

Serbia Accelerating Innovation and Growth Entrepreneurship (SAIGE) Project

RDI Reforms Component: Seed Research Grant Program II – Seed2

About the Call

Objective

The purpose of the **SEED RESEARCH GRANT Program II (Seed2)** is:

- (1) to boost research activities in RDIs with less developed research components;
- (2) to create interest in and experience with research project management among young, less experienced researchers and students at the RDI; and
- (3) to help build a robust pipeline of research projects with the potential for significant added value to the RDIs.

Program Design

The Program is available to all RDIs participating in the SAIGE Project with the maximum of €25,000 SAIGE Project funds per RDI to be approved. The Program will offer up to €8,000 per qualified project involving an individual or a group of researchers / students. Each project is expected to be co-financed by the RDI with 50% of the total project cost (other 50% of the cost will be covered by SAIGE funding). Duration of the project is up to 4 months (6 months in exceptional and duly justified cases).

This is a competitive program initiated through an Institute-wide Call targeting Principal Investigators (PIs) who are young researchers or PhD students contractually engaged by the RDI. At least 50% of the selected PIs will be first-time beneficiaries of the SAIGE Seed Research Grant Program, and such applicants will be given priority during the selection process. PI(s) should submit a project proposal (using the template provided in the Annex 1) outlining their plans to engage in specific research activities including research training (e.g., project management, proposal writing). An internal RDI Selection Committee will conduct the evaluation and selection process.

1.1. Roles and Responsibilities of Institutional Support Offices

The success of this program mechanism relies on the active involvement of RDI management, Project Management Offices (PMOs) and Knowledge and Technology Transfer Offices (KTTOs). PMOs play a critical role in ensuring the quality and feasibility of **Seed Research Grant** applications by providing structured proposal development support, including the design of a coherent work plan, the definition of

milestones and deliverables, the preparation of a realistic timeline and resource plan, and the outlining of an appropriate project management and governance structure. PMOs should also support risk identification and mitigation planning, budgeting and cost justification, compliance with call requirements, and the set-up of reporting and monitoring arrangements to ensure smooth implementation. The PMO should also ensure alignment with institutional priorities and active engagement of SAIGE RDI management in approved Seed Research Grant projects. In parallel, a strong commitment from PMOs is essential, particularly in identifying and articulating the specific research and development phases. All official communication with the SAIGE Project Implementation Unit (PIU) will be conducted exclusively through the designated PMO.

1.2. Rules and Procedures of the Call

The program mechanism builds on the established approaches, rules, and procedures for projects, defined in the RDI Transformation Operations Manual Version 3.2, with specific conditions and requirements listed below.

1.3. Who can apply?

SAIGE RDIs are invited to undertake an institution-wide call to young researchers / PhD students within the organization (where “young” is defined as researchers within 6 years of starting their professional careers and students, both no older than 35 years of age, while students need to be actively working in the Institute). Opening of the call and evaluation process is expected to be conducted within a 5-week timeframe. Upon completion of the selection process, the RDI PMO shall submit a comprehensive Evaluation Report to the SAIGE PIU.

1.4. Eligibility criteria and eligible costs

To be eligible for support under the Seed Research Grant Program, the following conditions and factors will be considered:

- PI is a young researcher or student as defined above,
- All starting/ending TRL levels are eligible,
- A mentor, designated by the RDI, may be assigned to each selected project to provide guidance, and/or oversight of the research activities.

Eligible costs and activities include the following:

- Research-related costs (materials, consumables, external expert service/advice).
- Purchase of small equipment needed to support proposed research activities. This component should not represent more than 50% of the project cost.
- Training costs related to the execution of the selected project (excluding any travel costs).
- Travel and stay costs up to €1,000 exclusively related to the project.

Non-eligible costs

- Any staff-related costs, including salaries, bonuses, or top-up payments.
- Equipment, if there is a possibility to contract/rent as a service from the market or RDI laboratories.
- Any conferences, unrelated travel for dissemination, or unrelated promotional activities.
- Contingency or reserve costs that are not directly tied to specific project outcomes.

Funds for the approved projects will be disbursed by the PIU to RDIs after the final approval of project proposals.

IMPORTANT: Compliance with the public procurement procedures of the Republic of Serbia is mandatory for all applicable expenses funded by SAIGE.

2. Application Process

Proposals should be prepared following the template (see **Annex 1**). Project teams are invited to engage early and continuously with their PMOs and/or KTTOs, and from there, where relevant, with PIU experts, to help identify high-potential research ideas. This consultative process can support both the quality of proposals and the capacity development.

3. Evaluation Process and Financing Decision

3.1. Administrative and eligibility check

All proposals are reviewed internally by SAIGE RDI launching the Call regarding eligibility, e.g., technical issues and completeness of the proposal, within 7 days after the submission deadline.

3.2. Selection process

Selection Process

The internal RDI Selection Committee will evaluate proposals on a competitive basis and select the highest quality proposals within 2 weeks of the Call closing date. The Selection Committee will include the RDI Director, the Head of the Science Council, and the Head of the PMO (or Head of KTTO, or Head of related Unit, if Head of PMO is not available). The PIU Manager as well as one other person from PIU/National Institutional Consultant (NIC) will be observers on the Selection Committee to ensure compliance with the Program design and requirements. As noted above, following the selection process the PMO will submit Evaluation Report to the SAIGE PIU to proceed with the formal approval procedure. The Evaluation Report should include the individual scoring for every proposal submitted, the final results and ranking and justifications for each project proposal recommended for funding and the amount of cofinancing by the RDI. The Report will be signed by all Selection Committee members including the observers.

Selection Criteria

Selection criteria to be used by the Selection Committee include:

- Research activity with the potential for delivering value to both the researcher/student and to RDI (the research activity could lead, for example, to the development of new early-stage products or services that would be suitable for IP protection/PoC funding).
- Research-related training activity that will substantially improve the research capabilities of the researcher/student.
- Researcher/student with strong potential for future growth and development.
- Project duration of no more than 4 months (in exceptional cases up to 6 months).
- Financial budget – realistic costs based on diligent market research.

3.3. Budget review

Following the Selection Report submitted to the SAIGE PIU together with top-ranked proposals, a budget review phase will be initiated by the SAIGE PIU within 7 days. This step may involve a discussion among PIU team with PMOs/KTTOs and where relevant with PIs, aimed at justifying the proposed costs, thereby ensuring alignment with program objectives and effective use of the resources. The outcomes from these reviews will be used by the SAIGE PIU / Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation (NITRA) to make the final financing decisions, subject to approval by the World Bank. The commencement date of the Seed Research Grant projects shall be deemed to be the date on which the PIU formally notifies RDI PMO of the approvals issued by both NITRA and the World Bank.

4. Procedures During Project Implementation

4.1. Financing rules

RDI PMO is expected to inform the SAIGE PIU of the initiation of public procurement within two weeks of the proposal's approval and report on the completion of the procurement process within two months.

4.2. Online update meetings

Two online review meetings will be held during project implementation: a mid-term review two months after the project start and a final review by the completion of the project. These meetings will involve the project team, PMO, KTTO, and PIU. The PIU team is available should issues addressed arise between the update meetings.

4.3. Reporting

A final report on the implemented Seed Research Grants initiative should be prepared by the Principal Investigator and submitted to the RDI's PMO for review and approval. Internally approved report will be submitted to the SAIGE PIU by the PMO no later than one month upon project completion. Report template will be provided by the SAIGE PIU.

Annex 1: Seed Research Grant II Proposal Template

SEED RESEARCH GRANT II Project Proposal

Delivery date: xx.xx.xxxx

Proposed SAIGE funding period: from xx.xx.xxxx to zz.zz.zzzz

RDI acronym and name:	
Project name:	
Total project budget (in EUR):	
Requested SAIGE budget (in EUR, up to 50% of the total project budget):	
RDI co-financing (in EUR, at least 50% of the total project budget):	
Project duration (in months):	
Principal investigator (PI):	
Proposed mentor (if any):	
PMO contact name:	
Email and Mobile phone of PMO:	

1. The overview of the research goal and specific research activities – summary of planned topic of the research and subsequent training activities (200 words max).
2. Contribution to research experience – describe how will proposed research and training activities contribute to research experience and research capabilities of the project team (200 words max).
3. Contribution to PI's research project management related skills – describe how will proposed activities contribute to development of PI's skills needed for involvement in future research projects (e.g., project management, proposal writing, etc.) (200 words max).

4. Expected value delivered to both the researcher(s)/student(s) and to RDI – explain the expected outcomes for both RDI and PI/project team (200 words max).

5. Project planning - include in the table below key project milestones, timeline, planned activities and associated risks.

Project Milestones	Timeline	Planned activities	Related risks

6. Project team members (if any) – explain and justify the role and contributions of researchers/students participating in activities (200 words max).

7. Mentor (if any) – justify the references of proposed mentor and explain in which way the proposed mentor will contribute to proposed activities and their outcomes (200 words max).

8. Future plans – describe plans for future actions after completion of proposed activities (200 words max).

9. Budget breakdown

Category	Total costs	SAIGE costs	RDI costs	Costs Justification
Research-related costs (materials, consumables, external expert service/advice)				

Small equipment				
Training costs				
Travel and stay costs				
TOTAL COSTS including allocation from SAIGE & RDI in EUR and %				

PI:

Signature

Annex 2: Evaluation Criteria

Eligibility questions

- to be checked by the RDI

Seed Research Grant	Yes	No
Is a PI a young researcher within 6 years of starting their professional careers and students, and no older than 35 years of age, contractually engaged by the RDI.		
Has the proposal structure been verified by the PMO and/or KTTO?		

Quality of the proposed action

- to be rated by the RDI Selection Committee

The quality of the proposals is rated against defined evaluation criteria as:

- low (1 point)
- medium (3 points)
- high (5 points).

Criteria	Points (1 - 3 - 5)
1. Strategic Value to the Researcher: Extent to which the project contributes to the PI's career development, including opportunities for networking, skill enhancement, and achievement of key professional milestones.	
2. Institutional Value to the RDI: Degree of alignment with institutional priorities and the potential to strengthen a defined research line or innovation area within the organization.	
3. Capacity Building: Relevance and quality of proposed training activities particularly in enhancing project management skills, technical skills, methodologies, or specialized research competencies.	
4. Future Growth Potential: Evidence of the young researcher's maturity, initiative, and likelihood to develop into a future leader (of research group or in their respective research field).	
5. Feasibility & Timeline: Appropriateness of the project scope within a 4-month timeframe (or exceptional 6-month) including the presence of clear and realistic research and development milestones.	
6. Proposal & Budget Quality: Overall clarity and coherence of the proposal, including a well-structured project plan and a realistic, justified budget.	
Overall quality (points)	