

Review Guidelines

Version 2.0
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Evaluation process time frame¹:

<i>Submission deadline</i>		
	<u>Eligibility Check (IF)</u>	1 week
<i>Estimated duration</i>	<u>First Level of Review (Peer Review):</u>	4 weeks
	<u>Second Level of Review (IF's independent Investment Committee Review):</u>	
	Pre-selection Meeting*	1 week
	Preparation of Pitch Presentations by Preselected Applicants	2 weeks
	<u>Financing Decision Final Pitch Event**</u>	1 week

* To be held via conference call

** To be held in person in Belgrade, with all preselected Applicants presenting their projects in a live pitch event

¹ The given dates are an approximation. The IF reserves the right to modify the dates. All participants in the process will be notified in due time.

1. REVIEW PROCESS

The Innovation Fund (IF) policy is intended to ensure that Applications submitted to the IF are evaluated on the basis of a process that is timely, fair and based on merit.

Therefore, the review process is organized in the following way:

- Eligibility check for all received Applications
- The first level of review (*Peer-Review*)
- The second level of review (*review and preselection by the independent Investment Committee*)
- Final decision on financing (*by the independent Investment Committee*)

The IF staff conducts eligibility checks for all received Applications to ensure their completeness and compliance with Program requirements. The IF verifies the integrity of all submitted documents, confirms that appropriate document templates were used and that the Application satisfies all the necessary eligibility and application criteria as described in the Grant Manual. All Applications which meet these criteria will be considered eligible and moved to the first level of review.

The first level of review (*Peer-Review*) is carried out by peer reviewers composed primarily of scientists and industry experts who have experience and knowledge in relevant disciplines and industry areas. The Peer Reviewers do not make any decisions regarding the selection of projects for financing. Instead, their expertise serves as additional input to the Investment Committee.

The second level of review (*review by the independent Investment Committee*) is performed by the independent Investment Committee (the IC) composed of 5 members with international expertise in applied research, private sector industry, international finance and venture capital, and entrepreneurship.

Based on its own analysis of all eligible Applications, the IC will pre-select the most promising Applications for financing under the IF's COLLABORATIVE GRANT SCHEME Program, while also taking into consideration the results of the peer-review. Each preselected Applicant will then prepare a 10-minute pitch presentation for their project and this presentation will be given live before the Investment Committee in Belgrade during the financing decision final pitch event.

The final decision for financing under the COLLABORATIVE GRANT SCHEME Program is made by the IC with the consent of the IF Board of Directors². The IC is responsible for selecting Awardees for financing based on the complete Application, the result of the peer review and the results of the final pitch event

2. EVALUATION CRITERIA

The Applications are evaluated based on the following criteria:

² The IF Board of Directors is responsible for approving the Investment Committee's decision for use of the IF funds, based on the availability of funds and in accordance with the law, adopted IF documents (such as IF Multiannual Work Program, IF Annual Work Program, IF Annual Financial Plan) and international agreements. The IF Board of Directors is not responsible for the selection of awards for financing.

- Management and key personnel credentials and ability of the consortium to deliver;
- Quality and collaborative potential of the consortia members;
- Innovative technology, product or service; clear IP position and potential;
- Clear market need, competitive (preferably global or EU) position and commercialization potential;
- Level of co-financing, use of funds, and adequacy of the project budget (preference will be given to applications with higher co-financing participation);
- Well-developed organizational design and project management system (including clear R2A2s for all consortia members and well-designed stage gate review process and risk management strategy).

Only Project Proposals satisfying and excelling in all the above mentioned criteria will be recommended for financing by the Investment Committee.

