

Innovation Fund

MINI GRANTS Program

GRANT MANUAL

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MINI GRANTS Program

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REPUBLIC OF SERBIA
MINISTRY OF FINANCE
Department for Contracting
and Financing of EU Funded Programmes
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE
AND TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

MINI, MATCHING AND
COLLABORATIVE GRANT
SCHEME PROGRAMME

INNOVATION
FUND



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Dear Applicant,

The MINI GRANTS Program is designed to stimulate innovative entrepreneurship by providing financing to most promising innovative Serbian startup companies.

Recognizing difficulties in securing funds for the early-stage development cycle and the high cost of translating research into a commercially viable product, this Program is designed to help sustain emerging companies through a critical stage of R&D and to enable entrepreneurs in Serbia to build their businesses.

Ideally, the companies which receive financing through this Program are expected to deliver a commercially usable prototype, conduct a pilot or offer a market ready product or service, and reach first potential clients during the duration of project.

Applicants are private micro and small companies incorporated in Serbia, not older than 5 years at the time of application, or teams consisting of up to 5 members.

The financing awarded by the Innovation Fund (IF) under the MINI GRANTS Program will cover a maximum of 70% of total project costs for projects lasting up to one (1) year, but the total IF co-financing cannot exceed more than **EUR 80,000** per project. The minimum of 30% of the total budget is to be secured by the Applicant from other, preferably private sector sources.

Financing decisions will be made on a competitive basis by the IF's independent Investment Committee (IC). The number of awards will be determined by the quality of the applications and subject to the total funds available or allocated to the MINI GRANTS Program. In addition, if and where applicable, through this Program, the IF will also provide support and training in areas such as business development, marketing, sales, intellectual property protection and management and other, depending on the specific needs of the startups.

This Grant Manual provides information about the Program and its application procedures and we hope the information will help you navigate easily through the process. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions.

The Grant Manual and associated procedures are subject to modification based on the specific requirements of the Program's sources of financing (state budget of the Republic of Serbia, EU IPA funds, World Bank, other donor sources, etc.) and may be changed at any time.

Additional information and the timetable with the application deadlines will be available through the IF website (www.inovacionifond.rs).

Wishing you success,

Ivan Rakonjac, PhD
Managing Director

DEFINITIONS

Applicant	A team or company applying for the MINI GRANTS Program.
Approved Project Budget	Project budget approved by the Innovation Fund, integral part of the Financing Agreement.
Awardee	An eligible Applicant that has received a notice from the Innovation Fund that it has been awarded financing and subsequently signed the Financing Agreement with the Innovation Fund.
Application	The package of all necessary documents and data submitted by the Applicant.
Financing Agreement	A document signed by the Awardee and the Innovation Fund, governing the terms and conditions of the financing under the MINI GRANTS Program.
Final Settlement	A legal document signed by the Innovation Fund and the Awardee at the end of the implementation of the project, defining the completion of the project implementation and the fulfillment of the obligations under the Financing Agreement.
Project	Development of the current business activity as described in the submitted Application.

1. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

1.1. PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

The objective of the MINI GRANTS Program is to stimulate innovative entrepreneurship and creation of innovative companies based on knowledge via private sector start-ups by providing financing for market-oriented projects with high commercialization potential and a scalable business model.

The Innovation Fund (IF) aims to provide financial support for the crucial stage of research and development activities and help create new or introduce significant improvements in existing products, processes or services.

1.2. AMOUNT AND TYPE OF FINANCING

The total amount and source of funds allocated by the Innovation Fund for the public call for proposals can be found on the IF's official internet website, available at: <http://www.inovacionifond.rs/programs/mini-grants-program/public-call-for-the-mini-grants-program>

The maximum amount of grant financing which the IF can award per each individual project is **EUR 80,000**.

The proposed total project cost is defined by the Applicant in the project budget template.

The grant financing awarded by the IF can cover:

- maximum of 70% of total project costs (Approved Project Budget);

Each Applicant must secure their own mandatory co-financing for the project in the following way:

- minimum of 30% of the total Approved Project Budget.

Acceptable co-financing includes Applicant's own resources from operating revenue or cash, private investments, venture capital or private equity funding, industry partner financing or any other source of private contribution or for equity financing, as long as it excludes financing from the IF or other public sector sources.

De minimis State aid regulation is applied to the financing received by the Awardee from the IF through this Program in accordance with the Innovation Fund's Rulebook on applying state aid rules.

The grant financing approved by the IF is based on specific needs of every Project, as originally submitted by the Applicant through their proposed Project Budget. However, before approving an Application for financing, the Innovation Fund's independent Investment Committee and the IF reserve the right to modify the proposed Project Budget to better reflect the Project's proposed activities or to align the proposed Project Budget with the Program's rules and requirements.

2. RULES FOR THIS CALL FOR PROPOSALS

There are three sets of eligibility criteria, relating to:

- (1) the Applicants;
- (2) the types of projects that can be financed;
- (3) the costs (types of cost that will be taken into account).

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2.1. ELIGIBILITY OF APPLICANTS

Each Application will be reviewed for eligibility using the following criteria:

The Applicant is a:

- Micro or small company¹ in majority private ownership of Serbian residents² (51% or more), incorporated in Serbia³ for no longer than five (5) years at the time of Application submission,
- or**
- Team consisting of a maximum of 5 members.

In cases where the Application is submitted by a team (not yet incorporated as a company), if financing is approved, the Applicant will be required to establish a company that will be the recipient of the funds and legally responsible for implementing the project, and it must fulfill all eligibility requirements stated in this section. The newly established company must be in **at least 51% ownership by the proposed team member(s)** (the percentage of ownership among team members is subject to their internal agreement).

