.
<b>Approved Project Budget</b>	Project budget approved by the SF.
<b>Awardee</b>	An eligible Applicant that receives a notice from the SF that it has been awarded financing and subsequently signed the Financing Agreement with the SF.
<b>Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF)</b>	Program-related document created by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, which defines the steps, processes, and procedures for screening, assessment, management and monitoring of environmental and social risks and impacts of all activities financed by the World Bank under the Serbia Accelerating Innovation and Growth Entrepreneurship Project.
<b>Environmental and Social Management Plan (ESMP)</b>	A site-specific plan to be developed by the Applicant, in line with the ESMF requirements and templates. ESMP is an instrument that contains detailed information on (a) measures to be taken during the implementation of a certain project to eliminate or compensate for adverse environmental and social impacts or reduce them to an acceptable level; (b) actions necessary to implement the specified measures.
<b>Environmental Screening Questionnaire (ESQ)</b>	Questionnaire on the Environmental and Social Management status and plans
<b>Financing Agreement/Contract</b>	A document signed between the Awardee and the Science Fund, governing the terms and conditions of the financing under the PROMIS 2023 Program.
<b>Intellectual Property (IP)</b>	Any product of the human intellect that the law protects from unauthorized use by others. May refer to inventions, literary and artistic works and symbols, names and images used in commerce.
<b>Project Team</b>	Group of researchers applying to the Public Call with the Project Proposal.
<b>Principal Investigator</b>	The person who leads the Project and submits the Project Proposal.
<b>Team Member</b>	A single researcher who is a member of the project team.
<b>Program Board (PB)</b>	Program Board members are international experts in the scientific fields related to those of project proposals' being evaluated. Program Board evaluates Project Proposals in the stage two of the Evaluation.
<b>Project</b>	Project Proposal approved for financing.
<b>Reviewer</b>	Independent peer reviewer engaged by the Science Fund, who evaluates the Project Proposal in stage one of the Evaluation. Reviewers are international experts, and exceptionally local experts with internationally recognized professional careers.
<b>SRO</b>	Scientific Research Organizations, as defined by the Law on Science and Research of the Republic of Serbia.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

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 development of scientific and research activities in the Republic of Serbia necessary for the advancement of a knowledge-based society.

The Fund's activities are represented through research, as well as through technological and developmental programs. Their goal is 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.

This Grant Manual (GM) provides general information and guidance on the Science Fund's PROMIS 2023 Program, including types of Projects eligible to receive grants through the Program, types of activities under the Project that will be considered for grant support, budgetary considerations, and grant application procedures.

The SF PROMIS 2023 Program is funded by the state budget of the Republic of Serbia, and also partly from the World Bank loan for the Serbia Accelerating Innovation and Growth Entrepreneurship Project (SAIGE)<sup>1</sup>, and the 2019 European Union Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (EU IPA) funds.

The GM sets out the key operating policies and procedures for each step of the grant-making process. Furthermore, it describes the key procedural guidelines for the grant-receiving researchers and SROs with regards to project implementation, evaluation and monitoring, and reporting requirements.

The GM is a "work-in-progress" document that will be reviewed regularly and amended to reflect new requirements and best practices, and is subject to modification based on the specific requirements of the Program's sources of financing (state budget of the Republic of Serbia, the World Bank, EU IPA funds, other donor sources, etc.).

## 2. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

### 2.1. Program Objectives

The objective of the PROMIS 2023 Program (Program) are as follows: empowering young doctors of science to manage projects, strengthening the professional capacities of young researchers and scientists at the beginning of their careers, involving excellent young researchers in scientific research work, empowering young researchers to apply for research and development projects at the national and international level, especially in the European Union, creating new project teams for excellent scientific research, as well as supporting the scientific research work of the young academic community, that will have an impact on social development and the economy.

### 2.2. Types of Projects that can be financed

The Program lends support to basic and applied research in all fields of science. There are no pre-defined topics for Projects within the Program. The Program enables researchers to define their own research programs, form their own Teams and collaborate with relevant laboratories, research centers and industry in Serbia and worldwide.

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<sup>1</sup> The SAIGE Project's development objective is to improve (i) the relevance and excellence of scientific research; and (ii) innovative entrepreneurship and access to finance for enterprise growth, as a way of contributing to Serbia's growth and competitiveness.

### 2.3. Eligibility of Applicants

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

- a) The person designated to lead a Project (hereinafter referred to as the: **“Principal Investigator”**), must also meet the following requirements:
- s/he holds a Ph.D. and has published and peer-reviewed scientific papers and other scientific research results, that indicates that s/he is capable of independent scientific research work;
  - s/he obtained the title of Doctor of Science no more than 7 years prior to the day of the closing of the public call for projects proposals;
  - s/he has been awarded a scientific title or an equivalent title according to the regulations on higher education;
  - s/he spent at most one election period in each science/equivalent teaching title to which s/he were elected;
  - s/he is employed at an accredited Serbian science and research organization (SRO) that is designed to lead the Project, with a minimum of 50% of monthly engagement at the moment of Project Proposal submission as well as during the project implementation.

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.

- b) **Project team members** can be young researches and early career scientists.

As young researches are considered students of doctoral studies and persons in research or teaching titles in higher education until obtaining the title of Doctor of Science Junior Research Assistant, Research Assistant, Junior Teaching Assistant, Teaching Assistant, as well as the PhD students who don't have research appointments at the moment of Project Proposal submission but will obtain research appointment before beginning of the project).