The following guidance has been given to support the review and selection process:

<p>Management and key personnel credentials and ability of the consortium to deliver</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the management team and key personnel have adequate skills, education, knowledge, track record and experience to execute the proposed project?
<p>Quality and collaborative potential of the consortium members</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do the consortium members fit together and complement the project's development needs? • Do all members have relevant roles and bring specific value to the consortium?
<p>Innovative technology, product or service; clear IP position and potential</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is improvement of existing technologies, products or services proposed? • To what extent does the proposal suggest and explore unique concepts or applications? • Does the proposal lead to enabling technologies for further discoveries? • Does the proposed technology, product or service have potential for creation of new IP? • Does the Applicant have full ownership/rights to develop and use the technology/product or service being developed? • Does the Applicant's technology, product or service infringe or violate IP rights of others?
<p>Clear market need, competitive (preferably global) position and commercialization potential</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the proposed approach have potential to lead to a marketable technology, product or process? • What is the specific market for the technology, product or process? Is it a growing market? Are customers/users definable? • Evaluate the competitive advantage of this technology vs. alternate technologies that can meet the same market needs. • Is the technology, product or service competitive and what are the competitive threats? • Preference will be given to globally competitive

	technologies, products and services.
Level of co-financing, use of funds and adequacy of the project budget (preference will be given to applications with higher co-financing participation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preference will be given to applications with higher co-financing participation (than the minimum percentage required by the program). • Are the items listed in the budget in line with the proposed activities (e.g. man hours, materials)? • Are the proposed costs realistic? • Would the budget benefit from any alterations or corrections (e.g. more funds allocated to IP protection, reducing consultancy costs)? • What is the structure of co-financing?
Well-developed organizational design and project management system (including clear R2A2s for all consortia members and well-designed stage gate review process and risk management strategy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the overall methodology and activities well-reasoned and appropriate to accomplish the proposed development of the technology, product or service? • Are roles, responsibilities, authorities and accountabilities clearly defined? • Is the organizational structure of the consortium aligned with the project's development goals? • Is there sufficient access to resources (materials and supplies, analytical services, equipment, facilities, etc.) to bring the project to successful conclusion?

3. ELIGIBILITY CHECK FOR ALL RECEIVED APPLICATIONS

Each Application received will be evaluated and assessed for eligibility using the following criteria:

- The Lead Applicant is a private sector micro, small or medium company³ incorporated in Serbia, in accordance with the current Serbian Company Law in effect, with operating annual revenue of at least EUR 200,000 (for the last fiscal year or for the current year, if applicable) and profitable;
- The consortium must include at least one public Scientific Research Organization registered in Serbia in accordance with the current Serbian Law on Scientific Research Activity in effect as Lead Co-Applicant, relevant to the field of industry and technology identified in the proposed project

Applicants that meet any of the following criteria are NOT eligible to apply for the COLLABORATIVE GRANT SCHEME Program:

- Applicant has received financing from any other IF financing program for the same activities;

Modified and improved Applications are allowed. However, an Applicant can resubmit substantially the same Application only once (regarding all IF's financial programs). An Application which is substantially the same as any two Applications (i.e., based on the substantially same or similar innovative technology, product or service and business plan) previously submitted to the IF by the Applicant will not be considered for further evaluation.

Application submitted by an Applicant who is already implementing a project (or funds have been allocated for financing) within the IF's Mini Grants, Matching Grants and the Collaborative Grant

³ In accordance with the current Serbian Law on accounting.

Scheme Program at the time of the submission are not eligible and **will not be taken into consideration**.

After the Application is submitted, the IF staff will conduct a desk review of the eligibility and completeness of the submitted Application as well as initial screening of the submitted documents (where applicable). Only fully completed, signed, and electronically submitted Applications will be considered for further evaluation. During this stage, the IF will provide every Applicant whose Application was initially determined to be administratively deficient with a 72-hour window to rectify the identified deficiencies. Ineligible Applicants will be notified of their ineligibility by email, after the IF completes eligibility review of all submitted Applications.

If an Applicant wishes to file a fact-based objection to the outcome of the eligibility review (citing evident omissions, oversights or mistakes made by the IF staff), they may submit a formal letter of objection to the IF, written in English and not exceeding 500 words within 8 calendar days from the day of receiving the original eligibility review decision notification.

4. THE FIRST LEVEL OF REVIEW: PEER REVIEW

The peer review includes a technical review carried out by the international peer reviewers selected by IF and administered by the IF Program Managers. IF Program Managers are responsible for ensuring that each Application receives an objective and fair initial peer review, and that all applicable laws, regulations, and policies are followed.