Applicant company that meets any of the following criteria is **NOT eligible** to apply for the MINI GRANTS Program:

- Has raised EUR 500,000 or more in total financing (equity, debt or grant) from public or private sources;
- Has revenue of EUR 2,500,000 or higher in any of prior 3 years, or is in more than 25% ownership by private entity that fulfills this criterion (this does not include VC or PE funds or similar investing entities);
- Has received financing from any other IF financing program for the same activities;
- Is considered to be an affiliated entity⁴ of a large company (domestic or foreign) or is 10% or more owned by a large company (domestic or foreign);
- Any of the founders are majority owners and/or are in control of a company that is implementing a project financed under the IF's grant programs* at the time of Application submission;
- Any of the founders are majority owners and/or are in control in more than one company that is submitting an Application or is a co-applicant under the IF grant programs*.

* except of innovation vouchers

Note: Control shall imply the right or possibility of one person/entity, either independently or acting together with other persons/entities, to have controlling influence on the operations of another entity through an equity interest in share capital, an agreement or a right to appoint the majority of directors or Supervisory Board members, in line with the applicable Serbian Company Law.

The Applicant cannot receive more than **EUR 800,000** of grant financing from the IF under all of the IF programs (including Mini Grants Program, Matching Grants Program, Collaborative Grant Scheme Program, TT Program, Katapult Program and others) over the lifetime of the company applying for

¹ In accordance with the current Law on Accounting of the Republic of Serbia, including newly founded companies as stipulated in this law.

² In accordance with the current Law on personal income tax. The Applicants might be required to submit the proof of residency for its owners.

³ In accordance with the current Serbian Company Law in effect.

⁴ As defined by the Serbian Company Law.

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financing. This maximum amount includes the IF financing awarded to any past, present or future affiliated entity (including its subsidiaries, spinoffs or affiliated companies which have changed their trade name).

In cases where the Applicant is a team, and therefore is not incorporated as a company at the time of the application, aforementioned rule is applied as follows: in case that any of the team members is majority owner and/or has control rights over the company⁵ that has been awarded financing under any of the IF programs (or was majority owner or had control rights over the company at the time when financing was awarded), all these previously awarded amounts count toward the maximum amount of EUR 800,000.

Modified and improved Applications which were previously rejected are allowed. **However, an Applicant can resubmit substantially the same Application only once (regarding all IF's financing programs: Mini Grants Program, Matching Grants Program, Collaborative Grant Scheme Program).** 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.

Any Applicant that is submitting a modified and/or improved Application which has already been submitted in the past calls for proposals **must** fill out the appropriate section for returning projects in the business plan and to clearly illustrate the progress that was made since the time of the previous application.

Application submitted by an Applicant who is already implementing a project within the IF's Mini Grants, Matching Grants and the Collaborative Grant Scheme Program at the time of the submission **will not be taken into consideration.**

2.1. TYPES OF PROJECTS THAT CAN BE FINANCED

The IF will consider financing of **projects coming from all fields of science and technology and from any sector of the economy.**

However, please keep in mind that the MINI GRANTS Program is aligned with the 2020 – 2027 Smart Specialization Strategy Serbia, which focuses on four main priority domains:

- Food for future;
- Information and communication technologies (including specific focus on Artificial Intelligence, as envisaged by the Strategy for the Development of Artificial Intelligence in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2020-2025⁶);
- Machines and production processes of the future;
- Creative industries.

At least 50% of IF's available funding for the call for proposals will be allocated for applications in the abovementioned priority domains, subject to availability of good quality projects.

⁵ Control shall imply the right or possibility of one person/entity, either independently or acting together with other persons/entities, to have controlling influence on the operations of another entity through an equity interest in share capital, an agreement or a right to appoint the majority of directors or Supervisory Board members, in line with the applicable Serbian Company Law.

⁶ The strategy can be found on the following link: <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/tekst/437277>

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The Smart Specialization Strategy Serbia can be found on the following link:
http://www.mpn.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/strategija_pametne_specijalizacije.pdf

The Innovation Fund will continue, together with the Government of the Republic of Serbia and the European Union as the main partners in supporting innovation, to provide support for projects that contribute to increased social inclusion of persons with disabilities using advanced technologies. The funding under the MINI GRANTS Program is ideal for the Applicants that offer:

- A competent and well-balanced team;
- High commercialization potential and viable business model;
- A competitive advantage over existing solutions addressing the same market needs.

The development activities undertaken within the project can include demonstrating, prototyping, piloting, testing and validation of new or improved products, processes or services where the primary objective is to make significant further improvements.

The minimum expected outcome for projects financed under the MINI GRANTS Program is a commercially usable prototype or pilot upon completion of the project. In case the Applicant already has a prototype at the time of applying, they are expected to be able to create a final product by the end of implementation period.

Projects that are focused on routine or periodic changes made to existing products, production lines, manufacturing processes, services and other already established operations (e.g. software version updates, product redesigns) which do not result in creation of tangible value and new intellectual property or know-how are not encouraged to apply, even if those changes may represent improvements for the Applicant's own portfolio or organization.

IP and know-how requirements

Any new IP and know-how which may be created during the implementation of the project must belong to the Applicant. To ensure this, the Applicant has to secure these IP and know-how rights in agreements concluded with any third party.

Duration

The project and the project budget must be designed for completion within a **maximum of 12 months**. The project may be extended only under exceptional circumstances for a period up to additional six (6) months subject to the review and approval by the IF. The Awardee must submit the request for change with the description of change and the justification for change at latest 30 days before the original end date of the project. The circumstances in which the project may be extended are unforeseen delays in project implementation caused by administrative, financial or other procedural factors; force majeure events which include, but are not limited to floods, fires, earthquakes, draughts, power and water shortages or general shortages of basic resources necessary for project implementation, armed conflict, etc. The approved amount of financing is not subject to increase in any case.

Number of Applications per Applicant

Only one (1) Application under this call for proposals regardless of the Program is allowed.

2.2. ELIGIBILITY OF COSTS

The grant awarded by the IF can only be used to co-finance the costs which are categorized as “eligible costs”. The categories of costs that are eligible and non-eligible are indicated below. The Approved Project Budget for each project is both a cost estimate for the items listed in it and an overall ceiling for total “eligible costs”.