Under the term early career scientists are considered researchers who have obtained the title of Doctor of Science no more than 7 years prior to the date of the conclusion of the public call for projects of the Program and have a valid science title or an equivalent teaching title in higher education.

*Table 1 - Titles of young researchers and early career scientists*

	<b>Research and scientific titles</b>	<b>Teaching titles in higher education</b>
<b>Young researchers</b>	junior research assistant research assistant	junior teaching assistant teaching assistant
<b>Early career scientists</b>	research associate senior research associate	teaching assistant with PhD assistant professor associate professor

Project team members must meet the following requirements:

- s/he has been awarded a title at the moment of Project Proposal submission in accordance to the Table 1;
  - The exemptions to this rule are new young researchers, i.e. PhD students who had never been elected as teaching staff or researchers, who don't need to have research appointments at the moment of Project Proposal submission but need to obtain research appointment before beginning of the project.

- s/he is employed at an accredited SRO<sup>2</sup> with a minimum of 50% of monthly engagement at the moment of Project Proposal submission as well as throughout her/his engagement in the Project.
- s/he must have valid title during the engagement in the project. If a project team member loses her/his title, s/he cannot participate in the project as a team member.

The proposed project activities and all participants (including SRO, project team, service providers and any other natural person or legal entity engaged through the proposed project) should be in accordance with the eligibility criteria for grants financed through the proceeds of the Serbia Accelerating Innovation and Growth Entrepreneurship World Bank loan.<sup>3</sup>

## 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.

A person may act as the Principal Investigator in only one Project Proposal within different Programs of the Science Fund.

A person who was a Principal Investigator on the Project on PROMIS 2023 Program (Public Call in 2019) cannot apply as a Principal Investigator within this Public Call nor be a Principal Investigator within this Public Call.

A person may, at any given moment, be a Team Member, or the Principal Investigator and a Team Member in up to two Projects within different programs of the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia.

The restrictions described above do not apply to the participation of the Principal Investigator and the Team member in cooperation and mobility programs, such as the Serbian Science and Cooperation Program with the Diaspora, as well as special strategic programs (Special research program on COVID-19).

The Science Fund reserves the right to withhold funds from researchers whose applications are or appear to be intentionally misleading, for up to two years following such an occurrence.

## 2.5. Project Team

The **minimum number** of Team members on a single Project is 3, while the **maximum number** is 6.

A person may act as a member of the Project team in only one Project Proposal within PROMIS 2023 program.

A full-time team member (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. However, in that occasion, a person cannot have any other engagement in the SRO.

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<sup>2</sup> A Team member may also be employed in an Innovation Center founded by an accredited SRO, but the Innovation Center may not be the leading institution in the Project implementation.

<sup>3</sup> Activities and participants located in Nuts 1 region Serbia North (including two Nuts 2 regions of Vojvodina and Belgrade) and Nuts 1 region Serbia South (including two Nuts 2 regions of Sumadija / Western Serbia and South / East Serbia) are eligible.

A person who is currently not employed in an SRO can also be included in the proposed Project as a Team member only if the Principal Investigator and an SRO submit a signed declaration that s/he will be employed in the SRO if the 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.

Within this Program, the project can also include an External Collaborator - a researcher from Diaspora, who is employed at an SRO abroad.

An External Collaborator will not receive a fee for his/her engagement in the Project, and while project cannot cover the personnel cost, it is acceptable to cover travel costs to Serbia or travel expenses for joint participation in conferences in Serbia and abroad.

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.

If over the course of the Project implementation the Principal Investigator should need to replace a Team member or a percentage of his/her engagement on the project, the Principal Investigator shall provide the Science Fund with a justified proposal for such a change, which must be consented to by the Science Fund in writing prior to such change. A replacement must fulfil all conditions for the Team members.

## 2.6. Project Duration

The Project and Project budget must be designed for duration of up to **two years (24 months)**.

## 2.7. IP and know-how requirements

In compliance with the law governing science and research activities, the rights to all new intellectual property and know-how that may be generated during the course of the Project belong to the SRO, unless the Principal Investigator and the SRO agree otherwise, in which case the Proposal shall explain the manner in which these rights will be regulated. In case that the Team members are employed by different SROs, they shall sign a separate statement, confirming their agreement to their mutual relationships and rights to intellectual property.

Commercialization of results shall be achieved pursuant to the law and the SRO's by-laws. 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 the Open Science Platform of the Ministry responsible for science and research activities (hereinafter referred to as the "Ministry").

## 2.8. Amount of Financing

The maximum Project budget amount is **€150,000 in dinar equivalent per project**.

Program Budget is defined in the Public Call document.

## 2.9. Eligible Costs

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

### 1) Personnel costs

- 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) **Purchase costs**

a. **Equipment and consumables cost**

- i. equipment, software, consumables and other resources necessary for the Project implementation;
- ii. unforeseen costs for equipment and consumables;

b. **Travel costs**

- i. short-term travel by the Team members as required for Project implementation in Serbia and abroad (up to 28 days per travel),
- ii. travel to participate in national and international conferences relevant to project implementation;

c. **Dissemination and visibility**

- i. costs of publishing in journals<sup>4</sup>, as well as in journals with open access, participation in scientific conferences, publishing books and monographs;
- ii. organization of conferences and seminars and other costs of disseminating the Project results;
- iii. applications for patents and protection of intellectual property generated as a result of Project activities, and associated expenses;

3) **Services and sub-contracting costs**

- a. external services of all natural persons and legal entities, as required for research and the Project implementation. Engagement of natural persons refers individuals not employed by the SRO participating in the Project, who are essential for the implementation of Project activities. Such individuals shall be considered service providers or subcontractors, rather than Project participants.