IF Program Managers:

- Analyze the content of each Application, and check it for completeness;
- Document and manage conflicts of interest;
- Assign Applications at least two appropriate peer reviewers to each Application based on the corresponding field of industry and science, so that the peer reviewers can conduct their evaluation and assign individual scores for each criterion;
- Attend and oversee administrative and regulatory aspects of peer review.

Peer Reviewers:

- Declare any conflicts of interest with regard to specific Applications presented to them, in accordance with the IF Confidentiality and Prevention of Conflict of Interest Policy;
- Receive access to the Applications for review;
- Prepare a written evaluation (using the online Peer Review Evaluation Form on the IF Portal) for each Application assigned, based on the defined evaluation criteria and judgment of merit;
- Assign a numerical score (from 1 to 4, with 1 being the poorest and 4 being the best) to each evaluation criterion.

Peer Review Procedures

The IF Program Manager will assign reviewers and provide them with the username and password to access the Applications on the IF online application portal.

Within 2 days of receiving the projects from the IF, Peer Reviewers will:

- Examine review assignments, review materials (including Applications), and instructions;
- Review all Applications assigned to them for conflicts of interest or the appearance of conflicts of interest and inform the IF Program Managers if any exist;
- Review each assigned Application to verify that the proposals match the reviewers' area of expertise and inform the IF Program Managers of any concerns.

Within 4 weeks of receiving the projects from the IF, Peer Reviewers will:

- Read Applications, consider each of the evaluation criteria, and give a separate score for each based on the technical merit, and write detailed evaluation comments for each of the assigned Applications, using the Peer Review Evaluation Form;
- Complete and submit the Peer Review Evaluation Form for each Application assigned to the IF online application portal.

Note: *should the IF establish that the Peer Reviewer has not provided sufficiently elaborate comments to justify the claims and conclusions made for any of the evaluation criteria, the IF reserves the right to ask of the Peer Reviewer to expand upon their comments and supplement their opinion with additional explanations.*

Scoring

Peer Reviewers will consider each of the evaluation criteria (Section 2) in the evaluation and give a separate score for each. The scoring system utilizes a 4-point rating scale (4 = excellent; 3 = good; 2 = acceptable; 1 = poor). The total score for an Application is the sum of the scores given to each criterion, producing a maximum of 24 points. All projects will be scored based on the average score of at least two peer-reviews and ranked accordingly. Taking the average score into account, if an Application scores less than 2 on any of the evaluation criteria or less than 13 points overall, the Application may automatically become ineligible for funding.

Peer Reviewer scoring represents only a segment of the overall evaluation and decision-making process. The IF's independent Investment Committee is responsible for selecting Awardees for financing based on its own analysis of each complete Application, the result of the peer review and the result of the final pitch event.

5. SECOND LEVEL OF REVIEW: INDEPENDENT INVESTMENT COMMITTEE REVIEW

The second level of review is carried out by the independent Investment Committee (IC) and administered by the IF Program Managers. IF Program Managers are responsible for ensuring that

each Application receives an objective review, and that all applicable laws, regulations, and policies are followed.

This level of review has two sub-phases. The first part of the process is the preselection phase – in this phase, the IC preselects the most promising Applications. These Applicants are then notified about advancing to the next round, while those Applicants whose Applications were not preselected are notified about the reason for their rejection. The preselected Applicants are then obliged to prepare a 10-minute PowerPoint presentation which they will use to present their Applications to the IC on the financing decision final pitch event.

IF Program Managers:

- Attend and oversee administrative and regulatory aspects of the IC meetings;
- Document and manage conflicts of interest situations;
- Ensure that all the documentation including peer review evaluation and any additional reports requested by the IC are available on the IF online application portal or via email;
- Assign Applications to IC members for presentation at the Pre-Selection Meeting;
- Ensure that the pitch presentations for all preselected Applications are submitted by the preselected Applicants and made available to the IC at least seven (7) days before the final decision pitch event;
- Prepare minutes of the IC Pre-Selection and Financing Decision meetings;
- Prepare feedback to the Applicants for all Applications reviewed.

