Experientia Foundation Starting Grant: Rules and Regulations

Article I
Introductory provisions

1. In line with its long-term goal of supporting Czech science, the Experientia Foundation (hereinafter "the Foundation") is publishing a competition for award of the Foundation's three-year Starting Grant ("the Starting Grant"). The aim of the competition is to support young aspiring scientists, particularly in setting up new independent research groups and laboratories at academic and research institutions in the Czech Republic. The Starting Grant is designed as seed funding intended for newly emerging teams. As a rule, such a team shall be considered a research group that was officially established no more than 12 months prior to the deadline for submitting project proposals in the given year, or a research group for which the Starting Grant would represent its first financial support. The competition is not intended to provide additional or follow-on funding for already established research groups. This is not a public tender as defined by Section 1772 et seq. of Act No. 89/2012 Coll., the Civil Code, as amended.

2. The Starting Grant is offered with a view to enhancing the dynamism of scientific research, including the mobility of researchers. The aim of the Starting Grant is to enable the most promising young researchers to establish their own research groups and develop their own independent research projects addressing new concepts and challenging topics that significantly push the boundaries of current knowledge.

Article II
Terms and conditions of the competition

1. The Experientia Foundation Starting Grant application (hereinafter referred to as the "project proposal") must be submitted electronically, including all the mandatory attachments listed below (all in pdf format) to the Foundation's email address (experientia@experientia.cz) no later than 15 February of the relevant calendar year.

2. Each applicant may submit only one project proposal to the Foundation in any given year.

3. The topic of the project proposal is confined to the development and support of research in the scientific fields of organic chemistry, bio-organic chemistry, medicinal chemistry and related disciplines. The project topic must be independent of and clearly differentiated from the research topics that the applicant covered and investigated as part of their PhD studies and postdoctoral fellowship(s), and its subject matter should not overlap with ongoing projects conducted at the host institution's site.

4. The Principal Investigator of the proposed research project is expected to apply for an ERC Starting Grant to the European Research Council during the Starting Grant period, if it was not applied for before the start of the Starting Grant. This does not preclude the Principal Investigator from applying for other grants in addition. Other research projects for which the applicant submits grant applications while working on the research project covered by the Starting Grant may overlap in terms of subject matter.

5. The research team should comprise the following members in particular:

   a) the Principal Investigator (who submits the project proposal) – a scientist with no more than 7 years of experience following the award of the academic title of doctor (abbreviation PhD) or its equivalent (i.e. the academic degree was obtained no more than 7 years before the project proposal submission deadline), who has international experience and has shown excellent results in their field. The 7-year period may be extended to make allowance for a documented long-term illness and by 18 months for care for each newborn child, which should be evidenced by producing the child's birth certificate. It is assumed that the Principal Investigator has completed a postdoctoral research stay abroad of at least 12 months in duration. Written confirmation (documentation) of the applicant's international research stay is an essential requirement for the award of the Starting Grant. It is not a requirement that the Principal Investigator be an employee of the host institution at the time of submission of their project proposal. The Principal Investigator, however, has to have become an employee of the host institution at the latest by the project start date.

   b) postdoctoral fellows;

   c) PhD students;

   d) master's students;

   e) bachelor's students;

   f) technical and professional staff.

6. The Principal Investigator may replace members of the research team during the course of the project. The size of the team is not limited, but it must be commensurate with the budget and the capacity of the host institution.

7. The start date of the research project will be 1 January of the calendar year following the submission of the project proposal, and the end date will be 31 December of the third consecutive calendar year of the project.