Eligible costs

The following budget categories are eligible for financing under the MINI GRANTS Program:

- Human resources (can be inclusive of all social benefits for employees working on the project);
- R&D equipment and supplies (to be used for project purposes, includes purchased equipment, as well as leased or rented equipment, online services and tools);
- Offices and business support (maximum EUR 1,000 per month);
- External R&D services, subcontracts;
- R&D experts/advisors;
- Sales, marketing and business consultancy (maximum 20% of Approved Project Budget, including, business development advisory, market research, conference attendance, travel costs (without per diem), production of promotional material, website design);
- Patent application and fees, certifications.

Taking into account the uniqueness of every Application, the percentages of the project budget that are allocated to each category may vary depending on the project goals. All items listed items should be clearly justified by the Applicant. Budget items and the amounts may be adjusted by the Investment Committee or the IF in order to better reflect the project goals.

Only costs accrued during the project in accordance with the Approved Project Budget and completed by the end of the project are eligible for financing.

Ineligible costs

The following costs shall not be considered eligible but are not limited to:

- a) Debts and debt service charges (interest);
- b) Provisions for losses, debts or potential future liabilities;
- c) Costs declared by the awardee and financed by another action or work program receiving a European Union grant (including through the European Development Fund) or other public sources of financing;
- d) Purchases of land or buildings, including any renovation;
- e) Currency exchange losses, fees and penalties;
- f) Credits to third parties;
- g) In-kind contributions;
- h) Salary costs of the personnel of national administrations;
- i) Taxes, including VAT*, duties and charges;
- j) Entertainment and hospitality expenses;
- k) Per diems;

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- l) Recruitment, relocation or subscription costs; The procurement of second hand or refurbished goods;
- m) Any activities outlined in the IF's Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) as Exclusions published on <http://www.inovacionifond.rs/>
- n) Cash payments from the project account.

*In accordance with regulations governing the financing through the European Union Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA), the financing under the Mini Grants Program in this public call is Value Added Tax (VAT), customs and import duties exempt.

3. HOW TO APPLY AND WHICH PROCEDURES TO FOLLOW

In order for any Application to be evaluated, it needs to be submitted as **a complete, structured documentation package within the given submission deadline electronically through the IF portal.** Only Applications submitted using the **IF online application portal and predefined document templates will be considered for financing.**

The complete set of necessary Application documentation can be found on the Innovation Fund's website (www.inovacionifond.rs). Applicants are expected to download these documents and become closely acquainted with their content before beginning to prepare their Applications.

Only complete Applications will be accepted.

The complete Application documentation consists of two different types of documents:

Application documentation:

- Business Plan;
- Project Budget;
- Project Presentation (in free format based on instructions)*;
- Environmental Screening Questionnaire (ESQ)⁷;
- CVs of the key personnel to be engaged in the project (maximum 5, free format, in English).

Financial documentation:

- Financial statements for the previous business year, if applicable.

Note: Application documentation must be submitted in the exact same visual and structural format and style as it is provided on the IF website. Any attempt to modify the Application documentation by unlocking and/or altering the formulas or text will result in the Application being disqualified from further evaluation.

***Project presentation in the PowerPoint format is the only exception to the note above, and needs to be submitted based on the instructions provided in the template itself (See the IF website).**

⁷ If applicable, the Applicant may be required to submit an Environmental Management Plan (EMP) at a later stage of the Application evaluation.

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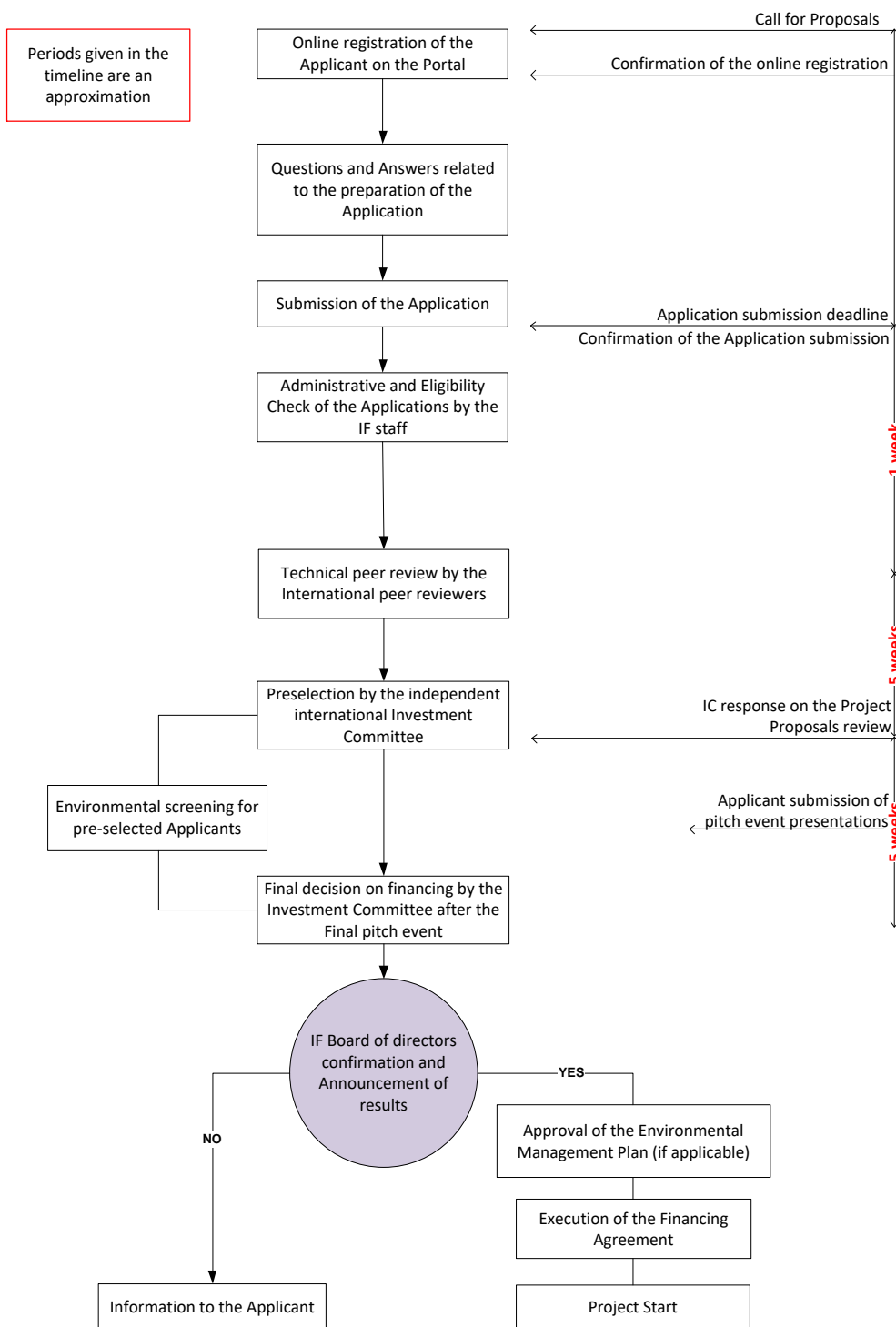
Application templates are an integral part of the Mini Grants Program Manual, and Applicants are required to comply with the instructions given in these templates. Failure to comply will result in disqualification from the evaluation process.

