

REPUBLIC OF CROATIA, MINISTRY OF SCIENCE, EDUCATION AND SPORTS

„Unity Through Knowledge“Fund

Evaluation Guidelines of “Unity Through Knowledge Fund“

2012

Content

1. Evaluators of the “Unity Through Knowledge” Fund“ 3
2. Code of conduct for evaluators 3
3. Conflict of interest 4
4. Conflict of interest policy procedure 4
5. Evaluators selection 6
6. Evaluation procedure and selection of project proposals 6
7. Evaluation methodology 8



Evaluators of the “Unity Through Knowledge” Fund

- I. The evaluators are independent (i.e. not representing any involved organization) experts that assist in the evaluation of formally eligible proposals. The UKF Secretariat selects evaluators from highly qualified and ethical individuals from Croatia or abroad. They can come from the fields of science, industry or innovation with the highest level of expertise in the field. The evaluators are internationally recognized authorities in the relevant specialist area. They are expected to have skills and knowledge appropriate to their areas of work.
- II. The names of the evaluators are not made public.
- III. The UKF Secretariat chooses evaluators for all eligible proposals in a call, and Steering Committee controls the quality of evaluation process, ensuring that persons with possible conflict of interest in no way participate in the process of evaluation.
- IV. The evaluators are rewarded for their service according to the guidelines set out by the Steering Committee and respectively, their travel costs are reimbursed in case they are invited to participate in evaluation discussion.

2. Code of conduct for evaluators

- I. The task of an evaluator is to participate in a confidential, fair and unbiased evaluation of each project proposal according to the procedures described in the UKF Guidelines and Procedures - Preparation Advance of Proposed Second Science and Technology Project 2012 and according to the conditions of specific UKF program and particular Call for proposals. He/she must use his/her best endeavors to achieve this and deliver a high quality of work.
- II. The evaluator works as an independent person. He/she is deemed to work in a personal capacity and, in performing the work, does not represent any organisation.
- III. The evaluator commits him/herself to strict confidentiality and impartiality concerning his/her tasks. If an evaluator has a direct or indirect connection with a proposal, has any other interest in some way connected with a proposal, or has any other allegiance which may impair his/her neutrality with respect to a proposal, he/she must declare such facts to UKF Secretariat as soon as he/she becomes aware of this. The UKF Steering Committee ensures that, where the nature of any connection is such that it could threaten the neutrality of the evaluator, he/she does not participate in the evaluation of that proposal, and, if necessary, competing proposals.
- IV. Evaluators may not discuss any proposal with other persons, including other evaluators except during the formal discussion at the meetings moderated by UKF personnel.
- V. Evaluators may not communicate with applicants. No project proposal may be modified during the evaluation session.
- VI. Evaluators must send their evaluations by post or electronic email only to UKF Secretariat.
- VII. Evaluators are not allowed to disclose the names of other evaluators participating in the evaluation.
- VIII. The evaluator will be held personally responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of any documents or electronic files sent and returning, erasing or destroying all confidential documents or files upon completing the evaluation as instructed. Evaluators may look for further information (for example through the internet, specialised databases, etc.) in order to

allow them to complete their examination of the proposals. Evaluators must not show the contents of proposals or information on applicants to third parties (e.g. colleagues, students, etc.).

IX. Evaluators are required to comply strictly with any rules defined by the UKF personnel for ensuring the confidentiality of the evaluation. Failure to fulfill these rules may result in exclusion from the immediate and future evaluation processes.

3. Conflict of interest

Conflict of interest can be **direct or indirect**.

- I. In **direct conflict of interest** is an evaluator who is involved in at least one of the following or similar situations regarding at least one of the project proposals for which the grant is requested within the same program and the same Call for proposals.
 - a. a person is an applicant or team member, a consultant in one of the project proposals, or was involved in preparation of one of the project proposals
 - b. a person is employed by the same institution and same department which was involved in at least one project proposal
 - c. a person is in kinship relation with any of the persons involved in the project proposal
 - d. a person has personal interest or direct financial interest and would benefit from one of the proposals being funded or not funded

A person in direct conflict of interest cannot serve in the evaluation process.

- II. In **indirect conflict of interest** is an evaluator who is involved in at least one of the following or similar situations:
 - a. a person who is employed by a legal entity (faculty) involved in proposal, but not within the same department
 - b. a person has some other professional/business connection with at least one of the project proposals
 - c. a person is a competitor in the scientific or business sense to the project
 - d. a person wrote a recommendation letter for one of the project proposals
 - e. persons who were in student-professor relationship with the person involved in the project proposal, with less than 5 years of scientific autonomy or in any other professional relationship in the last 3 years.
 - f. a person has any other relationship with the project applicants affecting his/her impartiality

A person in indirect conflict of interest may take part in evaluations but cannot evaluate such proposal and cannot take part in related discussion.