Article III
Breakdown of the funding

1. Pursuant to the contract of employment between the Principal Investigator and the host institution, funding in the sum of CZK 2,200,000 per year will be disbursed from the Foundation's

resources to cover the project. The host institution agrees to support the project through the sum of CZK 800,000 per year (to contribute towards the salaries of the members of the research team, including mandatory social and health insurance contributions and other social fund contributions, and overhead costs. This contribution cannot be used to fund investments). Both of the above payments will be payable on 1 January of the year following the award of the Starting Grant and thereafter on 15 February of the relevant calendar year. The funding will be transferred to an independent analytical account held by the host institution from which all the expenditure associated with the project and allocated to the Principal Investigator shall be disbursed. The total funds allocated to the project are divided as follows:

a) personnel costs and stipends up to the maximum amount of CZK 2,400,000 per year, including mandatory contributions (the salary of the project's Principal Investigator will be set at a minimum of CZK 60,000 per month unless the host institution has agreed a higher salary for the post), social and health insurance contributions calculated in compliance with the applicable laws and regulations, and social fund contributions at the rates determined by the host institution;

b) other expenditure, including operating costs and costs for the acquisition of small tangible and intangible assets (up to CZK 80,000) and software (up to CZK 80,000), travel expenses, and other services.

2. The Foundation's Starting Grant cannot be used to cover any indirect costs.

3. Any unused funding awarded by the Foundation may be carried over to the following year of the Starting Grant period. All of the funding awarded by the Foundation must be used by the end of the third year of the Starting Grant period.

Article IV
Project proposal

1. The research project proposal must be submitted in English and must include the following:

a) title of the research project;

b) brief synopsis of the project (max. 1,000 characters);

c) description of the research project (max. 5 pages/14,400 characters including spaces; font: Calibri, size 11; free layout of figures, which are not included in the character limit; a list of relevant citations must be provided separately as an appendix, which is not included in the character limit) incorporating the following:

- objectives to be achieved,
- level of current knowledge,
- analysis of the method proposed to achieve the project objectives,

- details of how the project is expected to push the boundaries of knowledge and what risks are involved,
- details of the site/institution where the project is to be conducted;

d) information about the Principal Investigator:

- personal information (first name, surname, date of birth, site/institution address including telephone and email),
- structured CV including information about Master's and PhD thesis (title of the thesis, name of the supervisor, affiliation, brief summary of the content, in the length of 3 sentences),
- a complete list of publications, or other outputs of the PI's scientific track record,
- information about the PI's research stay(s) abroad,
- information about the PI's experience in the discipline;

e) information on the members of the research team: personal information (first name, surname, date of birth) and a description of the post that the members are expected to occupy on the research team as defined by Article II (5) (b) -f), as well as a description of the main posts still to be filled if there are no specific candidates at the time of submitting the application;

f) two letters of recommendation testifying to the academic profile of the Principal Investigator, preferably from two different institutions and, if possible, from different countries. These letters of recommendation should be sent directly by the referee to the email address experientia@experientia.cz no later than the project submission deadline in the relevant calendar year. The Board of Trustees, represented by the Director, will confirm receipt without undue delay via an email communication sent to the email addresses of the applicant and the referees;

g) an approximate overview of the estimated financial costs for the entire period of the research project, calculated using the interactive form available on the Foundation's website, www.experientia.cz;

h) letter from a statutory representative of the host institution confirming the following:

- the status of the Principal Investigator's independent research group (within the organisational structure of the institution),
- commitment to co-fund the Starting Grant in the amount of CZK 800,000 per year (in compliance with Article III paragraph 1),

- consent to make available laboratory premises commensurate with the size of the research team, including the required equipment, and to enable access to the research site's equipment and other essential premises, in the event that the Starting Grant is awarded.

Article V
Evaluation of project proposals

1. Project proposals will be evaluated by independent internationally recognized reviewers, who will provide a written expert opinion, as well as by the Grant Committee.

2. The Board of Trustees will discuss each project proposal individually, taking into account the expert opinions received and the recommendations of the Grant Committee. The Board of Trustees reserves the right to request additional documentation required for appropriate appraisal of the eligibility of the Starting Grant application.

