

Georgia I2Q - Innovation, Inclusion and
Quality

Competitive Innovation Fund (CIF)
Operational Manual

Acronyms

AC	Awards Committee
AU	Administration Unit
CIF	Competitive Innovation Fund
CoI	Conflict of interest
GITA	Georgia's Innovation and Technology Agency
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
I2Q	Georgia Innovation, Inclusion and Quality Project
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
MA	Mandate Agreement
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MES	Ministry of Education and Science
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NCEQE	National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSF	Shota Rustaveli National Scientific Foundation of Georgia
OM	Operational Manual
SDPs	Strategic Development Plans
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
ToC	Table of Contents
ToR	Terms of Reference

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1. Introduction and background to the Competitive Innovation Fund and the Operational Manual

1.1 Background

In June 2019, the Government of Georgia signed a Loan Agreement for financing the implementation of the **Innovation, Inclusion and Quality Project (I2Q)** with the International Bank of Reconstruction and Development (IBRD). The Project Development Objectives are to: (i) expand access to preschool education; and (ii) improve the quality of education and the learning environments.

The project includes five key components. Under **Component 3 – Strengthening Financing Options and Promoting Internationalization in Higher Education** - the project will support the establishment of a **Competitive Innovation Fund (CIF)** in collaboration with the private sector. CIF is aimed at public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and the consortia projects encouraging cooperation in joint projects uniting the public and private HEIs targeting specific development and innovation issues.

The main regulatory framework governing the CIF is the present Operational Manual (OM). The OM defines the organizational structure of CIF, main principles and objectives, implementation mechanisms, functions, and procedures. To ensure that the CIF is consistent with the national development plans, public policies, and their implementation and to facilitate the development of the design of the grants this document has been approved by the IBRD and formally approved by the Minister. This ensures that the CIF is consistent with the national development plans, public policies, and their implementation.

1.2 Aims and objectives of the CIF

The strategic objective of the CIF is to ***'foster modernization of higher education programs and learning environment and strengthen the labour market linkages'***. This objective is fully aligned with the strategic framework for social-economic and higher education (HE) in Georgia including the Social-economic Development Strategy of Georgia (**Georgia 2020**), the **Unified Strategy of Education and Science 2017-2021** and the ongoing **Bologna Process**.

Strategically, the CIF is conceived as a tool that enables university units to link their strategic planning with actual prospects for strategic implementation of these plans. This is achieved by ensuring that funding applications are based upon and justified by a university's initial diagnosis of its principal strengths and weaknesses in the context of environmental opportunities and risks. By taking this approach, the CIF will accelerate processes of constructive change and institutional modernization by promoting both cooperation and competition among participating departments, faculties and HEIs.

Specifically, the CIF is envisaged as a dedicated instrument to help HEIs to realise their Strategic Development Plans (SDPs) in line with the strategic direction and priorities of Georgia and the Ministry of Education and Science (MES).

Under the overall management of the MES, CIF will provide support to (public HEIs, as well as private HEIs as members of consortia projects) HEIs who have the ambition and determination to implement changes that will provide measurable benefits to students, academic and administrative staff, researchers, future employers, and other stakeholders. It will enable HEIs to modernise their programs in line with international standards and strengthen the linkages of the programs with labour market needs, upgrade educational programs including teaching and assessment methods, support professional development of academic staff, build stronger linkages with other HEIs both in Georgia and abroad, mainstream innovative and good practice into the teaching and research environment as they fit to the national culture and environment, and compete in the international research area. The impact of the CIF should enable positive developments in future authorisation and accreditation reports issued by the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (NCEQE) as well as in metrics for Georgia and individuals HEI positions in international teaching and scientific rankings and national statistics for employment. In the long term (10 years) the impact of the CIF should translate

into tangible results as part of the innovation agenda alongside contributions from the Shota Rustaveli National Scientific Foundation of Georgia (NSF) and Georgia's Innovation and Technology Agency (GITA).

The CIF funding pool can be accessed by groups within the university community to carry out new initiatives and innovative approaches to address the existing problems in teaching, learning, integrating research into teaching and learning using technology and modern pedagogical approaches, and supporting the development of university management system.

More specifically, the funding windows (calls for proposals) are:

- (i) for the public HEIs targeting specific development and innovation issues identified in their SDPs. In this case, a single public HEI is the main beneficent of the project, and
- (ii) for public HEI led consortia projects. Consortia projects involve two or more eligible HEIs (in that at least one public HEI) who are the main beneficiaries of the project.

Proposals under both funding windows must demonstrate partnership arrangements.

Partnerships may involve the national and/or international private sector representatives, national and/or international education or research organizations, as well as non-governmental organization(s). However, users and beneficiaries of the CIF grants must be Georgian institutions, i.e. Georgian legal entities.

The design of the CIF grants scheme respects university autonomy while encouraging institutions to think holistically about their planning and development. The types of CIF funded projects that are envisaged to be supported include improvement and upgrade of programs to strengthen linkages to the labour market. This may include but is not limited to:

- developing program content (i.e. revision of existing programs or development of new programs) to reflect the latest trends in the field,
- introducing innovations in terms of teaching and learning including support for classroom teaching utilizing technology and modern pedagogical approaches, such as problem-solving and project-based learning, and improvement of e-learning methods,
- modernizing educational programs with private sector participation, e.g.:
 - supporting innovative research by faculty members involving students and private sector;
 - upgrading processes and enhancing the quality of the labour market surveys and/or graduate tracer studies to improve relevance of academic programs and employment tracking;
 - enhancing the quality of laboratories and workshops with modern scientific instruments and equipment to improve student learning;
 - conducting joint university-industry development of innovative research designs;
 - facilitating private sector representative's participation in academic research projects (e.g., by receiving access to sophisticated analytical and other experimental facilities);
 - facilitating the expansion of networks and outreach events, that connect current students and graduates that are already employed in the sector, as well as familiarize students with various employment opportunities in relevant private companies, organizing networking events, seminars with private sector representatives, and boot-camps;
- engaging relevant employers with curriculum development to reinforce the linkages with the labour market,
- modernizing and upgrading labs and physical infrastructure to meet the program objectives,
- improvement of gender imbalances in the education system, especially in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) subjects including supporting HEIs to attract female students to STEM programs and help narrow the gender gap in STEM fields.

2. Implementation plan and principles for implementation of CIF funded grant projects

2.1 Overall implementation plan

The CIF is a competitive grant instrument. It will award up to 40 CIF grants over a 3-year period from 01.2022-12.2024. The maximum grant amount for the single applicant would be 110 000 USD¹ per project and the maximum grant amount for consortia projects would be 200 000 USD² per project. Implementation will be coordinated by the MES.

The CIF will be implemented in two phases – a pilot in the first year (2022) for around 10 grants awarded competitively followed by the main call for up to 30 projects in the year 2023.

Future Calls are dependent on securing further funding.

The CIF is initially envisaged as enabling multiple grants per HEI but structured so that each grant should have a clear and limited set of linked strategic objectives, clearly visible in the SDPs of all HEIs and consortium composition that clearly enables it to access necessary skills and critical mass to achieve its objectives.

The overall number of grants that any one HEI can secure in a single year may be limited to ensure both that there is good competition for funding and that there is sufficient internal resource to ensure proper and timely implementation. The maximum number of grants per theme per funding cycle will be set by MES. Themes will reflect the priorities of the MES for education and science and the I2Q project.