4) **Indirect costs**

- a. reimbursement to the SRO employing the Project participants for administrative and other project-related expenses;
- b. external audit costs, that will be conducted at the end of the project implementation period;
- c. other costs, such as bank guarantee costs, import costs, customs duties, postage costs, etc.

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.

Services and sub-contracting costs listed in item 3) may be represented in the Project budget with no more than 10% of the total Project budget.

Indirect costs listed in item 4) are represented in the Project budget by 20% of a total amount of personnel costs (listed in item 1) and purchase costs (listed in item 2). Indirect costs are not justified when reporting, however they must be used in accordance with the law, the rules of this Program, as well as in accordance with the by-laws of the SRO.

Contingences for equipment and consumables may be represented in the Project budget up to 2% of the corresponding budget category of procurement.

Reimbursement to the SRO employing the Project Team members should be allocated for administrative and other project-related expenses. The budgeting of SRO technical or support staff should be calculated based on their current salary in SRO, scaled to percentage of monthly engagement on project activities.

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<sup>4</sup> Journal category must be specified in Justification of the Budget. The researchers are suggested to aim for international journals from SCI list with categories M21, with the exceptions for research areas that do not have journals in these categories.

If more than one SRO participates in the Proposal, this category of costs should be proportionally allocated in accordance with the total requested budget from each SRO, unless PI and all participating SROs make a different agreement, which should be clarified and justified.

### 2.10. Ineligible Costs

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

- 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;
- bank commissions and differences in currency exchanges;
- 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;
- 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;
- any of the activities listed in the World Bank Group -IFC Exclusion List, specified in Section 4.3 of this GM.

## 3. How to Apply and Which Procedures to Follow

### 3.1. Public Call

The Public Call for applications of research projects within the scope of the Program PROMIS 2023 (hereinafter referred to as the: "Public Call") comprises the following:

- full name of the Program PROMIS 2023;
- objectives of the Program;
- duration of Projects;
- requirements to be met by the Principal Investigator and Team members;
- total budget available for implementation of the Program under the Public Call;
- the maximum budget of individual Projects;
- permitted categories of costs to be financed by the Science Fund;
- method of submission of Proposals;
- deadline for the submission of Proposals;
- list of required documentation to be submitted with a duly completed Proposal application;
- the manner and criteria for evaluation of Proposals;
- expected duration of the process of evaluation of Proposals;
- reporting requirements;
- other information relevant to Program implementation.

The Public Call shall be published on the website of the Science Fund ([www.fondznanaku.gov.rs](http://www.fondznanaku.gov.rs)).

### 3.2. Public Call Application

Application to the Public Call is submitted exclusively in electronic form, through the online portal, along with the documentation stipulated in the Public Call and in accordance with the instructions for implementation of the Public Call (hereinafter referred to as the: "Instructions") published on the website of the Science Fund.

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 person who is not engaged as the Principal Investigator in response to the Public Call may be listed as a Team member **in only one Project within the scope of the same Public Call**.

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

The required elements of a Proposal are as follows:

- Project title, acronym, field of science (primary, secondary and tertiary), abstract and keywords (in English);
- Information on the Principal Investigator, Team members and SROs that participate in the Project (SF template, in English);
- Project Description A and B (SF template, in English);
- Project Budget (SF template, in English);
- Gantt chart (SF template, in English);
- the Environmental and Social Questionnaire (ESQ) (SF template, in English);
- Ethics Approval<sup>5</sup> (if applicable to Project Proposal);
- License to conduct medical research, as relevant for entities doing this kind of work, in line with adequate provisions of Animal Welfare Law issued by the Ministry of Agriculture, forestry and water management, Veterinarian Directorate ((if applicable to Project Proposal);
- Written statement made under material and criminal responsibility that the Applicant will comply with all the provisions of Law on labor and protection at work;
- Annexes (declarations of the SROs, joint statement of all project participants, proof of fulfillment of Program conditions for the PI and Team members, in Serbian or English, completed in line with the Instructions and the template provided in the documentation).

### 3.3. 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 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 Public Call within the Program, including formal fulfillment 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 GM.

The administrative and eligibility check is performed by persons employed by the Science Fund.

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

The Science Fund may request clarifications or additional information from applicants if deemed necessary for completing the administrative check. If a Proposal fails the administrative check, the Science Fund shall exclude it from further evaluation and notify the applicant of the reasons for rejection of the Proposal.

### 3.4. Process Flow and Timeline

The application process is structured in the following manner:

1. Registration of the Applicant through online portal

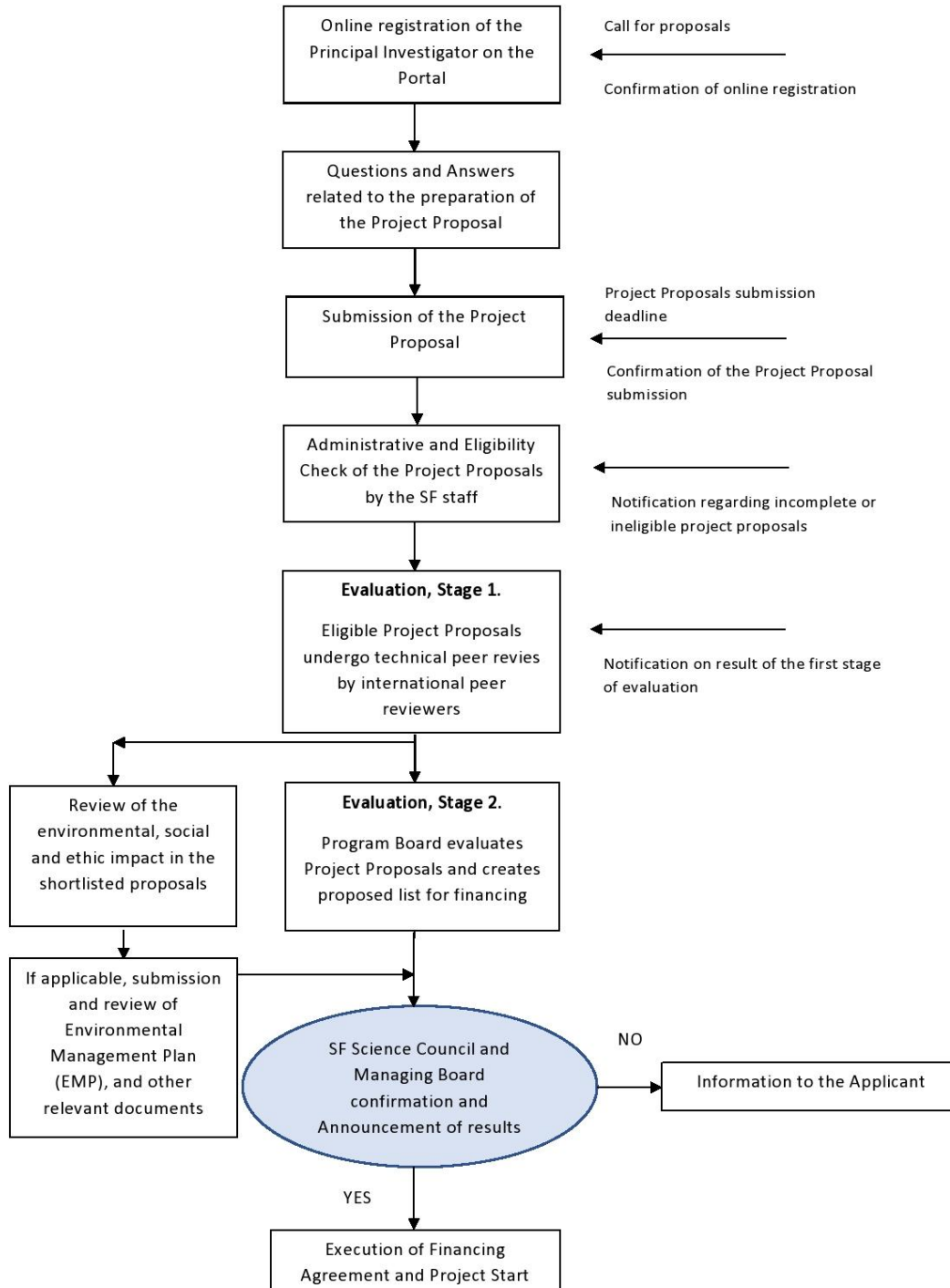
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<sup>5</sup> The Ethics Boards of the Institutions where the research on human beings/tissue/embryos are conducted shall give their consent to the conduct of scientific research and the taking of human beings, cells and tissues.

2. Applicant's creation of a new project by following the Instructions for Application to the Public Call published on the website of the Science Fund
3. Uploading and final submission of Project Proposal
4. Administrative and eligibility check by the Science Fund staff including rectifying of data if necessary
5. International independent evaluation of submitted Applications
  - a) Technical review by international Peer-reviewers
  - b) Pre-selection by the Program Board
  - c) Ethical and social review for pre-selected Applicants
  - d) Environmental review for pre-selected Applicants
  - e) Final List on financing by the Program Board
  - f) Endorsement of Program Board recommended list of projects by SF's Science Council and Executive Board
6. Signing of the Financing Agreement and beginning of project implementation

### 3.5. Application Procedure and Timeframe

Figure 1 Application and Evaluation Procedure



## 4. 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. 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 Preliminary ranking list of Project Proposals is formed.

The Program Board for Project Evaluation (hereinafter referred to as the: “Program Board”) evaluates the Proposals from the Preliminary ranking list and creates the Proposal of the 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 exceptionally 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 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 the Science Fund.

### Program Board

Program Board members are international experts, and exceptionally local experts with internationally recognized professional careers. Selection of Program Board members is done through the procedure regulated by relevant acts of the Science Fund.

### 4.1. 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, assessment of competence of the Principal Investigator and other members of the Team; maximum 50 points in stage one of evaluation.
- **Impact** – contribution to science, economy and society in the Republic of Serbia, 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; maximum 30 points in stage one of evaluation.
- **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; maximum 20 points in stage one of evaluation.

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

Criterion	1 <sup>st</sup> Stage (pts)
Excellence	50 (min. 30)
Impact	30 (min. 18)
Implementation	20 (min. 12)
<b>Total</b>	<b>100 (min. 70)</b>

### Stage One

In stage one of the Evaluation, each Project Proposal is evaluated, by 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.

After evaluation, the reviews are summed up and the average scores for each criterion are calculated as well as the overall average score.

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

In order to pass the evaluation by the Reviewers, the average number of awarded points must be greater than the corresponding minimum numbers specified in Table 2 and the total average score must not be less than 70 points.