3. The selected candidates will present their projects at a joint meeting of the Grant Committee and the Board of Trustees. Meetings with the members of these bodies are usually held at the end of May in a hybrid format (in-person and online).

4. On discussing and evaluating all project proposals, the Board will issue a decision on award (or non-award) of the Starting Grant. This decision of the Foundation's Board cannot be appealed.

5. Each project proposal will be assessed for its overall excellence and scientific relevance/excellence, as well as on the following aspects:

   a) clearly defined research intent of the project;

   b) proposed research methods;

   c) overall ambitiousness and boldness of the project and its high-risk/high-gain character;

   d) the autonomy and independence of the applicant, which will be assessed on the basis of the applicant's prior scientific publications in which they were named as lead author;

   e) originality and independence of the project, i.e. whether the submitted project is sufficiently innovative and different from previous projects (especially from the project completed as part of the applicant's PhD studies or postdoctoral work);

   f) prior scientific track record of the applicant;

   g) proportionateness of the estimated financial costs to the nature and objectives of the project and the amount of funding available.

6. The Board of Trustees of the Foundation selects the successful applicants at its own discretion, taking into account the recommendations of the expert peer reviewers as well as the recommendations of the Grant Committee.

7. Unless the Board of Trustees decides otherwise, the Foundation awards one Starting Grant in each calendar year. There is no legal entitlement to the award of the Starting Grant.

8. The Foundation's Director will notify all applicants as well as the host institution of the Board's decision electronically no later than 30 June of the calendar year in which the project proposal was submitted.

9. The Foundation will not return any documentation submitted as part of the Starting Grant application.

Article VI
Project grant agreement, billing, interim report, final report, and publication of results

1. Details of the project and the allocation and management of funds shall be regulated by the Agreement Governing Rights and Responsibilities that is drawn up between the parties following the award of the Foundation's Starting Grant (hereinafter referred to as the "Agreement"). This Agreement shall be entered into by the host institution, the Principal Investigator and the Foundation. In the event that the Principal Investigator or the host institution does not reach an agreement by 15 December of the calendar year in which the Foundation's Starting Grant was awarded, the entitlement to the funding stipulated in the Agreement shall be void.

2. The Principal Investigator will be responsible for appropriate withdrawals and effective use of the allocated funds as well as for compliance with the terms and conditions of the Starting Grant.

3. The Foundation reserves the right to visit the Principal Investigator's research site during the course of the Starting Grant period in order to discuss questions concerning the project.

4. The Agreement further imposes upon the Principal Investigator and the host institution the following commitments:

    a) to treat intellectual property and any property rights relating to the results of research and development in compliance with the applicable legal regulations;

    b) to submit, upon request and without undue delay, to the Foundation's Board and to the bodies of the host institution, documentation detailing the use of the funds, or;

    c) to return to the Foundation any funds awarded if such funding cannot be used or carried over to the next year of the grant period. The funds must be returned by the set deadline, in any event no later than three months after the end date of the accounting period or the end date of the Foundation's Starting Grant period.

5. If serious circumstances arise for the Principal Investigator, the funding of the project may be suspended for the required period of time. The length of such suspension of funding and the terms of resumption of the project must be agreed in a written agreement between the

Foundation, the host institution and the project's Principal Investigator. In the event of change of the research site or if the Principal Investigator joins another host institution, the Principal Investigator will be obliged to ensure that the new host institution agrees to accept all obligations arising from the transfer. The Foundation must be informed in writing, without undue delay and in reasonable advance of the extent, nature and particulars of the change in the project site.

6. The Foundation's Board of Trustees reserves the right, in especially serious cases of violation of the rules governing the award of the Starting Grant, to resolve to discontinue the Starting Grant with immediate effect and to demand the return of any unused funds granted by the Foundation. Especially serious violation of the rules include, in particular, the provision of false, grossly distorted or misleading information in the written reports submitted or in the overview of expenditure; the use of allocated funds for purposes unconnected with the conduct of the project; the falsification of documents recording the expenditure of allocated funds; research activities flagrantly in conflict with the project proposal; and persistent non-compliance with requirements for safe research set by the host institution at the research site or a serious breach thereof.