The Innovation Fund will provide advisory, non-obligatory and non-conclusive support to all interested Applicants via e-mail, phone, through frequently asked questions, information sessions and open doors that potential Applicants can require in regards to the administrative aspects of preparing the Applications for the MINI GRANTS Program. Furthermore, following the closing of a project submission deadline, the IF will provide a period in the eligibility review phase during which the Applicants can rectify administrative deficiencies pertaining to the contents of their Application, **but only in cases where the appropriate application templates provided by the IF were originally submitted by the Applicant.** This information will be requested in writing, including the deadline for the submission of the necessary corrections. After the eligibility review is completed, there will be no more possibility for rectifying deficiencies.

Figure 1: Process flow and timeline



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3.1. REGISTRATION PROCEDURE INSTRUCTIONS

In order to apply for this Program, the Applicants first need to register an account on the IF's portal, accessed via the IF website. The registration request is approved by the Innovation Fund staff after preliminary assessment of the information provided in the account registration request (corporate and tax ID, basic company information and contact person details). **Teams can register without a corporate and tax ID**, which they will be required to provide after registering their company with the SBRA if financing is approved.

Processing the Applicant's registration request may take up to three (3) business days. Applicants are advised to submit their registration requests in a timely manner and upload necessary Application documents to avoid being locked out of the deadline for calls for proposals.

Upon approval of the account registration request by the IF staff, the Applicant will receive a confirmation e-mail with the necessary login credentials. The account then becomes active and is used to submit the necessary Application documents in electronic form. The e-mail address of the contact person given in the Applicant registration form needs to be a valid e-mail address as it will be used for future communication with the Applicant.

Applicants can open several projects with their account, but can only submit one (1) Application within a Call for proposals. When registering their project, the Applicant needs to choose the appropriate industry area and sub-sector from the available list in the drop-down menu on the IF portal. Additionally, each registered project will automatically receive a predefined Applicant Statement document which the Applicant must read and agree to. Applicants with existing login credentials cannot register again due to corporate ID restrictions and can freely use their existing credentials to create new projects under the "MINI GRANTS" tab.

3.2. APPLICATION SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

Applicants can freely create new projects and upload documents at all times, but the submission of Applications is disabled until a call for proposals is officially launched by the IF. Once enabled, the submission of Applications is possible until the deadline given within the details of the call for proposals and published on the IF's website.

When the Applicant has successfully activated their account on the IF portal and submission of Applications becomes allowed, the Applicant can upload all the necessary Application documents to the designated slots within their project and then submit the Application for evaluation.

Once uploaded, each document can be overwritten by simply repeating the upload procedure, if the Applicant needs to update or replace the file for whatever reason. Please keep in mind that the previously uploaded document is permanently removed and replaced in the process. Overwriting of previously uploaded documents is possible up until the expiration of the Application submission deadline.

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Upon uploading all necessary documents, the Applicant must officially confirm the Application documents' validity by clicking the "Submit" button. This action informs the Innovation Fund that the Application is finalized and ready to be evaluated.

Applicants should keep in mind that the "Submit" button must be clicked before the expiration of the deadline in order for the Application to be taken into consideration for further evaluation. Furthermore, Applicants are free to make alterations or modifications to the submitted documents before the expiration of the Application submission deadline and have to validate the new refreshed Application documentation by clicking the "Submit" button.

It is the Applicant's responsibility to ensure the timely submission of the information/documents. **The Applications submitted after the deadline will not be considered for the evaluation.**

Acceptance of Terms of financing

By submitting an Application, the Applicant agrees to accept all relevant terms required by the IF in order for the Application to be considered and evaluated. Therefore, the Applicant agrees to accept the terms for the following:

- MINI GRANTS Program Manual;
- Applicant Statement;
- Financing Agreement;
- IF's Environmental and Social Management Framework;
- Confidentiality Policy and Prevention of Conflict of Interest Policy;

Furthermore, the Applicant agrees to undertake all necessary actions in order to prevent possible Fraud and Corruption activities during the implementation of the project. In pursuance of this policy, the practices constituting Fraud and Corruption are defined as follows:

- (i) "corrupt practice" is the offering, giving, receiving, or soliciting, directly or indirectly, of anything of value to influence the actions of another party;
- (ii) "fraudulent practice" is an act or omission, including misrepresentation, that knowingly or recklessly misleads, or attempts to mislead, a party to obtain financial or other benefit or to avoid an obligation;
- (iii) "collusive practices" is an arrangement between two or more parties designed to achieve an improper purpose, including to influence improperly the actions of another party;
- (iv) "coercive practices" is impairing or harming, or threatening to impair or harm, directly or indirectly, persons or their property to influence their participation in a procurement process, or affect the execution of a contract;
- (v) "obstructive practice" is:
 - (a) deliberately destroying, falsifying, altering, or concealing of evidence material to the investigation or making false statements to investigators in order to materially impede an investigation into allegations of a corrupt, fraudulent, coercive, or collusive practice; and/or threatening, harassing, or intimidating any party to prevent it from

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- disclosing its knowledge of matters relevant to the investigation or from pursuing the investigation, or
- (b) acts intended to materially impede the exercise of inspection and audit rights.