2.2 Principals for implementation

This section addresses how the specific aims of the CIF will be realised in practice and the principals applied to the design of CIF Grants.

2.2.1 Purpose of the grants

The aims of the CIF are to *'foster modernization of higher education programs and learning environment and strengthen the labour market linkages'*. The associated purpose of the CIF grants is to help HEIs to implement their SDPs in line with the strategic direction and priorities of Georgia and the MES. Grants should therefore focus on funding proposals that enable improvement and upgrade of programs. The types of grant that may be supported have been outlined in Section 3 below. However, this is designed to offer examples and not to be an exhaustive list.

2.2.2 Principals of design

CIF grants will follow four main principals of design:

a) Respect for university autonomy while encouraging institutions to think holistically about their planning and development.

HEIs will be encouraged to take a clear approach to utilising the CIF as a key strategic planning tool by:

- identifying the innovations that they wish to implement linked to key academic areas they regard as their greatest assets;
- selecting the strategic mix of staff development, short-term training, visiting experts, laboratory equipment, computers, technical assistance, etc. that they believe will best allow them to implement successfully their proposed innovation;
- using the funding application as an opportunity for institutional self-reflection and staff discussions centred on problem-solving and priorities;

¹ The grant competitions will be introduced in the national currency.

² The grant competitions will be introduced in the national currency.

- identifying institutional and private sector partnerships and cooperative efforts that will increase the possibilities of funding success;
- demonstrating in the application that a systematic exercise has taken place in which problems are defined and diagnosed; multi-year strategies for their resolution are elaborated; and the goals, performance indicators, human resources, and financial needs are established.

b) Promoting equal development opportunities in all institutions

Eligibility: The CIF will be open and accessible to all HEIs, provided that their applications are aligned with the overall aims and objectives of the CIF, are feasible, and meet the required criteria of quality, relevance, and strategic impact.

Recognition of effort: Non-approved applications will not be regarded as failures. Instead, they will be viewed as insufficiently developed. In such cases, the effort that went into preparing the application is recognized, and technical assistance may be requested (provided by the CIF Administration Unit (AU)) in order to strengthen the application and increase chances of success in the next round of awards.

c) Accountability and control

Target setting and reporting: HEIs will be responsible for setting clear objectives, outcomes and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and reporting on them at regular intervals to the CIF AU through both a technical (narrative) and financial report.

Implementation and M&E: HEIs will also be responsible for ensuring that the grant is implemented according to the current legislation of Georgia, including the Constitution of Georgia, the Law of Georgia on Higher Education, the Tax Code and other relevant financial regulations and procedures. HEIs are responsible for cooperating with the MES, including for Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) purposes. They will also take responsibility for any deviations that are identified during the independent external audit.

Strategic planning and decision making: The **Awards Committee (AC)** will be responsible for CIF strategic planning and decision-making as well as final evaluation of results.

d) Financing

Projects will be financed in two tranches according to the budget, implementation plan and project milestones.

The first payment should not exceed 90% of the total amount of the grant, while the second payment should cover all other eligible expenses that will be incurred under the Grant Agreement and approved by the Auditor.

Co-funding: At least 3% of Co-funding is required for the CIF projects. The Co-funding can be demonstrated by cash contribution, In-kind contribution, or combination of both. Contributions that may be provided in form of goods/services/consultancy, etc. without pricing should not be reflected in the project budget, they should be described in the narrative of the CIF grant project in the frames of the activity for which the specific contribution was anticipated. Any evidence of co-financing (cash or in-kind) will be taken into consideration during proposal evaluation.

3. Description of Funding window(s) and their aims

The CIF will be implemented through two funding windows (calls for proposals).

Funding window	Timeframe	Estimated number of Grants awarded ³
Funding window 1	To be introduced in 2022	10
Funding window 2	To be introduced in 2023	30

Both windows will adhere to the overall aims and objectives of the programme namely: ***'to foster modernization of higher education programs and learning environment and strengthen the labour market linkages'***.

Eligible applicants for the funding windows are:

- (i) The public HEI (single applicant) targeting specific development and innovation issues identified in their Strategic Development Plans (SDPs). In this case, a single public HEI is the main beneficent of the project, and
- (i) Consortia projects involve two or more eligible HEIs (in that at least one public HEI) who are the main beneficiaries of the project.

Proposals under both funding windows must demonstrate partnership arrangements.

Partnerships may involve the national and/or international private sector representatives, national and/or international education or research organizations, as well as non-governmental organization(s). However, users and beneficiaries of the CIF grants must be Georgian institutions, i.e. Georgian legal entities.

The MES may suggest that applicants indicate a particular theme for their proposals including:

- developing program content (i.e. revision of existing programs or development of new programs) to reflect the latest trends in the field,
- introducing innovations in terms of teaching and learning including support for classroom teaching utilizing technology and modern pedagogical approach, such as problem-solving and project-based learning, and improvement of e-learning methods,
- modernizing educational programs with private sector participation, e.g.:
 - supporting innovative research by faculty members involving students and private sector;
 - upgrading processes and enhancing the quality of the labour market surveys and/or graduate tracer studies to improve relevance of academic programs and employment tracking;
 - enhancing the quality of laboratories and workshops with modern scientific instruments and equipment to improve student learning;
 - conducting joint university-industry development of innovative research designs;
 - facilitating private sector representative's participation in academic research projects (e.g., by receiving access to sophisticated analytical and other experimental facilities);
 - facilitating the expansion of networks and outreach events, that connect current students and graduates that are already employed in the sector, as well as familiarize students with various employment opportunities in relevant private companies, organizing networking events, seminars with private sector representatives, and boot-camps;

³ The exact number of grants awarded will be determined by AC as a result of the evaluation process, see the section 9.1.3.

- engaging relevant employers with curriculum development to reinforce the linkages with the labour market,
- modernizing and upgrading labs and physical infrastructure to meet the program objectives,
- improvement of gender imbalances in the education system, especially in STEM subjects including supporting HEIs to attract female students to STEM programs and help narrow the gender gap in STEM fields.

The MES may decide to limit or to extend the number of themes in the pilot call (funding window 1) and the subsequent call.

Grants will be issued in Georgian Lari (GEL).

Individual grant project implementation period will be set at maximum of 18 months. This period may be extended provided there is sound justification for the delay, as well as in case of unforeseen circumstances such as world or national pandemic, war, political and/or social unrest in case these directly impacts grant implementation and if such an extension is possible under the terms of the funding source. When extending a grant period, no additional funding can be claimed.

The decision to extend a grant project implementation period will be made by the AC based on an official request from the lead HEI.

A grant may be terminated if the public HEI (single applicant) or in the the case of a consortium project, any HEI fails to renew its authorization or, in the situation where the grant is built around particular academic program, if the HEI fails to gain reaccreditation.

4. Main features of a CIF grant

The single applicant or the lead partner of a consortia project must be a Georgian public HEI.

The public HEI may be a consortium member or form a consortium with one or more Georgian private HEI(s), international public and/or private HEIs, national and/or international private sector representatives, national and/or international education or research organization, as well as non-governmental organization(s). When submitting a project as a consortium, a signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between consortium members should be included in the application.