Upon completion of stage one of the Evaluation, each Principal Investigator shall receive a notification on the outcome.

### Stage Two

Prior to stage two of the Evaluation, a Preliminary ranking list of Project Proposals is created, based on the Ranking list with all submitted Project Proposals, ranked by the descending order of average score of the reviewers after the stage one of Evaluation. considering only the highest ranked Proposals that have met the specified criteria from Table 2, and whose total budget, cumulatively, does not exceed twice the budget amount.

After the first stage of evaluation, Principal Investigators of all Project Proposals invited to the second round have an opportunity submit to the Science Fund a short-written response (up to 300 words) with comments on results of the first stage of evaluation, that are then forwarded to the Program Board and used during the second stage of evaluation.

In the second stage of evaluation, the proposals from the 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. Projects are initially classified into three groups based on the position on the preliminary ranking list, created in the first stage of evaluation:

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

Each project from the 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 first stage of evaluation, and in accordance with that, report to the members of the Program Board.

If the Rapporteur and the members of the Program Board have no objections to the Project Proposals from Group I, nor to the results or content of the assessment from the first stage of evaluation, the Proposals from Group I are proposed for funding in the current order. If the Rapporteur estimates that a Project Proposal from group I has important shortcomings or that there are inconsistencies in the results of the first stage of evaluation, he/she will inform the members of the 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 from group I 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 is kept in the order for funding, or a justified decision on a new result of the evaluation and ranking.

If the Rapporteur or members of the Program Board have no objections to the evaluations of the Project Proposals from Group III, nor to the results or content of the assessment from the first stage of evaluation. Proposals from Group III are not proposed for funding. If the Rapporteur considers that the Project Proposal from Group III has important qualities, or that there are inconsistencies or oversights in the results of the first stage of evaluation, he/she will inform the members of the 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. As a rule, the Rapporteur may nominate up to two Group III 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 quality, with an explanation, after which the project is classified in group II, or a decision on non-financing is made.

Following the review, at the suggestion of the Program Board members, and possible changes in the Preliminary ranking list, the list of projects is updated by groups, as defined in this chapter.

The focus of the Program Board analysis is on all Group II projects, which are analyzed and discussed in detail during the work of the Program Board, after which they are ranked, and decision is made on projects that will be supported for funding.

The Program Board may request from the Principal Investigator a rebalance of the proposed Project budget adjustment as a whole or in individual lines based on the first and second phase of evaluation. 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

At the end of the work of the Program Board, based on the results of the second stage of evaluation, Project Proposals are ranked and classified according to project quality and project budgets into categories A, AB, B, C and D by the Program Board.

*Table 3 - Results of the second stage of evaluation*

Project score (category)	Description*
A	Project Proposals that are ranked the highest after the second stage of evaluation, in the total amount of 20% of the Program budget, and which are <b>supported for funding</b> ,
AB	Project Proposals that are next ranked after the second stage of evaluation, in the total amount of 40% of the Program budget, and which are <b>supported for funding</b> ,
B	Project Proposals that are next ranked after the second stage of evaluation, in the total remaining amount of 40% of the Program budget, and which are <b>supported for funding</b> ,
C	Project Proposals that are ranked below the program budget limit after the second stage of evaluation, and that are <b>not supported for funding</b> ,
D	Projects for which a deficiency or irregularity has been identified due to which they can in no way be supported for funding.

*\* In the case that the budget that determines the line between two categories does not include the entire number of projects, the classification of projects into categories is done by rounding up to the full number of projects, taking into consideration that the total amount of the budgets of projects from categories A, AB and B cannot exceed the available budget.*

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

In accordance with the rules from Table 3, the Program Board forms the Proposal of the final ranking list of projects proposed for funding under the Public Call on the basis of this Program and submits it to the Scientific Council of the Science Fund.

The Scientific Council considers the Report of the Program Board and submitted Proposal of the final ranking list and together with its opinion on procedural correctness, submits to the Executive Board of the Science Fund the Proposal of the final ranking list of projects proposed for funding under the Public Call under this Program.

Based on the Proposal of the final ranking list and the Scientific Council's opinion, the Executive Board of the Science Fund makes the decision on adoption the Final ranking list of projects approved for funding under the Public Call under this Program, as well as decision on the amount of funds allocated to each Project approved for funding.

Once the Executive Board of the Science Fund has made its decision, the Final lists of projects approved for funding shall be posted on the website of the Science Fund, and the Principal Investigators shall receive notification on the outcome of the second stage of Evaluation. Proposals that have been approved for funding shall be signed financing agreements with the Science Fund.

## 4.2. Grievance Redress Mechanism

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 by the Program Board);

The appeal shall be submitted in writing, with a 500-word limit, within 5 business days upon the date of receiving the notification about the outcome of the administrative check/evaluation from the Science Fund. 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. The Science Fund 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: [promis2023@fondzanauku.gov.rs](mailto:promis2023@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 response provided).

In addition, all researchers may contact the Science Fund with their questions, suggestions or objections by e-mail at any time: [programi@fondzanauku.gov.rs](mailto:programi@fondzanauku.gov.rs) and [misljenje@fondzanauku.gov.rs](mailto:misljenje@fondzanauku.gov.rs).

## 4.3. Environmental and Social Impact

The management of environmental and social risks and impacts related to PROMIS 2023 Program activities under SAIGE will be carried out in accordance with the World Bank Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF), effective October 1, 2018. The ESMF is part of the PROMIS 2023 Program documentation and available at this [link](#). The scope and timing of ESMF requirements will be appropriate to the nature and scale of the individual projects and their potential environmental and social risks and impacts. The project is classified as Moderate Risk taking in account impacts and nature of the interventions, the experience of the implementing agencies in managing similar activities, the application of new and energy efficient technologies and the presence of sensitive research areas.

