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## *Regulation on the prevention of conflict of interest in the evaluation procedure*

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Board of the Croatian Science Foundation (further in the text: Foundation) hereby determines the main principles of identification, establishment and regulation of conflict of interest in the evaluation procedure. This regulation prescribes the steps for preventing to engage persons who might be in the conflict of interest during the project proposals evaluation procedure. The conflict of interest for the Foundation's bodies (members of Board and Executive Director) is regulated by the Act on the Croatian Science Foundation (OG 117/01, 45/09, 92/10 and 78/12).

The following terms are used in this Regulation:

**Project proposal applicant** – person who submits the project proposal to the call

**Project proposal** – proposal submitted to the call being evaluated

**Project leader** – leader of the project accepted for funding

**Project** – project proposal accepted for funding.

Prevention of the conflict of interest in the evaluation procedure is fundamental for the independent evaluation and equal treatment of all project proposals and projects. Personal interest or prejudices must not influence the result of the evaluation or the decision on funding.

Before the beginning of the evaluation, a coordinator of scientific projects and programmes will inform persons included in all levels of evaluation about Foundation's regulation on the prevention of conflict of interest in the evaluation procedure, and emphasize that they must inform an employee of the Foundation about the conflict of interest.

The conflict of interest can be identified at different phases of the evaluation procedure. All persons included in the evaluation of project proposals and funded projects need to notify the Foundation about the conflict of interest as soon as they find out about it. If there is doubt, all issues must be resolved at once to establish whether it is possible to carry out an independent evaluation. The conflict of interest will be documented and further involvement in the evaluation procedure will be decided upon in cooperation with the expert bodies.

### **Categories of the conflict of interest**

In defining the conflict of interest, and in the accordance with the recommendations of the *ESF Peer Review Guide*, the Foundation recognizes two main categories of relationship between the experts included in the evaluation and the project proposals applicants, i.e. the project leaders:

1. **Established conflict of interest**– person included on any level of evaluation will be excluded from the evaluation immediately after the conflict of interest has been identified.
2. **Potential conflict of interest**– if potential conflict of interest is identified for any point from 8 to 13 mentioned, the decision about the inclusion of the reviewer in the evaluation procedure will be taken individually for each specific case, depending on whether the reviewer declared that he/she can evaluate the project proposal, i.e. the project impartially.

### **Establishment of the conflict of interest**

Impartiality is one of the basic values of the evaluation procedure. The Foundation's work is based on integrity, truthfulness and impartiality of all persons included in all levels of evaluation, so that all persons that participate in the evaluation have to give statement on the existence or non-existence of the conflict of interest.

If the conflict of interest is identified before the beginning of the evaluation, it will be documented and appropriate steps will be taken to prevent partiality in the evaluation. If the conflict of interest is identified during the evaluation, it is necessary to stop the evaluation procedure, document the existing conflict of interest and suggest the solution for the existing situation.

The basis for the establishment of the conflict of interest is the Statement on confidentiality and prevention of conflict of interest.

### **Procedure in the case of established conflict of interest**

In the following cases the persons will be excluded immediately from the project proposals and/or financed projects evaluation procedure if he/she:

1. has submitted a project proposal to the same call as the applicant and research group members whose project proposal he/she is evaluating<sup>1</sup> or is in direct scientific competition when it comes to projects that deal with the same or a related topic;
2. has had joint publications or national or international projects in the last three years, planned cooperation or common interests, such as joint entrepreneurial activity, with the project leader;
3. is a direct relative, foster child, spouse or domestic or life partner to the project leader/applicant or to the research group members,
4. was in a PhD student - teacher or other relationship of interdependence with the project leader/applicant in the last two years;

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<sup>1</sup> Only for the evaluation of project proposals.

5. is participating in the management structures of the institution where the project leader/applicant is employed or where the project will be implemented (rectors, deans, directors of scientific institutes, etc.);
6. has personal economic interests in the research area of the project proposal/project that he/she is evaluating;
7. estimates that he/she cannot ensure the impartiality during the evaluation procedure for any other circumstance.

All persons involved in the evaluation procedure have to notify the Foundation's office responsible for the organization of evaluation in the case of conflict of interest described in points 1 to 7. If evaluation panel member is in direct conflict of interest, he/she will be excluded from the evaluation procedure of a specific project proposal and will have to leave the room during the discussion about this project proposal.

In case where a member of the evaluation panel is planning to submit project proposal for the Foundation call as a project leader or participate on the project as an associate or as a candidate for mentor on the call "Young researchers' career development project – training of new doctoral students", he/she will be excluded from the evaluation procedure on that specific call.

### **Procedure with the potential conflict of interest**

All persons involved in the evaluation have the obligation to notify Foundation's employee, who is organizing the evaluation, about the circumstances which can influence the impartiality of the evaluation. The decision on the participation in the evaluation process in this case is taken by the Foundation's office in cooperation with the expert bodies.

Potential conflict of interest arise in the following cases:

8. if the person involved in the evaluation is employed at the same organizational unit (chair, department, division, centre, clinic, clinical institution, etc.) as the project leader/applicant whose project proposal he/she is evaluating;
9. if the person involved in the evaluation has personal relationship or financial interests with the project leader/applicant and research group members that are not described in point 3 of this document;
10. if there is a possibility of future employment in the institution of the project leader/applicant, except in the case of function described in point 5 of this document;

11. if there are joint publications or national or international projects in the last three years, planned cooperation or common interests such as joint entrepreneurial activity;
12. if the person is participating in other national or international body which decided or will decide in the next 12 months on the career advancement or will evaluate another project proposal of the project leader/applicant;
13. if there is any other circumstance for which impartiality during the evaluation of the project proposal/project can be questionable.