Before applying for the Innovation Fund's programs, the Applicant is advised to carefully read all relevant documents and contact the IF staff if any questions arise.

4. EVALUATION AND FINANCING DECISION

The evaluation procedure includes several steps:

- The administrative and eligibility check of all Applications received;
- Pre-selection of Applications (based on review by the Investment Committee and technical peer-reviewers);
- Environmental screening of all pre-selected Applications
- Financing decision (made by the Investment Committee after a live-pitch event).

The Applications will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Management and key personnel credentials and ability of the company/team to deliver;
- Innovative technology, product or service; usefulness and uniqueness of the innovation; clear IP position;
- Clear market need and commercialization potential;
- Potential for revenue/partnership with a strategic partner within two to three (2-3) years after the project start;
- Viable implementation methodology and capabilities;
- Use of funds and adequacy of the project budget;
- Technology and implementation risk management.

Only Applications excelling in all the above-mentioned criteria will be recommended for financing. Additional details regarding the evaluation process can be found in the Review Guidelines document, available at: <http://www.inovacionifond.rs/en/programs/mini-grants-program/mini-documentation-november-2021>

Each person taking part in any stage of the evaluation process is required to abide by the IF's Confidentiality Policy and Prevention of Conflict of Interest document.

4.1. ADMINISTRATIVE AND ELIGIBILITY CHECK

After the Application is submitted, the IF staff will conduct a desk review of the eligibility and completeness of the submitted Applications. Please observe that only fully completed, signed, and electronically submitted Applications will be considered for 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, **but only in cases where the appropriate**

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templates provided by the IF were originally submitted by the Applicant. Ineligible Applicants and Applicants whose Applications did not pass the administrative aspect of the check will be notified of their ineligibility by email, after the IF completes the administrative and eligibility check of all submitted Applications.

If an Applicant wishes to file a fact-based objection to the outcome of the administrative and eligibility check (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 with a recommended limit of around 500 words within 8 calendar days from the day of receiving the original eligibility review decision notification. The IF will provide an official response to the formal letter of the objection within 14 calendar days from receiving the objection.

4.2. PRE-SELECTION OF APPLICATIONS

The first phase of review of eligible Applications for the MINI GRANTS Program includes a technical peer-review by independent international peer reviewers, and evaluation by the IF's independent Investment Committee. Both types of evaluators assign points for each of the evaluation criteria and the points are then summed after being awarded the appropriate weights to generate the total score for each Application (30% of total score comes from the peer reviewers, while 70% of the total score comes from the Investment Committee). All Applications which score 75% of the maximum number of points and above (21 or more) will be preselected for the second phase of review.

If an Applicant wishes to file a fact-based objection to the outcome of the preselection phase (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 with a recommended limit of around 500 words within 8 calendar days from the day of receiving the original preselection decision notification. The content of the letter must be limited to the clarification of the data already existing in the originally submitted application. The IF will provide an official response to the formal letter of objection within 14 calendar days from receiving the objection.

During the course of the evaluation of submitted Applications, the Applicant may be required to submit supplemental information.

4.3. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

All pre-selected Applications will undergo a screening by External environmental and social management provider (ESMP) to verify compliance with the IF Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF).

The environmental review consists of assessment of the Environmental Screening Questionnaires (ESQ) for all pre-selected Application. The pre-selected Applicants will be informed about the results of the ESQ assessment only if the Environmental Management Plan (EMP) is required. When an Application (project) requires the preparation of the EMP (Category B), it is the responsibility of the Applicant (who has at that time been informed by the IF that the financing for the Applicant's project was approved) to prepare the EMP and submit it to the ESMP for approval as one of the prerequisites for signing the Financing Agreement. The guidance on the content of the EMP is provided in the Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) available on-line www.inovacionifond.rs. Environmental and Social Management Framework specifies environmental and social procedures for

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implemented projects to adhere to, which are consistent with Serbian national legislation. In cases where an Application requires an EMP and the Applicant does not prepare it or is not approved by the ESMP, that Application becomes ineligible for financing⁶. Additionally, all preselected Applications which are categorized as type A projects according to the ESMF, are considered automatically ineligible for financing under this program.

4.4. FINANCING DECISION

The final decision for financing under the MINI GRANTS Program is made by the IF's independent Investment Committee **after a live pitch event**. During this event, all Applicants which have been pre-selected by the IF's Investment Committee and satisfied the ESQ Environmental review will present their projects in front of the independent Investment Committee in person. Based on the results of the live presentation, the Investment Committee will make its final decision. Following the Investment Committee's decision to award financing and accompanying statutory procedures, the Applicant will be notified via email about the positive decision on financing and subsequently offered to sign the Financing Agreement. The Investment Committee will perform the necessary budget clearing for every pre-selected project to optimize the use of available financing in this public call. The Investment Committee reserves the right to modify the milestones (proposed by the Applicant) and to set specific conditions for each individual project. The IF will also notify all pre-selected Applicants whose projects were not awarded about the outcome of the final phase of the evaluation process and they will receive the Investment Committee's comments for their project.

4.5. CONTRACTING OF FINANCING AGREEMENT

From the date of notifying the Awardee about the positive decision on financing, Awardee will have up to 10 weeks to fulfill necessary requirements and sign the Financing Agreement⁸. Each Awardee will be notified about the signing date of the Financing Agreement.

The Awardee is obliged to provide the following required documents before signing the Financing Agreement:

- Approved Environmental Management Plan (EMP) for Category B projects only, will be contacted by the ESMP;
- Proof that the Awardee is listed in the Register of Bidders at the Serbian Business Registers Agency;
- Bank Agreement on opening project bank account;
- Other as requested.

⁶ As per IF's Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) the Applicant is obliged to follow the environmental procedures.

⁸ On exceptional circumstances this period may be extended for additional 4 weeks on case-by-case basis.

5. IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING OF THE PROJECT

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 MINI GRANTS Program and the Financing Agreement and with sound technical, economic, financial, managerial, environmental and social standards and practices.