During preparation of the SAIGE Project, a Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) has been prepared, while the additional commitments required by the ESMF are included in the Environmental and Social Commitment Plan (ESCP) which is part of the Loan Agreement.

Throughout the implementation of the SAIGE project, the Science Fund will be improving Grievance Mechanism and Ethics Appraisal Procedure in line with the recommendations and practices of the European Commission and EU research funds, as well as raise public awareness of research ethics and procedures through public media.

In terms of monitoring of ethical issues during project implementation, with the support of SAIGE project, the SF developed an Ethics Act which outlines the procedures applicable to all RDIs in the country. The Ethics Act (in the form of a bylaw) was adopted by the Executive Board of the Science Fund on 10 December 2021, and made public on SF website. The Ethics Act, is harmonized with the national and EU legal framework.

### 4.3.1. Environmental and Social Screening Process (Step-by-Step)

#### Step 1. Applicant prepares necessary documentation

Applicant is responsible to prepare the required documentation and confirmation in accordance with the information and templates provided by the Science Fund (see section 3.2. Public Call Application). Submitted documentation should confirm that all permits necessary for the proposed projects have been obtained from responsible authorities as prescribed by appropriate local legislation and in line

with the World Bank procedures.

### **Step 2. Science Fund performs screening**

The Science Fund Program Board evaluates the Project Proposal based on the Environmental and Social Questionnaire, Ethics Approval and other related statements.

The Project Proposals shall be categorized as follows: Category 1 - Low risk projects (projects expected to have negligible environmental and social impacts with no need of environmental impact assessment); Category 2- Moderate risk project (projects with impacts which can be identified easily and for which standard preventive and/or corrective measures can be prescribed without environmental impact assessment. Mitigation measures are standard and usually involve only good maintenance measures or good engineering practices); Category 3 - Substantial risk projects (projects which may have potential and very significant or irreversible environmental and social impacts, scope of which is very difficult to determine in project identification phase); Category 4- High risk projects (sub-projects or enterprise engaged in manufacturing or use of hazardous or illegal material).

Category 3 and 4 sub-projects shall not be eligible for financing.

For categorization purpose, the Science Fund shall identify if the potential Applicant is engaged in manufacturing or certain forbidden products/material or in forbidden activities as specified in the Project/Activities Exclusion List (Annex 01 of the ESMF). Each existing project which would involve such activities or products shall be considered Category 4 and ineligible for financing under the Program.

If the Project Proposal is categorized as Category 1 ("Low risk"), further environmental and social assessment shall not be required after initial screening, nor further monitoring shall be done. For the activities with limited and site-specific impacts (Category 2- "Moderate risk"), the Science Fund would require the Applicant to develop an Environmental and Social Management Plan (ESMP).

For Project Proposals with many aspects assessed as "moderate impact", or the Science Fund assesses that they present potential environmental and social risk, development of full and comprehensive ESMP is recommended. However, in case of simpler Project Proposals with only one or two items assessed as "moderate impact", the Science Fund may assess that concise or simplified ESMP would be sufficient. Mandatory contents of Full ESMP and Simplified ESMP are given within the Chapter 7.4 of this ESMF document.

### **Step 3. Applicant prepares ESMP**

If the project is assessed with moderate environmental and social risk, Applicant shall be responsible to prepare an ESMP. The guidance on the content of the ESMP is provided in the ESMF available online. The ESMF specifies environmental and social procedures for implemented projects to adhere to, which are consistent Serbian national legislation.

Unless the Applicant prepares ESMP, the project would not be eligible for financing. ESMP should contain detailed information on: a. Measures to be taken during implementation of certain project in order to eliminate or compensate adverse environmental and social impact or reduce it to an acceptable level, b. Actions necessary to implement the said measures.

Applicants shall be responsible for site-specific ESMPs implementation of which shall be supervised and monitored by the Science Fund.

### **Step 4. Project approval and Monitoring**

The Science Fund is responsible of review and approval of environmental documentation. For projects subject to ESMP as a result of limited and site-specific impacts, ESMP shall be approved by the Science Fund and included in the financing agreement with the Science Fund.

The results of the screening may constitute the following: 1. Approved without additional

requirements. Fulfilled ESQ is sufficient in this case. 2. Approved with use of simplified ESMP. 3. Approved with requirements to produce full ESMP for this grant. 4. Not approved.

The awardees are obliged to comply with the requirements specified in the ESMP which will be part of the financing agreement, including monitoring of projects in line with the monitoring plan in the ESMP. The awardees would be required to invest all efforts to ensure project implementation in environmentally and socially acceptable manner.

In terms of monitoring of ethical issues during project implementation, the Science Fund will apply the procedures stipulated by the Ethics Act. The Science Fund will monitor the formal compliance of the ethical procedures (existence of approvals, etc.), and an ethics expert will be engaged for annual and final ethics assessment (in line with Horizon Europe procedures). On site visits will also be organized for projects with ethical issues.

In case of substantial breach of ethical principles, research integrity or relevant legislation, the Science Fund can carry out an Ethics Audit following the provisions and procedures laid down in the grant agreement.