Demonstrated co-funding for the project is encouraged from both the main applicant and its partners (members of the consortium). Co-funding may take the form of monetary contribution and/or in-kind contribution (e.g. services, good, consultancy, physical infrastructure, etc.).

HEIs may submit more than one application per each funding window.

5. Consortium and partnership

In the case of a consortium project, the application must specify the project leading HEI (Project Leader) that will be responsible for submitting the grant application and take responsibility for all communications and reporting with the CIF including the MES, the Awards Committee (AC) and the CIF AU.

The Lead HEI must sign a MoU with all other members of the consortium that regulates their relationships including conferring the authority to communicate on behalf of the consortium with the CIF.

Any kind of partnership arrangement (beyond the consortium) also needs to be confirmed through the signed MoU.

6. Eligibility criteria (applicants and partners)

6.1 Lead HEI

To be eligible to submit an application, a public HEI must be authorized by NCEQE.

The decision must be publicly available on the NCEQE website.

In case where the grant application is built around one or more academic programs, the program(s) should be accredited by the NCEQE. The accreditation decision must be publicly available on the NCEQE website. Program(s) should be granted full or conditional accreditation.

6.2 Partners

6.2.1 Private HEIs

Criteria for inclusion for private HEIs are identical to that for public HEIs. See above.

6.2.2 Foreign HEIs

In order to be eligible to be part of consortium, a foreign HEI(s) should be accredited by their national accreditation agency. The accreditation decision should be publicly available on the website of the relevant national agency and/or accessible from another reputable international registry/database.

6.2.3 Non-HEI partners

Non HEI partners, (including but not limited to national and/or international private sector representatives, national and/or international education or research organizations, as well as non-governmental organization(s)) must submit a copy of their registration documents to confirm their

status. The MES has the right to restrict the composition of eligible partners before they publish a call and/or to request in a Call, specific information to confirm the status of an entity.

7. Eligible and non-eligible Expenditures

7.1 Eligible costs

The CIF grant will finance the following costs:

- i. Purchase and maintenance of new laboratory equipment;
- ii. Purchase of modern Information and Communication Technologies;
- iii. Subscriptions to up-to-date electronic databases of scientific journals;
- iv. Operating costs (up to 2% of total project cost) and administrative costs, including salaries of the grant (up to 10% of total project cost with a potential condition of maximum single salary allowed up to three times national average salaries);
- v. Travel to meet consortium partners including costs for visiting professors/researchers from abroad;
- vi. Technical assistance and training to help implement activities funded by the grant;
- vii. Costs of an independent external audit;
- viii. Indirect/incidental costs (e.g. car rental, office supplies, miscellaneous utilities, maintenance and spare parts, consumables, local transport and communication).

The allocation of funds must be well balanced.

The MES has the right to set limitations on some budget categories when each funding window is published.

7.2 Non eligible costs

Grant funds may not be requested for activities that include, but are not limited to:

- Interest or debt owed to any party;
- Expenditures and provisions for possible future losses or debts;
- Items already financed through another framework, program or company/institution;
- Entertainment and hospitality expenses, including: banquets, cultural programs; ceremonies and expenses connected with them, such as treating guests and lodging, and tips;
- Alcoholic drinks and tobacco products;
- Currency exchange losses, fees and penalties;
- Recruitment or relocation costs;
- Pay interest payments, give out loans;
- Fundraising;
- Value-added taxes and customs taxes and fees;
- Bank commissions and differences in currency exchanges;
- Payment of interest or current debt to any party, including commitments made or undertaken during consideration of Project application, or upon approval of Project financing;
- Costs of items or services that are already being financed by another program or entity;
- Costs/participation in the costs of purchase, lease, sub-lease or adaptation of land, facilities and/or other real estate, including vehicles and movable assets and equipment not designated exclusively for Project related scientific and research activities;
- Costs defined by the sources of funding under the Public Call;
- Activities that require involuntary taking of land resulting in temporary or permanent relocation or loss of shelter, loss of assets or access to assets, loss of income sources or means of livelihood, or involving the involuntary restriction of access to legally designated parks and protected areas;

- Any construction or rehabilitation activities;
- Procurement of passenger/commercial vehicles;
- Purchase/lease of property (real estate).

8. Selection criteria

Projects will be selected based on clear and transparent criteria that are communicated to both Applicants and Evaluators. These are:

- Quality and relevance of the proposal with an emphasis on the innovation aspect;
- Quality of partnership;
- Team composition and Budget;
- Implementation Plan and Sustainability.

The MES have the right to set a percentage of marks for each of the criteria as shown below. When this action is taken, the weighting will be made clear in the Call and in both the Guidelines for Applicants (Annex 1) and Guidelines for Evaluators (Annex 2).

Project proposals will be assessed by at least 2 Evaluators, one of which should be an international Evaluator, against the above set four criteria by applying detailed assessment guidelines (see Section 11 below). In a case of significant differences between the individual evaluators' scores (when the difference is at least 4 points or when the proposal was rated more than 14 points by one individual evaluator and 14 points or less by another), the Consulting Company responsible for evaluating grant proposals on Stage 2: Proposal review (paragraph 10.3.2) (hereafter: Consulting Company) should ensure the participation of a third evaluator in the evaluation process. Evaluators must declare themselves free from any conflict of interest and sign a statement of confidentiality.

Detailed guidelines for assessment of each separate criterion will be shown in the Guidelines for Evaluators (Annex 2) and Guidelines for Applicants (Annex 1). The guidelines will lay out clearly what a proposal must contain to be awarded a given grade. Use of multiple Evaluators will reduce any marking bias while publishing the detailed assessment guidelines will ensure that the assessment will be made in an objective and fully transparent manner.

This scheme will allow all projects to be ranked with sufficient granularity of marks to enable decisions to be made on the cut off point for funding. It will also make it possible for marks to be justified and for projects to note how they can improve their proposals for the future.

All proposals will receive feedback from the Evaluators on the main strengths and weaknesses of their proposals for each of the assessment criteria as well as an indication on how the proposal could have been strengthened.

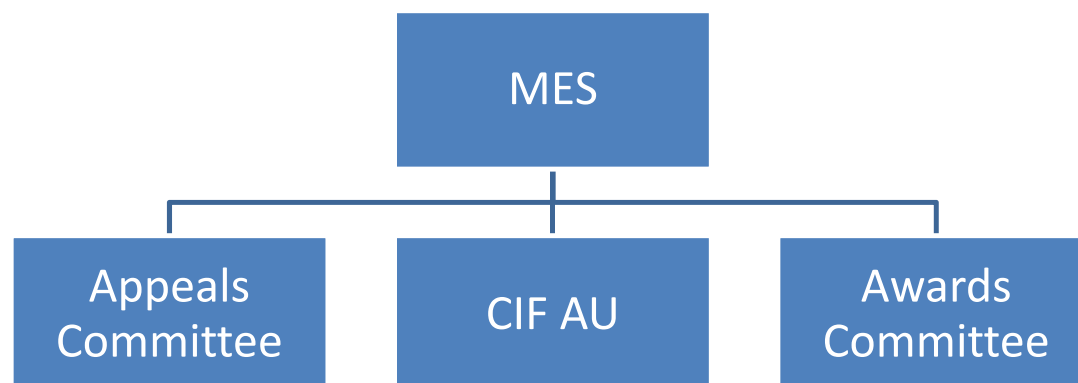
Based on the feedback, HEIs can refine and resubmit the project during the subsequent funding windows.