Investment Committee Members:

- Declare conflicts of interest with specific Applications in accordance with the IF Confidentiality and Prevention of Conflict of Interest Policy;
- Receive access to Applications approximately one month prior to the scheduled Pre-Selection Meeting;
- Prepare written evaluations for each Application, based on the evaluation criteria and judgment of merit (using Investment Committee Pre-Selection Form for the pre-selection and Investment Committee Financing Decision Form for the final selection) and taking into account the feedback from the peer reviewers;
- Pre-select Applications for further analysis;
- Receive access to PowerPoint presentations which the preselected Applicants will use during the financing decision final pitch event at least one week before the event;
- Select Applications for financing following the financing decision final pitch event.

Investment Committee Review Procedures

The IF Program Manager will provide the IC with the username and password to access the Applications on the IF online application portal and assign a number of projects to each IC member based on their primary field of expertise.

Within 1 week of receiving the projects from the IF, the Investment Committee members will:

- Examine Applications, review materials and instructions;
- Review all Applications assigned for conflicts of interest or the appearance of conflicts of interest and inform the IF Program Managers if any exist.

Within 3 weeks of receiving the projects from the IF, the Investment Committee members will:

- Read all assigned Applications, consider each of the evaluation criteria and the peer reviews;
- Prepare for discussions at the Investment Committee preselection meeting.

During the Pre-Selection Meeting:

- Each IC member will summarize the Applications assigned to them and present it to the Investment Committee, taking into account the peer review comments;
- IC members will discuss all Applications and make their decision (preselected/not preselected) via consensus;
- The designated IC member will write their evaluation comments for each of the assigned Applications using the Pre-Selection Form on the IF Portal;
- The designated IC member will complete the Pre-Selection Form and assign the appropriate status (preselected or not preselected) for each of the assigned Applications on the IF online application portal.

Feedback to the Applicants whose Applications were not preselected will include IC comments and recommendations (where applicable).

If an Applicant wishes to file a fact-based objection to the outcome of the preselection decision (citing evident omissions or mistakes made by the Investment Committee or the IF staff), they may submit a formal letter of objection to the IF, written in English and not exceeding 500 words within 8 calendar days from the day of receiving the original preselection decision notification.

In regards to the Environmental Screening Questionnaire (ESQ) evaluation, the pre-selected Applicants will be informed about the results of the ESQ evaluation only if the EMP is required. The review of the ESQ is conducted by the IF independent Environmental Expert.

When the project requires the preparation of the EMP, it is the responsibility of the Applicant to prepare the EMP and submit it within two (2) weeks after feedback on the ESQ is provided. The guidance on the content of the EMP is provided in the Environmental and Social Management Framework available on-line (www.innovationfund.rs). In cases where the project requires an EMP

and the Applicant does not prepare it, that Application would become ineligible for further evaluation.

During the Financing Decision Live Pitch Meeting:

- The IC will provide each Applicant with a 10-minute time window to present their Applications through a PowerPoint presentation, followed by a 15-minute time window for specific questions that the IC may have for each proposal;
- The IC will re-discuss all Applications which participate during the live pitch meeting and select Applications for financing based on their overall quality and the availability of funds;
- IC will approve Applications for financing, complete the online IC Financing Decision Form for all previously preselected Applications and assign the appropriate status (approved or not approved) on the IF online application portal.

Feedback to the Applicants (preselected) will include the IC written comments from the Financing Decision Form. Following the Investment Committee's decision to award financing, the Applicant will be notified about the positive decision on financing and subsequently offered to sign the Financing Agreement. In case any significant changes arise within the structure of a Project that was approved for financing before the signing of the Financing Agreement, the independent Investment Committee reserves the right to alter and adjust its decision in accordance with these changes.

While making the final decision on financing, the IC will take into consideration the total amount of available funds for the public call. If the number of quality Applications that the IC would approve for funding exceeds the total available budget allocated for that particular public call, the IC will then select and rank preferably three (3) backup projects from the list of those Applications which were preselected, but not ultimately approved for financing. These Applications are to be subsequently offered financing by the IF should any of the originally approved ones fail to sign the Financing Agreement.