#### 4.3.2. Exclusion List of Project / Activities

Each project which falls under list 01A or list 01B of the ESMF<sup>6</sup> will not be eligible for financing through the proceeds of the Serbia Accelerating Innovation and Growth Entrepreneurship World Bank loan.

The World Bank Group (IFC) Exclusion List defines the types of projects that IFC does not finance. IFC does not finance the following projects:

- Production or trade in any product or activity deemed illegal under host country laws or regulations or international conventions and agreements, or subject to international bans, such as pharmaceuticals, pesticides/herbicides, ozone depleting substances, PCB's, wildlife or products regulated under CITES.
- Production or trade in weapons and munitions.<sup>7</sup>
- Production or trade in alcoholic beverages (excluding beer and wine).
- Production or trade in tobacco.
- Gambling, casinos and equivalent enterprises.
- Production or trade in radioactive materials. This does not apply to the purchase of medical equipment, quality control (measurement) equipment and any equipment where IFC considers the radioactive source to be trivial and/or adequately shielded.
- Production or trade in unbonded asbestos fibers. This does not apply to purchase and use of bonded asbestos cement sheeting where the asbestos content is less than 20%.
- Drift net fishing in the marine environment using nets in excess of 2.5 km in length.

A reasonableness test will be applied when the activities of the project would have a significant development impact but circumstances of the country require adjustment to the Exclusion List.

**All financial intermediaries (FIs)**, except those engaged in activities specified below\*, must apply the following exclusions, in addition to IFC's Exclusion List:

- Production or activities involving harmful or exploitative forms of forced labor<sup>30</sup>/harmful child labor.
- Commercial logging operations for use in primary tropical moist forest.
- Production or trade in wood or other forestry products other than from sustainably managed forests.

\* When investing in **microfinance** activities, FIs will apply the following items in addition to the IFC Exclusion List:

<sup>6</sup><http://fondzanauku.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Environmental-and-Social-Management-Framework.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> This does not apply to project sponsors who are not substantially involved in these activities. "Not substantially involved" means that the activity concerned is ancillary to a project sponsor's primary operations.

- Production or activities involving harmful or exploitative forms of forced labor<sup>8</sup>/harmful child labor<sup>9</sup>.
  - Production, trade, storage, or transport of significant volumes of hazardous chemicals, or commercial scale usage of hazardous chemicals. Hazardous chemicals include gasoline, kerosene, and other
- petroleum products.
- Production or activities that impinge on the lands owned, or claimed under adjudication, by Indigenous Peoples, without full documented consent of such peoples.

\* **Trade finance projects**, given the nature of the transactions, FIs will apply the following items in addition to the IFC Exclusion List:

Production or activities involving harmful or exploitative forms of forced labor/harmful child labor.

## 5. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

### 5.1. General Implementation Principles

The Awardee is required to carry out the project diligently, timely and efficiently in accordance with the terms of the PROMIS 2023 Program and the Financing Agreement and with sound technical, economic, financial, managerial, environmental and social standards and practices. The Awardee is required to maintain adequate policies, procedures and records to enable the SF (or its representatives) to monitor and evaluate the progress of the project and the achievement of its objectives, as well as financial transactions pertaining to the project.

The Awardee is required to carry out the project in accordance with the provisions of the Environmental and Social Management Framework and the Environmental Management Plan (where applicable) and to take in a timely manner all measures to enable the SF to monitor the provisions of the Environmental Management Plan.

The Awardee is required to implement the project in accordance with the signed Financing Agreement and the Application which represents one of the annexes of the Financing Agreement. Any significant deviation from the Application (e.g. project is not on schedule for completion within timeframes defined in the Application, proposed milestones are not achieved) requires prior written consent of the SF. The SF will examine the possible deviations respecting the content, quality and ranking of the project at the time it was approved for financing and deviations that receive the consent will not influence or alter the mentioned elements.

Any expenditures covered from the Project funds may not be incurred before the start of the Project.

### 5.2. Payments and Disbursement of Project Funds

The Science Fund shall disburse the funds to the SRO in compliance with the approved Project budget and the signed Contract. The payments will be performed in accordance with the Payment Schedule that is part of the Contract. Equipment and consumables shall be purchased at the beginning of the project implementation. The first payment shall be provided in advance for the first quarter, within 45 days upon Contract signing.

The Principal Investigator shall submit to the Science Fund a six-monthly report, prepared on the Science Fund's templates. The Principal Investigator shall provide the Science Fund with an annual narrative and financial Project Progress Report at the end of each project year, and the Project Final

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<sup>8</sup> Forced labor means all work or service, not voluntarily performed, that is extracted from an individual under threat of force or penalty.

<sup>9</sup> Harmful child labor means the employment of children that is economically exploitive, or is likely to be hazardous to, or to interfere with, the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health, or physical, mental, spiritual, moral, or social development.

Report following the end of Project implementation.

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

All disbursements shall be made in Serbian Dinars (RSD), at the official average exchange of the National Bank of Serbia on the date of disbursement, to a separate bank account of the SRO (or a separate portion of the bank account) earmarked solely for purposes of the Project within this Program.

### 5.3. Procurement

Procurement of goods and services required for the implementation of a Project, whose financing has been approved under the Program, are conducted in compliance with the applicable law of the Republic of Serbia - Law on public procurement ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia" No. 91/2019) and the Contract on Financing the Implementation of a Science and Research Project of the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia (hereinafter referred to as the: "Contract"), which the Science Fund shall conclude with the Project participants, in accordance with the Contract template that forms an integral part of this GM.

As a rule, Beneficiary awards contracts in open or restricted procedures, and may also award contract in other public procurement procedures (such as competitive procedure with negotiations, competitive dialogue, innovation partnership, and negotiated procedure with publication of the contract notice. All beneficiaries from the list of approved projects will specify the procurement procedure to be used. Contract awards for all projects will be published on SF website. The Science Fund is required to keep documentation related to all projects approved and procured under the Grant

#### Procurement Principles

The procurement contract must be awarded to the **tenderer offering best value for money for service tenders** (i.e. the tenderer offering the best price-quality ratio) or, as appropriate, to the tenderer offering the lowest price for the fulfilment of the technical specifications for the supply contracts. In doing so, the Awardee shall avoid any conflict of interests and respect the following basic procurement principles:

The Awardee shall evaluate the offers received against objective and transparent criteria which enable measuring the quality of the offers and which take into account the price (the offer with the lowest price shall be awarded the highest score for the price criterion for service tenders).

The Awardee shall keep sufficient and appropriate documentation with regard to the procedures applied and which justify the decision on the pre-selection of tenderers (where an open tender procedure is not used) and the award decision.

Participation in tender procedures managed by the Awardee is open on equal terms to all natural and legal persons.

Supplies may originate from any country.

SF will conduct a **sample desk-check** of conducted procurements on a quarterly basis. In addition, activities under the Grant maybe subject to post review by the Bank's Procurement Specialist.

### 5.4. Monitoring and Evaluation during Project Implementation

Science Fund shall regularly supervise and monitor Project implementation through review of the submitted reports, monitoring visits to the Project site/Team members should the Science Fund find such visits necessary, and direct monitoring of individual Project activities, as well as through review

of the Final Report on the Project results. Should it be determined that the Project funds have been used unjustifiably, the Fund shall request reimbursement of funds and consider suspension of further Project implementation and financing and other appropriate actions as deemed fit by the Science Fund.

Project monitoring is regulated by the relevant acts of the Science Fund and the law. SF will periodically organize a review of the expenditure of funds during the implementation of projects, in line with the acts of the Fund.

As needed, the implementation and target-oriented utilization of funds in line with the approved Project budget may also be subject to ad-hoc evaluation at the behest of the Science Fund, or upon a justified request of the SRO or the Principal Investigator.

For the purposes of evaluation, the Principal Investigator communicates the Project results in a relevant report.

Annual, ad-hoc and final project evaluations are performed by at least one person with international experience in the field of the Project.

Project evaluation entails a comparison between the proposed and achieved objectives of the research, the accomplished scientific results, the assessment of utilization of funds and other relevant indicators. If during the course of the evaluation it is established that the Project implementation has not been fully compliant with the Proposal, the Science Fund shall notify the competent authority of the Science Fund. Based on the findings, a decision can be made to decrease the contracted budget or to suspend Project financing altogether, which may also include initiation of a procedure for reimbursement of funds spent wrongfully or illicitly or any further action as appropriate.

For the purposes of the Program monitoring and evaluation, the Science Fund shall perform independent analysis of beneficiaries once a year and at the end of the Program, based on clearly defined milestones and results. In order to accomplish this goal, the beneficiaries shall provide the Science Fund with all the necessary information and documentation as well access to relevant sites and facilities.

The Science Fund shall submit a relevant report to the Ministry and other stakeholders on the results of the monitoring and evaluation specified above.

## 5.5. Master File

At the beginning of the Project implementation period, the Awardee should create a **Master File**. This Master File should include the following documentation:

- Application and all supporting documentation, as specified in the Section 3 of this GM;
- Any official documentation exchanged between the Awardee and the SF during the application period (e.g. notifications from the SF, etc.);
- Award notification;
- Any official documentation exchanged between the Awardee and the SF during Project implementation;
- Copies of all reports required by and submitted to the SF;
- Copies of all invoices and supporting financial documentation related to proof of purchase and payments from the dedicated project account;
- Procurement documentation;
- Records including agreements with third parties, invoices and other payment records that are related to the project. During the monitoring visit the master file must be made available.

The Awardee needs to archive all project documentation in the master file for a period of at least 5 years following project completion.

All the contract files, including the signed contract and all the relevant documentation (master file),

will be made available to the SF and any entities named by the SF upon request.

## 6. PROMOTION AND VISIBILITY OF PROJECT RESULTS

The Principal Investigator is obligated to ensure promotion of the Project and visibility of the Project results through participation in conferences, scientific publications, organization of forums and seminars, promotion in mainstream and social media, organization of visits to the Project Team and the laboratory, and in other ways. It is suggested to have papers published in leading scientific journals, including those applying the Open Science principle, as well as at leading international conferences.

In all papers that are published in journals and presented at conferences, the Principal Investigator and Project participants are obligated to state that the results have been achieved on the Project financed by the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia, as defined in the Contract.

The Principal Investigator is obligated to enable access to Project results to interested parties at any time over the duration of the Project, and for at least one year following the Project completion.

Additional visibility and communications rules may apply, in line with the specific requirements of the Program's source of financing (the World Bank, the European Union), which shall be defined in the Contract.

It is recommended that primary data collected during the Project implementation be systematically consolidated, structured and formatted electronically, and to be made freely accessible (*open data*).

*This Grant Manual is created in accordance with the Act on Goals, Implementation Method and Project Financing Terms of the PROMIS 2023 Program and adopted by the Management Board of the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia.*

Chairman of the Management Board  
Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia

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Prof. Dr. Vujo Drndarević