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

The Awardee is required to implement the project in accordance with the signed 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 IF.

Any costs covered from the project funds may not be incurred before the start of the project.

5.2. PAYMENTS AND DISBURSEMENT OF PROJECT FUNDS

The Awardee must open a project bank account where project financing from the IF and co-financing from the Awardee is transferred. This account must not be used for any other purpose except for implementation of the approved project. The Awardee bears full legal responsibility for this account, documents all the payments made to and from it and reports them back to the Innovation Fund.

The project funds are disbursed on a quarterly basis. The disbursement amount will cover up to 70% of the Approved Project Budget for the quarter. However, prior to the quarterly disbursement, the Awardee must submit, along with the quarterly progress- and financial- report a bank account statement showing that the Awardee has deposited in the project account a minimum of 30% of the total amount of funds requested for the particular quarter.

Prior to next quarterly disbursement, the Awardee must **submit quarterly progress- and financial- reports within two (2) weeks after the last calendar day of the project quarter** along with other required documentation and these reports must be approved by the IF. Upon review and approval of the reports by the IF, the Awardee will be eligible for disbursement for the next quarter.

Disbursement for the last quarter of the project will be reduced by an amount of 10% of the total IF financing as per Approved Project Budget until the monitoring of the project is completed as defined in section 5.5 and the final report is approved.

The final disbursement for eligible costs will be made upon review and approval of the final progress report and the quarterly financial report for the last project quarter and upon completion of the project in accordance with the provisions of the Financing Agreement and signing of the Final Settlement. In case of any ineligible costs, the IF's pro-rata amount of these costs will be subtracted from the withheld amount.

The review and approval of the reports will take approximately two (2) weeks and will include desk-review (financial report and progress report) and may be subject to an on-site monitoring visit as described in Section 5.5.

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All payments to the Awardees are made in Serbian Dinars at the official average exchange rate of the National Bank of Serbia on the date of the disbursement.

In special cases, Awardee is allowed to request *changes of the Approved Project Budget within any budget category*. In order to implement the budget changes, the Awardee is obligated to send a written request for reallocation of funds to the IF and a Project Budget proposal for approval via email. The Awardee has the right to request a change once in 6 months. Only after the receipt of the IF's written approval the Awardee can make payments related to these changes. However, if the change affects the disbursement schedule, an amendment to the Financing Agreement needs to be signed.

5.3. PROCUREMENT PROCEDURES

Subject of procurement procedures are:

- I. **Procurement of supply** – includes the purchase or rental of supplies/equipment (may include sitting, installation and maintenance);
- II. **Procurement of services** – includes engagement of service providers, firms and/or individuals, experts, advisors.

Awardee will conduct procurement for **all budget categories**, except for:

- I. Budget category I. Human resources;
- II. Supplier/service provider who was explicitly named in the first Project Budget that was part of the Application;
- III. Proven previous professional collaboration. In this case, Awardee has to submit to the IF Portal contract, invoice or other proof of previous collaboration which was dated before Investment Committee decision for financing. Previous collaboration may be appropriate only for cases when there is natural continuation of previous work or compatibility with existing equipment, with reasonable prices. The IF reserves the right to request additional documents to confirm the previous collaboration, if needed.

Procurement principles

The Awardee shall respect the principles of **fair competition, transparency, proportionality, equal treatment, non-discrimination and economy, efficiency and effectiveness**. All procurements shall be put out to competition on the broadest possible basis. The estimated value of a procurement package may not be determined with a view to circumventing the applicable rules, nor may be split up for that purpose. No artificially splitting is allowed. Supplies or services that can be purchased from the same supplier or service provider in principle should be included in a same procurement procedure.

The 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 fulfillment 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 i.e.,

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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.
- Fair competition and equal treatment - There should always be a competition for the award of contracts. All tenderers must be given the same information and be treated equally with this regard. The potential tenderers should be given sufficient time to prepare and submit their offers.
- Objectivity and impartiality - Requirements in the technical specifications for supply and terms of reference for service procurements must be non-discriminatory, clear and unambiguously set in line with the market conditions. Using manufacturer or brand name shall be avoided. If it is necessary to name brand or manufacturer, the words "or equivalent" shall be added after such reference.

Record keeping and audit trail

The Awardee shall keep sufficient and appropriate documentation with regard to the procedures applied. In this way, a clear and easy to follow audit trail (supporting documentation from each step of the procurement procedure such as whole tender documentation with requests and procurement description, nomination and composition of the evaluation committee, submitted offers, evaluation reports, communications with the tenderers, emails correspondence if applicable, documentation during contract implementation etc.) **for all steps of the procurement procedure** must be ensured.

Rule of nationality

For procurement of goods and services **tenderers (legal entities that submitted offer/tender) are eligible if they are established in one of the following countries/territories (hereinafter: eligible State):** Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia, Turkey, the Republic of North Macedonia, Iceland, Lichtenstein, Norway, Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Republic of Moldova, Morocco, occupied Palestinian territory (oPt), Syria, Tunisia, Ukraine.

Eligible legal entity is established under the law of an eligible State and its real seat i.e., registered headquarters are within an eligible State.

This rule **does not apply for engagement of experts and other natural persons** employed or legally contracted, i.e., experts recruited or otherwise legally contracted by an eligible contractor/sub-contractor. Engaged experts and other natural persons may be of any nationality.

The rule of origin

This rule applies only for procurement of goods.

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All procured goods **may originate from any country if the amount of the goods to be procured is below EUR 100,000 per purchase**, in which case no proof of origin is required. Where the procurement is divided into lots, the rule applies per lot (only applicable to lots of less than EUR 100,000).

For the purchase of EUR 100,000 and above, goods must originate from the same eligible States listed above for the rule of nationality. The proof of origin must be issued by the competent authorities of the country of origin of the goods or supplier (for example the chamber of commerce) and must comply with the rules laid down by the relevant European Union legislation.