4. Conflict of interest policy procedure

I. Members of the UKF Secretariat, Steering Committee and Approval Committee and their families cannot compete in the Fund's Calls for proposals for the time of duration of their appointment/contract with the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports and not earlier than one year after their appointment/contract is finished.

II. In case of other personal relationship between the member of the Steering Committee and UKF Secretariat and the project applicant, as well as in case when the project applicant comes from the same institution as the Steering Committee member or the applicant and the Steering

Committee member collaborate on the same project or similar, the Steering Committee or UKF Secretariat member must disclose possible conflict of interest on one or more project proposals once information of the projects applied for financing is presented.

III. The Steering Committee member who is involved in the conflict of interest regarding the specific project proposal must stay neutral when decision on financing is being made, must leave the premises while discussion about the selection of an evaluator or project's financing is ongoing, must not comment the evaluation process results or disclose information which might influence the Steering Committee's decision on financing. If the UKF Secretariat member is in the conflict of interest towards any of the project proposals, he/she does not participate in the selection of an evaluator for the project in question. Every possible conflict of interest of the members of the Steering Committee and UKF Secretariat is documented in the Minutes from the meetings which will be submitted to MSES together with the list of projects recommended for financing.

IV. Checking for possible conflicts of interest in the evaluation procedure is done on three levels: 1. When choosing evaluators; 2. At the first contact when evaluators get the list of project proposals with the summaries ; 3. After the evaluation procedure is finished.

V. By submitting the fulfilled *Code of conduct for evaluators*, and after reviewing the projects list and summaries, the evaluator notifies the UKF Secretariat on the possible conflict of interest. If he/she is in direct conflict of interest with at least one of the project proposals the Steering Committee will exclude him from the immediate evaluation procedure. If an evaluator is in indirect conflict of interest, he/she cannot participate in the evaluation of the particular proposal and the UKF Secretariat is inviting another evaluator.

VI. In case the conflict of interest is not described in this document, the Steering Committee will bring the final decision whether the particular evaluator may participate in the evaluation procedure or not and whether to accept the evaluation report.

VII. If the representative of UKF personnel acting as moderator of the consensus discussion meeting states that there is a conflict of interest; the evaluation process will be terminated. On the grounds of the moderator's report, the decision on the continuation of the evaluation process will be brought by the Steering Committee in the following meeting.

5. Evaluators selection

I. General conditions:

- highly qualified and ethical individual from Croatia or abroad
- comes from the fields of science, industry or innovation with the highest level of expertise in the field
- internationally recognized authority in the relevant specialist area
- has knowledge and skills appropriate to their areas of work

II. Professional skills

- considering the particular Call for proposal, the Program's goal and grant's objectives
- considering the scientific depth of the projects and its possible multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary nature
- experience in projects, project leadership and project evaluation

III. Sources of potential evaluators:

- project proposals, if there is no conflict of interest
- EU public list of evaluators - FP6/FP7 (<http://cordis.europa.eu/fp6/experts.htm>)

- evaluators of other Funds
- scientific literature and conferences from the projects fields of science
- other accessible scientific databases
- successful project leaders funded by other foundations from the same fields of science
- recommendations of the Steering Committee and Approval Committee
- recommendations of successful and eminent scientists
- expression of interest by experts replying to a Call for evaluators

6. Evaluation procedure and selection of project proposals

I. All project proposals received by the call's deadline are entered into the evaluation procedure to examine their conformity with the evaluation criteria relevant for the specific program and call for proposals.

II. In case of big number of applications are received to a call UKF Secretariat and Steering Committee may organize the evaluation procedure to be carried out in two rounds. In case of two rounds of evaluation, first one does not necessarily be peer-review evaluation. Only the project proposals with the final mark greater than 4,00 which is the minimum threshold for financing, are forwarded to the second round of evaluation, the peer review procedure.

III. All project proposals are divided into the groups according to the field of science which will be sent to the same evaluator. That can be just one project proposal or several proposals from the same scientific field for which the plan and quality of the project proposal and the applicant/applicants are more important than the quality of the project theme (for instance in the case of short-term visits).

IV. UKF Secretariat sends Appointment letter to each independent expert containing a description of their duties, evaluation form and Code of conduct for evaluators. When they accept their duties and sign the Code of conduct for evaluators they register on the UKF web site and UKF Secretariat authorizes them to see and download the project proposal(s) for evaluation. Both signed and unsigned copy of the final evaluation is sent to the UKF Secretariat by email or post as well as other relevant documents.

V. If an evaluator does not register within seven days or withdraws from the evaluation (conflict of interest, changed circumstances etc) UKF Secretariat proposes and invites new evaluator. This process continues until all necessary evaluations are received.