7. The Principal Investigator shall submit an annual report, no later than January 15 each year, on the progress of the research project and an overview of the funds used, clearly identifying funds granted by the Foundation and those provided by the host institution. The overview must also incorporate an outline of the budget for the next calendar year. The annual report should be 6–8 pages in length (including figures) and should contain information on the progress of the project in the relevant calendar year, as well as a summary of the results achieved. In the event of divergence from the original project plan, the report should also include a brief rationale for such divergence. The scientific section should also contain information on the research team, the laboratory equipment and laboratory infrastructure used by the research group at the host institution, and information on the teaching commitments of the Principal Investigator. The report should provide a summary of planned and already published papers, patents, planned or already submitted grants, and other scientific activities, e.g. participation in conferences. It should also contain information on the planned development of the project for the remaining duration of the Starting Grant. The annual report will be evaluated by the Board of the Foundation. If the Board issues a favourable opinion on the project's progress, the funding for the next calendar year (up to the total duration of the project) will be approved no later than one month from the receipt of the annual report.

8. In the event that the Foundation's Board of Trustees, having reviewed the overview of the funds spent, concludes that these funds or their part have been used for purposes other than those set out this Rules and Regulations document or the valid Agreement, and should the Principal Investigator fail to document the appropriate use of the funding after being requested to do so in writing, the Board of Trustees of the Foundation reserves the right to withdraw its financial support in the amount specified, in which case the Principal Investigator will be obliged to return these unapproved funds within 15 calendar days from the date of service of the written decision of the Foundation on the withdrawal of funding.

9. The host institution shall continuously monitor the utilisation of the funds.

10. The final report must be submitted within three months of the end date of the project. The final report, which should be 6–8 pages in length (including figures), should contain complete information on the project's progress in the relevant calendar year, as well as a summary of the results achieved over the entire duration of the project. In the event of divergence from the original project plan, the report should also include a brief rationale for such divergence. The scientific section should also contain information on the research team, the laboratory equipment and laboratory infrastructure used by the research group at the host institution, and information on the teaching commitments of the Principal Investigator. The report should summarize information about planned and already published papers, patents, planned or already submitted grants, and other scientific activities, e.g. participation in conferences. It should also include an evaluation of the research group's activities and information about its future direction, e.g. the potential for the group's expansion, further funding, future collaborations, and the planned progress of the project after the grant period has ended.

11. In addition, the Principal Investigator agrees to deliver a lecture at a conference entitled Advances in Organic, Bioorganic and Pharmaceutical Chemistry - "Liblice" (Pokroky v organické, bioorganické a farmaceutické chemii – "Liblice") under the conditions set out by the Foundation. This lecture is to be delivered in the final year of the grant period.

12. The Principal Investigator agrees to acknowledge the Foundation's sponsorship in all publications and other outputs produced through the support Foundation's Starting Grant using the following wording: "The recipient acknowledges the Experientia Foundation (Starting Grant Number 202x/002/xxx) for funding."

Article VII
Final provisions

1. Reasons for excluding the Start Grant Application from the competition:

   a) the applicant does not meet the requirements set out in Article II;

   b) the application does not contain all the particulars set out in Article IV;

   c) the applicant is a member of any of the Foundation's bodies or its employee or is related to such persons;

   d) the applicant has already received the Foundation's Starting Grant in the past.

2. The competition is coordinated according to the above principles and is administratively managed by the Director of the Foundation.

3. The Foundation will have the right to audit the use of the allocated funds relating to the project for a period of 10 years from the end date of the project, including audits performed at the research site of the host institution.

4. These Starting Grant Rules and Regulations are also governed by the Statutes of the Foundation document.