The country of origin is not necessarily the country from which the goods were shipped and supplied. Two basic concepts are used to determine the origin of goods, namely the concept of 'wholly obtained' products and the concept of products having undergone a 'last substantial transformation':

- If only one country is involved in the production, the 'wholly obtained' concept will be applied. In practice, these goods wholly obtained in a single country must be regarded as having their origin in that country.
- If two or more countries are involved in the production of goods, it is necessary to determine which of those countries confers origin on the finished goods. For this purpose, the concept of 'last substantial transformation' is applied⁹.

When rules of origin apply, the tenderer must state expressly that all the goods meet the requirements concerning origin and must state the country(ies) of origin. When tendering for systems comprising more than one item, the origin of each item in the system must be specified. The tenderer is bound by the declaration of origin she/he submits. The tenderer may be requested to provide documents supporting the stated origin. The declaration of origin must be submitted at the latest during implementation of the contract when the certificate of provisional acceptance is requested.

Procurement procedures

The basic means of awarding contracts is competitive tendering. The purpose is twofold:

- to ensure that operations comply with the procurement principles; and
- to obtain the quality of services and supplies at the best possible price.

The **applicable financial thresholds** that further determine the use of procurement procedures are summarized in the table below. The thresholds are based on the maximum budget for the contract in question (including any co-financing). Where contracts are subdivided into lots, the value of each lot is taken into account when calculating the overall threshold.

⁹ In general the criterion of last substantial transformation is expressed in three ways: by a rule requiring a change of tariff (sub)heading in the HS nomenclature (i.e. the Nomenclature governed by the Convention on the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System); by a list of manufacturing or processing operations that do or do not confer on the goods the origin of the country in which these operations were carried out; by a value added rule, where the increase of value due to assembly operations and incorporation of originating materials represents a specified level of the ex-works price of the product.

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Thresholds and procurement procedures:

PROCUREMENT OF SERVICES	<i>Competitive procedure</i>	<i>Single tender</i>	<i>A payment may be made against invoice without prior acceptance of a tender if the expenditure is</i> ≤ EUR 5,000
PROCUREMENT OF GOODS/SUPPLIES	> EUR 20,000 < EUR 300,000	≤ EUR 20,000	

Single tender procedure: Awardees are strongly advised to invite 3 quotations to show that they got a good deal reflecting the current market prices. This will demonstrate that the process was fair and transparent. The Awardees need to obtain at least one valid quotation.

Competitive procedure: Awardees must invite at least 3 possible suppliers/service providers to submit quotations. The Awardees need to obtain at least one valid quotation.

For procurement of supplies and services **for contracts estimated to cost EUR 50,000 or more**, the Awardees will be required to provide procurement documentation to the IF **for prior review and approval**. Only after obtaining the IF's written consent, the Awardee will be allowed to finalize the procurement procedure and make corresponding payments.

IF reserves the right to conduct a sample desk-check of completed procurements.

The physical inspection is on a sample basis will be a part of the monitoring visit.

5.4. REPORTING

The Awardee is obligated to provide the Innovation Fund with accurate, timely and coherent quarterly financial and progress reports pertaining to the project, in predefined intervals. The IF will provide every Awardee with a detailed Implementation manual which outlines the reporting requirements and procedures.

Two (2) weeks after the last calendar day of each **quarterly period (i.e. every 3 months)**, the Awardee needs to submit the **quarterly progress and financial report** (signed by the authorized legal representative), **including all supporting documentation** to the IF for review. For any identified deviations that are unintentional or technical mistakes the Awardee may be required to update the reports or submitted additional documentation. Additional check-ups by the IF may also be made.

Any changes to the project (e.g. regarding project implementation, timelines, project budget, deliverables, project staff, etc.) should be communicated to the IF, especially when they require the IF's written consent. Such changes may not be effective before the written consent is issued to the Awardee.

Quarterly Progress Report

This report should describe in detail all previously completed and currently on-going activities, as well as actions planned for the upcoming period. It needs to focus on the main achievements of the reporting period, state any potential setback of issued and provide an overview of the Awardees business activities.

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Quarterly Financial Report

This report must document all actual payments from the project account. These payments must be properly itemized and categorized in accordance with the Approved Project Budget as found in the Financing Agreement.

Supporting financial documentation will include all bank statements from the project account, along with viable proof of payment, such as invoices, delivery receipts and/or reports, payroll calculations, service providers' reports, etc.

Final Progress Report

Final Progress report is submitted **within 4 weeks after the end of the final reporting period**, and it needs to provide details on the overall achievements of the project. It should include information on the status of the planned milestones and development activities, but also focus on the marketing and commercialization activities that are on-going or even planned, as well as any other information that is relevant for the success or future development of the Awardee.

5.5. MONITORING OF THE PROJECT

Prior to disbursement of funds to the Awardee, monitoring of the project is required by the IF. The purpose of the monitoring is to assess the progress of the project in implementing the task activities and to assure that financial costs are in accordance with the Approved Project Budget for the given period. Methods of monitoring include:

- A) Review of submitted quarterly progress- and financial- reports;
- B) On-site monitoring visits (at least once per year);
- C) Review of submitted final progress report;
- D) Review of visibility requirements;

The purpose of the monitoring visit by the IF staff is primarily to check that project development and financial activities are occurring as reported and as stated in the approved project documents. The IF will perform monitoring visits at least once per year or more often, if deemed necessary. The IF staff will notify the Awardee in writing by email in advance about the monitoring visit. The notification will outline the purpose of the visit, what is to be reviewed, and who should attend the visit and the meeting during the monitoring visit.