VI. UKF Secretariat and Steering Committee log into the web application read all project proposals and evaluations and then decide if the evaluations will be accepted without an evaluation discussion, i.e. consensus discussion or they will organize one, they can also reject one or more evaluations and look for new evaluators.

VII. Evaluators are assessing the individual criteria, giving marks on the scale 1-5. They are required to provide comments to accompany each of their marks in a form suitable for providing feedback to the applicants.

VIII. If UKF Secretariat and Steering Committee decided on the consensus discussion to be carried out, a conference or teleconference where all evaluators examine together their individual evaluations and the representative of UKF Personnel (UKF Secretariat or Steering Committee) acting as moderator is organized.

The evaluators attempt to agree on a consensus mark for each of the criteria (max 2 grades of difference) and on an overall consensus report, which they confirm.

The outcome of the discussion is an evaluation report on each proposal agreed on by all evaluators.

IX. The submission of the individual evaluation form (by post or electronically) signed by an independent expert closes his/her individual assessment. His/her evaluation form may not subsequently be changed.

X. Apart from evaluators' marks, another mark is given by Steering Committee to each proposal assessing the contribution of the project to the Fund's goals. Steering Committee reviews and accepts evaluations and in accordance with the final mark and mark given by Steering Committee (general mark) , the final ranking of proposals is generated and Steering Committee brings the decision which projects will be financed. The Steering Committee decision may be: projects accepted for financing with no additional requirements, list of proposals requiring additional negotiations and a list of proposals not recommended for financing. In case further negotiations are necessary, the UKF Secretariat with the assistance of Steering Committee performs negotiations with applicants whose proposals are conditionally recommended. Steering Committee also provides a written explanation about strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the each proposed project which are sent to the applicants together with the evaluation reports.

XI. After negotiations and revisions are finished and Steering Committee finishes its approvals, the UKF Secretariat forwards all decision notices with explanations and evaluation reports to applicants. At that time the applicants with approved proposals are invited to sign the contract.

XII. Project proposals up to 10 000 EUR may be evaluated by the Steering Committee.

7. Evaluation methodology

The purpose of the evaluation procedure and projects proposals' assessment is fair, consistent and transparent selection of the best project proposals submitted to the Unity Through Knowledge Fund's calls for proposals, according to the Fund's goal, programs' purpose, calls' objectives and in accordance with the UKF Guidelines and Procedures - Preparation Advance of Proposed Second Science and Technology Project 2012.

I. MARKS AND THEIR MEANING

Marks are quantitative indicators of the level of compliance to the specific criterion. Their scale is 1 to 5, and the marks indicate the following:

- 1 – poor, few or none of the criterion aspects are satisfied
- 2 – fair, some aspects are satisfied, but at least one important one
- 3 – good, most aspects are satisfied, but maybe one (not that important one)
- 4 – very good, criterion fully satisfied and excellent from one aspect
- 5 – excellent, fully satisfied and excellent from many aspects

Each quantitative mark must be explained and the full evaluations will be shown to the candidates.

II. INDEPENDENT EVALUATORS MARKS

Evaluators assess criteria listed in the call for proposal (I, II, III...) with marks on the scale from 1 to 5. Independent evaluators assess specific criteria for the call from the scientific and professional aspect. Their marks are equal so the average value is calculated. Steering Committee can reject the evaluation of an evaluator if they identified a conflict of interest or for

another valid reason. If evaluators' marks vary significantly in one of the criteria, that mark is taken into account with the lower value factor.

III. STEERING COMMITTEE MARKS

Apart from the evaluators' marks, the Steering Committee evaluates the project's compliance with at least one of the Fund's goals: (1) Supporting research that is competitive on international level (2) Fostering research that creates new values in Croatian economy (3) Supporting projects that help the development of research infrastructure in Croatia.

Steering Committee brings the decision on the mark by consensus while making sure they conform to the paragraph 4.II of this Evaluation guidelines (the member who is involved in the conflict of interest can't evaluate that project) and explains the given mark.

IV. GENERAL MARK

The general mark is obtained by incorporating all criteria from the mark given by evaluators and mark given by Steering Committee. How is the general mark generated, ie formula will be explained in a call for proposal for the specific program.

Steering Committee decides separately in the cases where fewer evaluations were received, conflict of interest occurred or the evaluation is incomplete or inadequate. The general mark is calculated on 2 decimal numbers.

V. LOWEST ACCEPTABLE MARK (THRESHOLD)

The proposal can be considered for financing if it complies with two conditions as follows:

- (1) The general mark must be greater than 4,0 (on the scale 1 - 5).
- (2) Neither average evaluator's mark for any of the criteria nor the Steering Committee mark may be lower than 3,00.

By putting the high threshold it is assured that all project financed are excellent and by putting the additional criterion on an average evaluators or Steering Committee's mark it is also avoided financing of projects that might have some significant weakness.