9. Organizational setup

The CIF has been established as a Competitive Grant Mechanism coordinated by the MES. The scheme is implemented by the CIF AU.

The CIF structure is shown in the figure below.

Figure 1 CIF Organizational structure and bodies



9.1 Functions and composition of the CIF's organizational bodies

9.1.1 MES

The MES has overall responsibility for the CIF. It is supported by the CIF AU and works closely with the AC who act as a steering committee for CIF and prepares the ranking of the evaluations. The MES will appoint the AC and will consult on approval of a pool of non-permanent independent evaluators (Pool of evaluators). The MES signs contract agreements with the final project beneficiaries.

9.1.2 CIF AU

The CIF AU is subordinate to the Head of the Department of HE Development of the MES. During the project, project-related activities will be reported to the Head of the Department of HE Development of the MES.

The CIF AU is composed of a minimum of 4 persons:

- i) Head of CIF AU with strong project management experience, including experience in monitoring and evaluation;
- ii) Legal specialists with relevant professional experience in the areas of HE, grant schemes and/or procurement issues related to HEIs;
- iii) Financial specialists with relevant professional experience in the areas of grant schemes and procurement issues related to HEIs;

- iv) Education specialist with experience in promotion and communication, preferably of actions directed towards HEIs.

The CIF AU is responsible for the day to day implementation of the CIF including Calls, monitoring and evaluation of the implementation and gathering of relevant feedback to improve the instrument. They also ensure the smooth running of the AC communicate with the HEIs including prospective applicants and grant beneficiaries. Smooth running is ensured by the CIF AU undertaking the following main activities:

1. Organizing all the preparatory arrangements related to the Call for proposals;
2. Outreach and communication to HEIs and target beneficiaries.
3. Ensuring that all members of the AC have signed a statement on non-disclosure of the information and avoidance conflict of interest (CoI) and storing the documents;
4. Developing and submitting to the AC for approval the necessary documents for each call;
5. Taking and circulating minutes for all meetings of the AC;
6. Coordinates work of the Consulting Company, consults with the MES on approval of a pool of Evaluators. Ensures the Consulting Company has signed a statement on non-disclosure of the information and avoidance of CoI (Annex 7a) and storing the documents;

The CIF AU will:

1. Prepare a ToR for the selection of the Consulting Company responsible for grant proposals evaluation. The CIF AU will consult on the ToR with the MES.
2. Manage the promotional campaign and communication strategy for the CIF including, where agreed, organise information days and workshops and possible TA for applicants;
3. Ensure eligibility and completeness of the CIF project proposals;
4. Submit the CIF applications to the Consulting Company who will create a temporary group(s) of evaluators.
5. Transfer the final evaluations and marks provided by the Consulting Company to the AC;
6. Carrying out/supporting any appeals processes to the MES and recording the final results.
7. Preparing grant agreements and amendments with HEIs for signature by MES;
8. Carrying out the M&E including:
 - o receiving, reviewing and approving of grant project reports (narrative and financial) from HEIs for each implementation stage and arranging for any additional actions deemed necessary to be taken;
 - o monitoring the overall indicators for the CIF and organising any additional actions deemed appropriate to evaluate the CIF as an instrument.
9. Regularly preparing and presenting reports on the CIF activities to the AC.

9.1.3 Awards Committee

The AC is composed of 5-7 members with at least one coming from the non-HEI sector e.g. from industry. At least one representative should be from the international community.

The AC is comprised of distinguished scholars, highly respected stakeholder representatives, and employer representatives. Members of the AC can be chosen from government or university institutions, but they are not institutional representatives and serve purely in their individual capacities. However, all AC members must declare a conflict of interest and reclude themselves from any voting when their home institution is involved. Senior university officers are excluded from becoming AC's members.

The AC acts as a steering committee for the CIF carrying out strategic decision making as well as defining the priorities or themes for calls for proposals and approving the CIF's budget.

When all the individual evaluations are received the AC is responsible for preparing the overall ranking of projects and making the final decision on project financing based on their ranking and the budget available. Final ranking is done according to the ranking based on achieved points and the available budget.

Where comments of individual evaluators require further clarification then the AC is permitted to request this. Clarifications must be made in writing and communicated to CIF AU who will save them to the proposal file.

Proposals that have an average score of 14 points or less by the two Experts (or three Experts, in the case of three expert participants in the evaluation process) shall not be eligible for funding and shall not be reflected in the overall ranking list of projects.

Meetings of the AC are chaired by a representative of the MES. Any decisions may be taken based on a simple majority of members present provided at least 50% of total members are represented. In the case of a tied decision the MES chair has the deciding vote. The meetings may be held remotely. All meetings must be minuted and the minutes signed by all members present and transferred to the CIF AU.

9.2 Consulting Company to Evaluate CIF Grant Proposals

To carry out the project selection stage 2: Proposal Review (of paragraph 10.3.2) and evaluate applications, the selected Consulting Company will reach out to and select relevant experts for creating a pool of evaluators.

The pool of approved experts can be composed of both national and international evaluation experts. Relevant experts from the Pool are appointed by the Consulting Company to evaluate a specific proposal.

Each grant proposal will be evaluated by 2 experts, one of which should be an international Expert. In a case of significant differences between the individual evaluators' scores (when the difference is at least 4 points or when the proposal was rated more than 14 points by one individual evaluator and 14 points or less by another), the Consulting Company should ensure the participation of a third evaluator in the evaluation process.

The individual evaluators will evaluate and score the proposals based on published criteria and contained in the Guidelines for Evaluators (Annex 2). They will summarise their decision making in an associated evaluation template that is then shared with the AC (The evaluation template forms part of the Guidelines for Evaluators – Annex 2).

If the Evaluators require additional/ missing information then they will communicate this to the CIF AU who will take steps to procure this in the agreed time-scale.

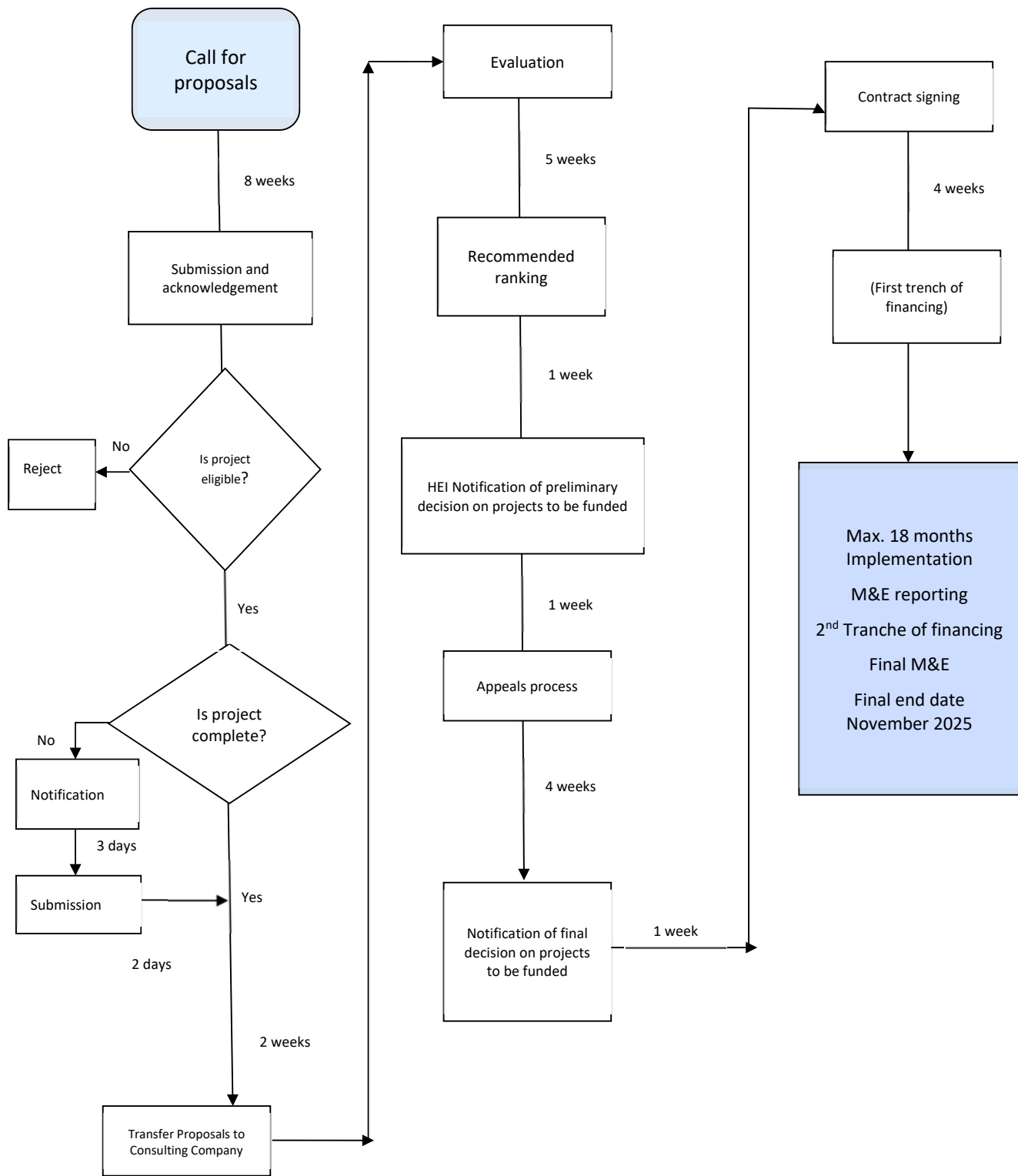
10. Operational guidelines and procedures

Description

This section lays out the operational guidelines and procedures for CIF corresponding to the different stages of the project cycle. This includes the Call for proposals and project submission, project selection and evaluation procedures, project implementation guidelines, reporting (narrative and financial), monitoring and evaluation including possible use of KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) and overall evaluation of the CIF with the purpose of making practical recommendations for improvement of the scheme.

The overall scheme is shown in Figure 1 below and described in the text that follows. This shows that each 'cycle' of funding takes 26 weeks of preparation before implementation commences, including

an 8-week Open Call. The period of grant implementation (shown here as 18 months) needs to respect the final deadline for the CIF namely November 2025.



10.1 Call for proposals

The CIF will be an open public call. The number and frequency of calls will be set by the MES. In the first 3 years it is envisaged to have 2 calls: one in 2022 and one in 2023.

A Public HEI may submit as many applications as they wish to all 2 calls.

The call will be published on the website of the Ministry of Education and Science. It will simultaneously be announced on the dedicated CIF web-platform. It will be promoted using a variety of channels that may include an email subscription list, social media, national news media and the channels of partners including GITA and the NSF. The exact arrangements for promotion of each call will be decided in advance by the CIF AU following a consultation with the AC.

The Call will be open for a period of 8 weeks. This duration may be amended by the MES in consultation with the AC.

10.2 Submission procedures

Applications to the call must be submitted using the official application form (Annex 3).

Completed applications must be submitted electronically in the format required by the MES. The document flow may be carried out fully or partially electronically, via email and/or through the CIF Portal.

The CIF AU will be responsible for acknowledging all applications that are received in the official duration of the Call. This notification may be generated automatically by the grant portal or may be carried out manually by the CIF AU.

The CIF AU are also responsible for notifying applicants whose proposals arrived after the Call deadline. This notification may be generated automatically by the Portal making it impossible to upload further documents after the deadline has passed and publishing a notification that the call is now closed. Alternatively, applications that arrive after the deadline may be notified manually by the CIF AU based on the date/ time stamp of the application.

During the duration of the Call the MES will respond to questions sent by email to a dedicated email address. The MES will announce the deadline for submitting questions and the final date for publishing replies.

10.3 Project section

10.3.1 Eligibility and completeness evaluation – stage one

After the Application is submitted, the CIF AU will do a desk review of the eligibility and completeness of the submitted Project as well as initial screening of the submitted documents where applicable including, but not limited to, HEIs authorization, company registration documentation, proof of the co-financing, and obligations under agreements with third parties.

Eligibility and completion checks must be completed within 2 weeks of the Call closing. When an applicant is asked to submit more information, they must send this within 3 working days. The CIF AU must check the additional information within a further 2 working days. Only fully completed, signed, and electronically submitted Applications should be considered for further evaluation. When an applicant has not supplied all the information necessary to prove their eligibility in the time-frame permitted then they will be notified by the CIF AU and their applicant will not be evaluated further in the Call. The deficiencies will be explained by email so that they can be addressed in further Calls. Failing to prove eligibility in one Call will not prevent the applicant from applying successfully to further calls if they can provide the necessary information to prove eligibility.

All applicants will be notified by the CIF AU by email of the results of the eligibility checks after 2 weeks. Applicants that are not satisfied with the outcome will be referred to the Grievances Redress Mechanism (see Section 12).

10.3.2 Proposal review and selection – stage two

Eligible proposals will be evaluated by the Evaluators. Each proposal will be evaluated by a minimum of 2 Evaluators, one of which should be an international Evaluator, using the criteria laid out in the Guidelines for Evaluators (Annex 2). These will mirror the criteria published in the Guidelines for Applicants (Annex 1). In a case of significant differences between the individual evaluators' scores (when the difference is at least 4 points or when the proposal was rated more than 14 points by one individual evaluator and 14 points or less by another), the Consulting Company should ensure the participation of a third evaluator in the evaluation process.

The CIF AU will send applications to the Consulting Company by email in order to carry out the project selection stage 2: Proposal Review (paragraph 10.3.2). The Consulting Company must confirm by email within 5 days of the applications being sent out that they have received the documents. If a Col is declared, the Consulting Company must send the application to another potential evaluator and repeat the process until no Col is confirmed.

The Consulting Company will have 5 weeks to complete all assessments from the point they are received. This time-frame may be extended by MES in consultation with the AC depending on the number of applications that have been received, the size of the pool of Evaluators and the number of reported Cols that have resulted in a need to transfer proposals to another evaluator.

Evaluators will record the results of each assessment using the template provided. The CIF AU has the right to ask the Consulting Company to upload their native evaluation and final mark for each section of the application form to the Call platform if this functionality is selected to consolidate the information. Alternatively, the company will be asked to send results by email.

The AC is responsible for consolidating all results and ranking the projects by overall mark.

The AC will confirm the projects to receive funding. This will be based on the total amount available and the amount requested by individual projects. The ranked list will be funded until the funding for the Call is allocated. Projects will not be partially funded. Where money remains that cannot fully fund the next ranked applicant then this will be returned to the funding pool for the following Call.

The AC must confirm the list of projects to be funded within 1 week of the evaluation being completed.

The CIF AU will notify both successful and non-successful applicant of the results by email. This notification must take place within 5 working days of the AC confirming its decision. Each applicant will initially receive their mark, their position in the overall ranking and the summary of the Evaluators' feedback on the main strengths and weaknesses of the application.

Notification will make clear that signing of a contract will be dependent on the final outcome of any appeals. The timeline for final notification will be stated in this email communication. Applicants that are not satisfied with the outcome will be referred to the Grievances Redress Mechanism (see Section 12).

The AC has a further 5 working days from the end of the Appeal procedures to confirm the final list of projects to be funded.

The list of successful applicants will be published by the MES on their website within 1 day of the AC taking their final decision.

10.4 Notification and signature of the Grant Agreement

The CIF AU will notify applicants of the final results by email within 1 working day of the final decision being published. The notification to successful applicants will include details of how contracts will be signed with the successful applicants.

The draft grant agreement will be available to download from the MES website and/ or the CIF Grant portal.

The grant agreement must be signed by the HEI within 4 weeks of the official notification. The signed grant agreement must be accompanied by the signed MoU between partners, Consortium agreement (in case of consortia projects), and any other documentation that has been requested under the Call Guidelines. This deadline may be extended by the AC based on an emailed request for prolongation and a justification considered to be reasonable by the AC e.g. unavailability of one of the signatories.

Notification to unsuccessful applicants will encourage them to take into consideration the feedback of the Evaluators and to consider reapplying to a further call.

10.5 First tranche of funding

The first tranche of money will be transferred as soon as the grant agreement is signed. This will reflect the financial plan for a maximum of 90% of the total amount of the grant.

A final balancing payment of 10% will be made to cover all other eligible expenses that will be incurred under the Grant Agreement and approved by Auditor.

10.6 Project Implementation and reporting

Projects will have 18 months from signing the contract to fully implement their project.

Projects must be implemented according to the plan included in the application and according to the rules of the CIF program related to management of budget and procurement. Implementation must also reflect anti-corruption and environmental guidelines (see below).

Any significant deviations from the original plan, e.g. major changes in named personnel or partners must be notified by email to the CIF AU who may request a meeting of the AC to consider them if they are deemed to be significant. Significant deviations from the plan should not take place without written approval from the AC. While approval is sought the project may need to be placed on hold if it is not possible to continue to implement according to the original plan. Projects that do not inform the CIF AU of changes and request approval run the risk of not having their narrative and financial reports approved and that further payments may be suspended.

Projects must submit regular narrative and financial reports (according to the templates provided by CIF AU) to the CIF AU. These would normally be every 6 months but the MES has the right to amend this before the Call takes place. Reports must be signed by the designated project leader as well as the head of the finance department of the HEI and the Rector of the HEI. Reports will be delivered by email unless the MES has indicated in advance that they will be uploaded to the CIF grant portal. Safe delivery of reports will be acknowledged by email, either automatically or individually by the CIF AU.

Each narrative report must contain an indication of progress towards defined deliverables and key milestones.

Each financial report must contain details of how funding has been dispersed over the reporting period.

The CIF AU will read and check reports against the original plan and prepare a summary for the AC. Any area of concern will be highlighted. The AC has the right to approve reports or to ask for further

clarification. Grant beneficiaries will have 5 days to submit clarifications to the AC. This deadline may be extended based on a justified written request by the Grant Beneficiary. Reports must be approved before further funding is made available. A final decision by the AC must be taken within 10 days of information being submitted. The CIF AU is responsible for notifying grant beneficiaries of final approval of reports.

The final reports must be delivered within 2 months of the end date set in the project proposal. The AC has the right to extend the final deadline for reports based on a written and well justified request from the HEI implementing the project. Only one such extension may be granted unless the HEI can demonstrate *force majeure*.

10.7 Environmental and Social Management

Each project must follow an Environmental and Social Management Framework and Resettlement Policy Framework, as applicable, during implementation of the Grant Project. These Frameworks are available online at:

World Bank web-site:

ESMF - <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/680481551093893455/pdf/Environmental-and-Social-Management-Framework.pdf>

RPF - <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/672551551098424901/pdf/Resettlement-Policy-Framework.pdf>

Municipal Development Fund of Georgia web-site:

ESMF and RPF - [MDF: Announcements - Inclusion, Innovation and Quality Project implementation in Georgia](#)

10.8 Sanctioned entities

Projects shall ensure that any suppliers, consultants, experts, contractors and/or any third parties contracted using CIF grant funds, are not sanctioned under Georgian legislation and/or World Bank rules. For those purposes, the lead partner is responsible for ensuring that no contracted entities appear in the official sanctioned list of the World Bank. This can be found online at www.worldbank.org/debar

As a part of documentary evidence, the lead partner is responsible for keeping a record of checks on such third parties before entering into an agreement/contract and/or concluding any transaction.

10.9 Project suspension and/or termination

The MES has the right to suspend and/or terminate a CIF grant after it has been awarded under the following conditions:

The Grant Beneficiary fails to submit narrative and/ or financial reports in the appropriate time-scale and fails to offer acceptable reasons for their delay to the AC despite one or more written reminders.

The written reports do not demonstrate progress towards the project KPIs and goals and the HEI is unable to submit a plan to rectify the situation that is acceptable to the AC.

The AC do not agree that a major change proposed in writing by the Beneficiary is justified e.g. a major change in personnel or partners and the beneficiary has not been able to offer an acceptable alternative plan.

The AC agree that there is evidence that the project is not being implemented according to the Col, anti-corruption and environmental management and the grant beneficiary has failed to convince provide adequate evidence to repudiate the allegations.

The grant beneficiary requests that the project be suspended or terminated for a written reason e.g. cause major.

If the AC decide that the project should be suspended then they notify the grant beneficiary in writing and indicate in their communication the actions that may be taken to redress the situation as well as the necessary timeline.

If the AC decide that the project should be terminated then they notify the MES who will notify the grant beneficiary in writing that the grant has been terminated and indicate any further redress that the beneficiary has under the law.

10.10 Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of individual projects

The purpose of the M&E process is to:

- i) ensure that projects are being implemented to plan (including, expenditure monitoring) and are achieving a satisfactory level of outcomes and results;
- ii) approve release of further tranches of funding
- iii) identify emerging issues or unforeseen circumstances that merit further investigation and that may require supportive intervention or even suspension or termination of a project;
- iv) help HEIs to refine their project planning and implementation in the future;
- v) contribute to the evaluation and refinement of the CIF instrument.

M&E takes the form of regular reporting based on written submissions linked to the logical framework of the original proposal. These may be supplemented by ad-hoc requests for additional information or to conduct site visits, including by independent experts.

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) of each project is the responsibility of the Grant holder. Oversight of the M&E process is the responsibility of the CIF AU on behalf of the MES who will prepare regular summary reports for the AC. These will flag up any emerging issues that may need intervention e.g. the need to request further information, suspend or terminate a project or to use a site visit and independent/ international experts to investigate the status.

The M&E will be built around three main stages:

- ❖ Baseline: the situation indicated in the project proposal and reflected in the performance indicators selected.
- ❖ Mid-term: benchmarking progress against the indicators;
- ❖ Final evaluation: reporting on the indicators when the project is completed.

The mid-term and final evaluations will use both a narrative and a financial report format. The templates for reporting (Annex 10a and Annex 10b) will be confirmed to beneficiaries when they sign the grant agreement along with the timeline for reporting and the method of submitting reports e.g. email or via the grant portal.

In addition to the mid-term report, the CIF AU will have the right to request additional reports and to organise ad-hoc site visits to projects and to include independent and international experts. A clear justification must be given for any requested additional reports and beneficiaries should have up to 1 month to respond. Notice must be given of any site visit and this should not be less than 10 working days.

When M&E has involved independent experts, including international experts, then short reports must be produced summarising the visit and including and justifying any recommendations for action e.g. individual project suspension or early termination.

If the M&E reveals major deviations and faults in the project implementation then the CIF AU will notify the AC who may recommend to MES that the project be suspended or terminated.

10.11 Performance indicators

The CIF AU is responsible for establishing overall performance indicators for the CIF. These should clearly reflect the vision, aims and objectives of the CIF. They should be linked to individual CIF grant reporting.

When setting indicators, the CIF AU should take into consideration the reliability and validity of the available data.

Performance indicators for individual projects should be included in the proposal and reflect the proposal evaluation criteria. The baseline data, the methodology for calculating them, as well as the measurement timeframes and the source of information for measuring them should be well designed during the preparation of the project.

10.12 Monitoring and evaluation of the overall CIF Scheme

M&E of the overall CIF program, including individual project submission, evaluation and implementation and overall processes and responsible actors (AC) is organised by the CIF AU on behalf of the MES. Where deemed necessary, e.g. for site visits, the CIF AU may involve independent experts including international experts.

The purpose of the M&E is to:

- i) Ensure that the CIF instrument is implemented correctly to achieve its objective and purpose and to identify refinements that could be applied to the CIF in the future;
- ii) Ensure that the individual CIF grants are implemented correctly and with maximum impact and to identify any problems that would reduce the impact of the action and that could be rectified in the framework of the existing scheme.

Over the course of the CIF the AU will collect feedback from beneficiaries and stakeholders including recommendations on how to improve the CIF in the future.

M&E will be an ongoing process with clear periods of formal activity when Grant scheme beneficiaries submit written reports (narrative and financial). In addition, the CIF AU will have the right to request additional reports and to organise ad hoc site visits to projects and to include independent and international experts.

11. Proposal Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on 4 main criteria:

- Quality and relevance of the proposal with an emphasis on the innovation aspect;
- Quality of partnership;
- Team composition and Budget;
- Implementation Plan and Sustainability.

All proposals should be evaluated according to 4 criteria graded by the Evaluators from Excellent to Fail. These grades will automatically be translated in to associated mark based on the rubric below:

0 – Proposal fails to address the criterion or cannot be assessed due to missing or incomplete information.

1 – Poor. The criterion is inadequately addressed or there are serious inherent weaknesses.

2 – Fair. The proposal broadly addresses the criterion, but there are significant weaknesses.

3 – Good. The proposal addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present.

4 – Very good. The proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present.

5 – Excellent. The proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.

Proposals that have an average score of 14 points or less by the two Experts (or three Experts, in the case of three expert participants in the evaluation process) shall not be eligible for funding and shall not be reflected in the overall ranking list of projects.

Detailed guidelines for assessment of each separate criterion will be shown in the Guidelines for Evaluators and Guidelines for Applicants. The guidelines will lay out clearly what a proposal must contain to address the criterion fully or partially to be awarded a given grade. Evaluators will apply the criterion and then summarise the main strengths and weakness of each section to justify the score awarded.

These guidelines for interpreting each of the 4 criteria are laid out below.

11.1 Evaluation criterion 1: Quality and Relevance with an emphasis on the innovation aspect

The relevant questions related to this criterion are as follows: ***What are the objectives of the project and why? To what degree are the objectives of the proposal aligned with relevant strategies, policies and priorities? What is the envisioned impact of the project on the higher education programs, learning environment and strengthening the labour market linkages? What is the innovation/novelty/uniqueness of the applied concepts and methodology of the project?***

The project application shall address the following aspects:

- ✓ *Justify the proposed objectives and actions by clear reference to the institutional strategic plan and in particular the SWOT;*
- ✓ *Layout the relevant strategic frameworks;*
- ✓ *Explain how their own objectives align with the priorities of the strategic frameworks;*
- ✓ *Indicate what would be the project impact on the higher education programs, learning environment and strengthening the labour market linkages?*
- ✓ *Make clear the 'state of the art' in a field and explain how their proposed actions will attain or even exceed this with associated measurable results and impact, for example:*
 - *by laying out current programme content and indicating how new content will attain international standards and reflect the latest trends in the field;*
 - *by outlining the status of classroom teaching and indicating how new innovations can be introduced that will utilize technology and a modern pedagogical approach;*
 - *by explaining current specific weaknesses in linkages between the HEI and the labour market and how these can be addressed by engaging relevant employers;*

- *By explaining how the current labs and physical infrastructure inhibit the HEI from meeting their desired program objectives and how this situation could be improved through modernizing and upgrading;*
 - *by indicating the present gender balance in the education system, especially in STEM subjects and detailing proposed actions that will attract female students to STEM programs at the HEI and help narrow the gender gap in STEM fields;*
- etc.

11.2 Evaluation criterion 2: Quality of partnership

The relevant questions related to this criterion are as follows: ***What partners are involved in the project, and how the partnership was built? What is the quality of the partnership?***

The project application shall address the following aspects:

- ✓ *Explain how the partnership (or consortium) was built and how the final composition has influenced the design of the proposal, as well as, which partners are involved directly and indirectly in the project;*
- ✓ *Explain how the partnership/consortium match the project's objectives;*
- ✓ *Explain how the core partnership/ consortium adds resources, including skills, knowledge, experience/capacities and access to critical infrastructure needed to carry out the project activities that are not available to the lead partner alone and that are needed to fully implement the project and realise measurable benefits and longer-term impact.*
- ✓ *Is it explained how will the partners get the maximum benefit from the project implementation?*

11.3 Evaluation criterion 3: Team composition and Budget

The relevant questions related to this criterion are as follows: ***What resources will be needed (human and financial), to successfully implement the project?***

The project application shall address the following aspects:

Team:

- ✓ *Clearly identify key roles and personnel in the project;*
- ✓ *The project manager has a proven track record and relevant experience to lead a complex project;*
- ✓ *The project team has sufficient scientific/technological capacity to execute the project and achieve its objectives (key publications and other results, necessary expertise, previous scientific achievements, experience obtained in relevant projects).*
- ✓ *The project team has an adequate organizational structure to ensure effective communication (within the project team, with university, partners/consortium, and others involved in the project) for implementation of the project.*

Budget:

- ✓ *Provide a budget that reflects the activities described.*
- ✓ *Explain how the budget items fit the aims and objectives of the project, how they will be used in the activities and how they will help the project realize its outputs and deliverables.*
- ✓ *Outline the essence and proportion of co-financing.*

- ✓ *Outline any resources that are necessary or that add value to the project but that is not paid for directly from the CIF grant.*

11.4 Evaluation criterion 4: Implementation Plan and Sustainability

The relevant questions related to this criterion are as follows: ***What is the plan of activities and does it follow a logic structure? How can the outcomes be sustained? What are the risks and mitigation measures?***

The project application shall address the following aspects:

Implementation plan:

- ✓ *Set out a clear but concise plan of activities with associated milestones and deliverables.*
- ✓ *Ensure that the plan describes activities including duration, sequencing and links between activities is clear, measurable and feasible.*
- ✓ *Provide a Gantt chart to accompany the plan and show clear linkages between different components/work packages.*
- ✓ *Offer a risk analysis with mitigation for foreseen risks and contingency for unseen ones/Force Majeure.*

Sustainability:

- ✓ *Demonstrate the ability to ensure the systematization of the good practices generated by the grant;*
- ✓ *Demonstrate a clear understanding of the cost of sustaining the activity in the future;*
- ✓ *Clarify how the state-of-the-art equipment to be purchased for the project will be efficiently used after the project completion;*
- ✓ *Quantify and categorize the costs and indicate internal and external future sources of financing that cover the costs.*

12. The Grievance Redress Mechanism

Applicants who are not satisfied with the result have the right to file an evidence-based complaint on the outcome of:

- a. the administrative check, at the first stage of evaluation (invoking evident omissions, oversights or errors made by the CIF AU);
- b. the evaluation procedure, at the second stage of evaluation (invoking evident omissions, oversights or errors made by AC);

The appeal shall be submitted in writing, with a 500-word limit, within 8 calendar days upon the date of receiving the notification about the outcome of the evaluation. The content of the appeal must be limited to clarification of data already existing in the Proposal, and may in no way modify the content of the proposed Project. The Appeal Commission shall provide an acknowledgment of receipt of appeal within 3 calendar days upon the date of receipt and an official response to the objection within 20 calendar days upon the date of receipt.

The Appeal is reviewed by an Appeal Commission created by the Minister. The Appeal Commission consists of 3 members. Member can be employees of the Ministry and/or invited professionals. Members shall be independent and have no conflict of interest with any applications submitted.

A decision is made by a simple the majority of the Commission. A Commission member does not have the right to avoid voting on the Decision. Any member in a minority who does not agree the decision of the majority, has the right to attach his/her opinion to the Decision of the Commission.

Commission members are not obliged to meet for the review of the appeal. The review process can take place through a review of the application by individual members. Commission members can organize joint meetings online and/or offline. The Commission is not obliged to prepare minutes of such meetings.

For the organizing Commission work, the Minister may appoint an organizing group from the staff of the Ministry. Alternatively, the CIF AU may be asked to carry out this task. The designated group/CIF AU supports Commission members to collect the data, request the information and other organizational issues.

The decision of the Appeal Commission shall be justified and include the reasons for the rejection and/or the approval of the Appeal.

The Appeal Commission reviews only the original application evaluated by the CIF AU/Awards Committee. The Applicant has no right to appeal about the outcome of an evaluation of any other application.

The Decision of Appeal Commission is submitted to the Minister for the final approval. The final results will be sent to the AC.

The Decision of the Ministry is subject of appeal in court (according to the Georgian legislation) together with the decision of the Committee.

An Applicant has right to withdraw his/her appeal any time before the Decision by the Commission. In such a case, the Commission does not continue to review the appeal.

13. Audit Procedures

Successful applicants shall conduct audit of the actual expenditures after the completion of the project.

Auditor shall be selected based on the Terms of Reference as defined by Annex 11 of this document.

Costs of the Audit is eligible under the project budget.

Applicant shall submit to the Ministry Audit Report and Management Letter within 2 months after completion of the project. In case applicant fails to submit Audit Report and Management Letter to the Ministry, it will be obliged to reimburse whole received amount within 10 working days after expiration of 2 months submission period.

The second and final payment will be made based on the results of the approved audit report.

In case submitted Audit Report and Management Letter is qualified and/or any discrepancies discovered between the approved budget and actual expenditures, and/or ineligible costs have been spent by the successful applicant, applicant is obliged to reimburse such occurred difference within 10 working days after submission of the Audit Report to the Ministry or request to deduct such amount from the final payable amount.

14. Confidentiality and avoidance of conflict of interest

All parties involved in the CIF must adhere to the highest ethical standards including avoiding all conflicts of interest. The following guidelines should be followed during grant proposal submission, evaluation and implementation period. More detailed guidelines have been suggested for the grant proposal Evaluators (Annex 2).

CoI will be interpreted but in no way limited to the following: any past, present or prospective economic, financial and private direct and/or indirect (e.g. through relatives or partners) interest, as well as ownership or other links between proposed grant project staff and senior management of the CIF grant submitted/holder HEIs and the staff of the CIF AU as well as members of the AC and individual proposal evaluators.

Where any CIF proposed grant project staff and senior management of the CIF grant holder HEIs directly and/or indirectly (through relatives or partners) has an economic, financial and/or private interest in, any other association or other organization (including any vendor of goods or services) with which a CIF grant holder HEI has entered into, or is considering entering into, any contract or other transaction, such a staff member shall disclose in writing to the CIF AU all material facts as to the relationship or interest. The CIF AU must promptly inform the AC. Individuals with conflicts of interest must reclude themselves from participating in any part of the decisions related to the transaction giving rise to the conflict.

Each case of fraud, waste or misuse of project resources or property identified by the proposed grant project staff of the CIF grant holder HEI shall be reported in writing to the rector of the HEI. Should the rector fail to undertake any action for suspending such fraud, waste or misuse, the issue shall be submitted to the AC in writing by the same staff, simultaneously sending a copy of such notification to the person having committed the suspected act of fraud, waste or misuse.

CIF AU, the AC and the Consulting Company who have access to the CIF grant proposals must sign Confidentiality Statement (Annex 7a). The Consulting Company must also ensure that every evaluator (from the Pool of Evaluators) signs a Confidentiality Agreement. This will cover the period of grant implementation and may be extended by the MES as they see fit.

The template Confidentiality Statement (Annex 7a) will be provided by the CIF AU.

The CIF AU will undertake reasonable efforts to ensure that all participating organizations and team members retain all rights to ideas and intellectual property, as applicable by implementing the Confidentiality Statement. The CIF will not share submissions with any parties outside of the AC, the Consulting Company and evaluators. However, it is the responsibility of participating HEIs to ensure that their proposals provide information without including confidential intellectual property. Where this is not possible, the HEI should notify the CIF AU team and the AC and ensure that all such information is clearly marked as confidential.

CIF List of annexes

A1	Guidelines for Applicants
A2	Assessment Criteria and Guidelines for Evaluators
A3	Draft Proposal Submission Form
A3a	Project Deliverables and Monitoring Plan
A3b	Citizen Engagement Plan
A4	Budget Template
A5	CV Template
A6	JV_ Consortium agreement Template
A7a	Confidentiality Statement – CIF staff
A7b	Confidentiality Statement – Applicant
A8	CIF Grant Applicant’s Statement
A9	Draft Grants Financing Agreement
A10a	Financial Report Form
A10b	Progress Report Form
A11	Draft Terms of Reference For the selection of Audit Consultant