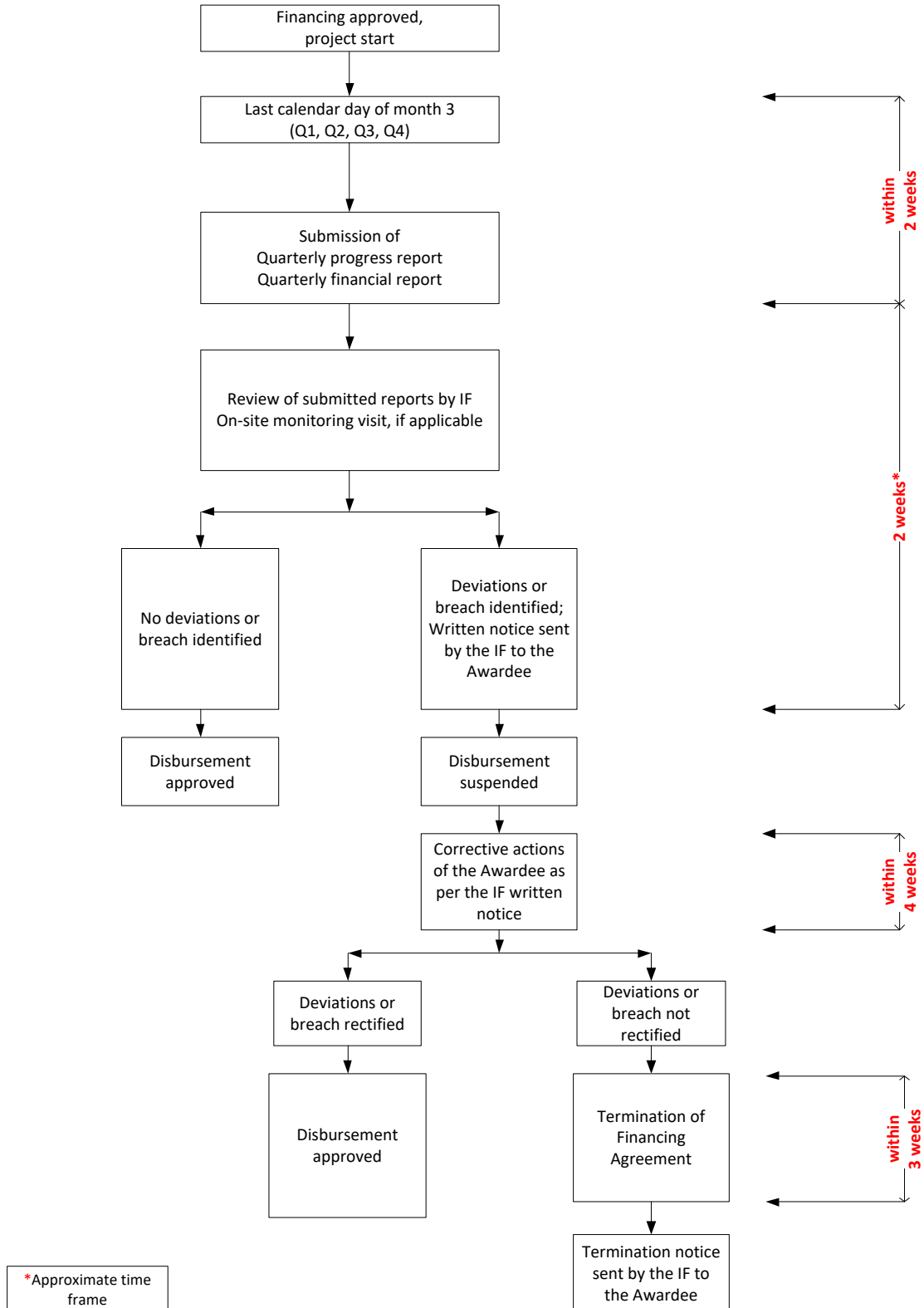
Monitoring visits will typically include a review of project implementation (e.g. procedures, milestones with measurable results, timelines, tasks, agreements, policies, and financial documentation) as well as in-person meetings with relevant project team members. At the end of each monitoring visit, the IF staff will discuss findings from the meeting with relevant project team members and clarify which corrective actions to pursue after the visit, if any. If the monitoring visit has identified any concerns, the Awardee will be required to correct these deficiencies within agreed timelines. Further payments depend on the severity of problem and it will be suspended until the deficiencies are corrected.

The representatives of institutions from which the IF receives financing for this Program may also take part in the IF's monitoring visit as observers, or perform a monitoring visit on their own.

For a comprehensive overview of the monitoring procedure, please see Figure 2.

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Figure 2: Monitoring procedure



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5.6. MASTER FILE

The Awardee needs to archive all project documentation in the master file for a period of at least 5 years following project completion. The project archive should include all relevant project implementation document (such as contracts, official approvals, proof of payment and etc.).

All the contract files, including the signed contract and all the relevant documentation (master file), will be made available to the IF and any entities named by the IF upon request.

5.7. VISIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

The Awardees must take all necessary steps to publicize the fact that the IF and the European Union has financed or co-financed the Awardee's project. As far as possible, projects that are wholly or partially funded by the European Union must incorporate information and communication activities designed to raise the awareness of specific or general audiences of the reasons for the project and the EU support for the project in the country or region concerned, as well as the results and the impact of this support.

5.8. INFORMATION REQUIREMENTS DURING AND AFTER PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Should financing be received, the Awardee will be asked to provide the IF with certain standardized information to help the IF monitor information pertaining to: employment figures, revenue generation, taxable income, employee salaries, financial management, environmental management, additional financing, and information regarding to the Awardee's operations and business affairs. Up to five years after the completion of the grant project, the Innovation Fund also reserves the right to request from its Awardees any corporate information deemed relevant to the IF's process of monitoring and evaluation of the MINI GRANTS Program. Awardees are obliged to make their best efforts to deliver the required information within one month following IF's request. The Innovation Fund will treat all received information in accordance with its Confidentiality Policy.

5.9. TERMINATION OF FINANCING

In case of termination of financing due to the breach of any terms of the MINI GRANTS Program or the Financing Agreement, the Awardee will be required to refund all or any part of the amount disbursed by the IF as determined by the IF under the Financing Agreement.

If the Awardee terminates the Financing Agreement or abandons the project, the Awardee shall be obliged to refund to the IF the entire amount disbursed to the Awardee.

If, upon the termination of the Financing Agreement for any reason, the entire disbursed amount has not been expended, the Awardee shall return to the IF the IF's pro rata share of such unexpended portion and if not repaid forthwith, such sum shall bear interest.

The Innovation Fund will undertake its best effort to maintain timely disbursement of project funds to the Awardee, taking into account the Innovation Fund's access to and availability of said funds.