If potential conflict of interest is confirmed according to the points 8- 13, the Foundation office and coordinator of the panel responsible for the evaluation or monitoring expert (in case of the evaluation of reports of funded projects) decide about the participation in the evaluation. In the case of conflict of interest of the coordinator of the responsible evaluation panel, the Foundation's office will assess the possibility to include another evaluation panel member in the evaluation procedure.

#### **Conflict of interest during decision making procedure**

When making a decision about financing a project and/or results of the evaluation of project implementation reports, the Board member in the conflict of interest will not participate in the debate about the project proposal/project he/she is in the conflict of interest with and the President of the Board can ask him/her to leave the room during the discussion about the project proposal/project. The Executive director has to warn the Board about his/hers potential conflict of interest, even though he does not have the possibility to make the decision.

The president of the Board or his Deputy is responsible for the prevention of the conflict of interest within the Board, and the conflict of interest will be documented in the Board's meeting minutes.

Prof. Dario Vretenar, PhD  
President of the Board

The Board of the Croatian Science Foundation has determined the text of the Regulation on the conflict of interest at 86 Meeting held 24 February 2017 (Decision number: O-739-2017).

## Statement on confidentiality and prevention of conflict of interest

### 1. Statement on confidentiality

Persons participating in the evaluation procedure conducted by the Croatian Science Foundation are obliged to strictly respect the confidentiality of all data given to them during and after the completion of the evaluation procedure.

Evaluators are not allowed to discuss projects with third parties, nor discuss them with other participants in the evaluation procedure. Communication with project leaders about the projects is not allowed. Each participant in the evaluation procedure is personally responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of information related to the projects in the evaluation process, as well as for the documentation related to project proposals contents and must not disclose any information about the projects.

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*By signing this statement, I declare that I will protect the confidentiality of all materials and information that will be provided to me for the purpose of project proposal evaluation and I will not copy, quote, or otherwise use the materials for any other purpose, nor will I discuss them with the persons which are not involved in the evaluation procedure.*

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I accept the conditions of confidentiality (please mark):  YES  NO

### 2. Prevention of conflict of interest

**Conflict of interest** implies exclusion of experts from any level of the evaluation process. A person will be immediately excluded from the evaluation procedure if he/she:

1. has submitted a project proposal to the same call as the applicant and research group members whose project proposal he/she is evaluating<sup>2</sup> or is in direct scientific competition when it comes to projects that deal with the same or a related topic;
2. has had joint publications or national or international projects in the last three years, planned cooperation or common interests, such as joint entrepreneurial activity, with the project leader;
3. is a direct relative, foster child, spouse or domestic or life partner to the project leader/applicant or to research group members,
4. was in a PhD student - teacher or other relationship of interdependence with the project leader/applicant in the last two years;

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<sup>2</sup> Only for the evaluation of project proposals.

5. is participating in the management structures of the institution where the project leader/applicant is employed or where the project will be implemented (rectors, deans, directors of scientific institutes, etc.);
6. has personal economic interests in the research area of the project proposal/project he/she is evaluating;
7. estimates that he/she cannot ensure the impartiality during the evaluation procedure for any other circumstance.

All persons involved in the evaluation procedure must in cases of the conflict of interest in situations described in points from 1-7 report the conflict of interest to the Office of the Foundation, which organizes the evaluation.

**Potential conflict of interest** of persons involved in the evaluation will depend on the assessment of the Foundation, but it is the duty of all persons involved in the evaluation procedure to report to employees of the Office of the Foundation that organizes the evaluation procedure about circumstances that could affect the objectivity of the evaluation.

Potential conflict of interest appears:

8. if the person involved in the evaluation is employed at the same organizational unit (chair department, division, centre, clinic, clinical institution, etc.) as the project leader/applicant whose project proposal he/she is evaluating;
9. if the person involved in the evaluation has personal relationships or financial interests with the project leader/applicant and research group members that are not described in point 3 of this document;
10. if there is a possibility of future employment in the institution of the project leader/applicant, except in the case of function described in point 5 of this document;
11. if there are joint publications or national or international projects in the last three years, planned cooperation or common interests such as joint entrepreneurial activity;
12. if the person is participating in other national or international body which decided or will decide in the next 12 months on the career advancement or will evaluate another project proposal of the project leader/applicant;
13. if there is any other circumstance for which impartiality during the evaluation of the project proposal/project can be questionable.

*If a potential conflict of interest is confirmed according to points 8-13, Foundation's office and the evaluation expert in charge of overseeing the evaluation procedure shall decide about the participation in the evaluation.*

**I hereby declare that my participation in the evaluation of the following projects is a conflict of interest:**

Name or proposal code:	Please state the case of the conflict of interest (1-7)

**I hereby declare that my participation in the evaluation of the following projects is a potential conflict of interest:**

Name or code of the project:	Please state the case of the conflict of interest (8-13)

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*By signing this statement, I declare that I read and understood the rules in this document which describe conflict of interest and potential conflict of interest in the evaluation procedure, and which are in line with the Regulation on the conflict of interest in the evaluation procedure. If I discover conflict of interest during the evaluation procedure in which I will participate, I declare that I shall inform the Foundation immediately.*

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Signature:
Date: