



ICPF Return Grants

Tender Documentation

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OF THE ASCR



Spolufinancováno
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Abbreviations and Explanations

DMP	Data Management Plan
FAIR	Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
GA	Grant Agency
GAČR	Czech Science Foundation
ICPF	Institute of Chemical Process Fundamentals of the CAS
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
OP JAK	Operational Program Johann Amos Comenius
RIS3	Research and Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialization
WoS	Web of Science

Definition of Terms

Research and Development (R&D) Activity

The performance of work by a researcher (see the term Researcher below) in an employment relationship with a research organization.

Principal Investigator of a Return Grant

A researcher returning from a career break (see the term Career Break) to R&D activity, who is implementing a return grant (see the term Return Grant), or under whose supervision the return grant is being implemented.

Career Break

A period lasting at least 180 calendar days (no maximum duration is set) during which the researcher (the applicant for a return grant) was unable to fully carry out R&D activities due to maternity or parental leave, long-term care, or long-term illness

It is permitted for a researcher on a career break to simultaneously perform R&D work in an employment relationship at a maximum of 0.3 FTE¹ per month on average over the months in which this work was performed. However, in no month may the R&D FTE exceed 0.5. For FTE calculation, the month in which the researcher begins R&D work during the career break is counted from the start date of this work, and the month in which the researcher ends the R&D work is counted up to the end date

A career break can be interrupted when the personal barrier temporarily ceases to apply to the researcher. The duration of the career break before and after such interruptions is cumulative, provided that the total length of all interruptions does not exceed 30 calendar days. The minimum duration of 180 calendar days is extended by the number of days of such interruptions (i.e., if interrupted for 30 days, the career break, including all interruptions, must last at least 210 days).

Progress Report

A report submitted at regular intervals (at least once every six months) by the principal investigator of the return grant. The interim activity report is one of the mandatory deliverables of the return grant, and its submission is a condition for recognizing the eligibility of unit costs.

Ph.D. Student

A Ph.D. student is a person enrolled in a university's doctoral study program (full-time or part-time).

¹ This is the amount of time commitment at a given institution in the field of R&D.

Return Grant

A research grant awarded specifically to researchers returning from maternity or parental leave, or after a career interruption due to long-term care or long-term illness (i.e., after a Career Break).

Researcher / Research Staff

For this call, a Researcher is a worker who creates new or expands existing knowledge, typically by directing and/or conducting activities that involve the conception or development of new knowledge, processes, methods, and systems, and by applying scientific concepts and theories. For this call, researchers are considered those who have completed at least a master's degree, are employed by the relevant organization, and are engaged in R&D activities.

Junior Researcher

A Junior Researcher is a researcher for whom no more than 7 years have elapsed since being awarded their Ph.D. (from the dissertation defense date) or its equivalent (level 8 of the ISCED). This period is extended by time spent on maternity and parental leave, long-term illness (more than 90 days), family caregiving (more than 90 days), pre-certification training, or military service. The return grant applicant must highlight these circumstances in their CV and is required to document them (e.g., proof of maternity/parental leave). The 7-year period is assessed as of the return grant application's submission date.

Senior Researcher

A Senior Researcher is a researcher for whom more than 7 years have elapsed since being awarded their Ph.D. (from the dissertation defense date) or its equivalent (level 8 of the ISCED). This period is extended by time spent on maternity and parental leave, long-term illness (more than 90 days), family caregiving (more than 90 days), pre-certification training, or military service. The return grant applicant must highlight these circumstances in their CV and is required to document them (e.g., proof of maternity/parental leave). The 7-year period is assessed as of the return grant application's submission date.

Final Report

A report must be prepared and submitted by the principal investigator of the return grant upon its completion.

A. General Settings for Return Grants

A.1 Compliance with the Return Call and MEYS Policies

1. Return Grants at ICPF will be provided per Call No. 02_24_037 “Returns” conditions under the OP JAK Program. The full wording of Call No. 02_24_037 “Returns” conditions under OP JAK is available at https://opjak.cz/vyzvy/vyzva-c-02_24_037-navraty/.
- 1.1. The objective of return grants is to help ensure that career interruptions due to maternity/parental leave, long-term illness, or long-term care of a child or close person do not lead to the termination or significant slowing down of further professional engagement of researchers with strong potential for qualified employment.
- 1.2. The following activities are excluded from return grants:
 - new construction, building work;
 - purchase of real estate;
 - conducting economic activities in the sense of offering goods and services on the market (e.g., contract research, provision of research services, etc.);
 - outsourcing of project activities (it is not permitted to subcontract an entire supported activity to another entity);
 - teaching within study programmes.
- 1.3. It is not permitted to combine the costs of a return grant with support provided under the Group of Grant Projects “Return Grants” funded by GA ČR; otherwise, the costs of a return grant implemented with OP JAK resources will be considered ineligible.
2. Return Grants will be provided in compliance with the policies of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (equal opportunities, sustainable development, state aid)
 - 2.1. Equal Opportunities
 - 2.1.1. In the area of equal opportunities, return grants will ensure compliance with the following horizontal principles:
 - gender equality;
 - non-discrimination based on gender, race, ethnic origin, religious belief, worldview, disability, age, or sexual orientation.
 - 2.1.2. In the grant application, the applicant will indicate, according to the contribution level to the specific horizontal principle, whether the project is neutral, positive, or specifically targeted toward that principle. The return grant must not conflict with any horizontal principle.
 - 2.1.3. The return grant's compliance with the principles of equal opportunities will be verified during the project eligibility assessment process.
 - 2.2. Sustainable Development
 - 2.2.1. Return grants must be implemented so that they will not lead to increased environmental burdens and associated costs in the future, while also ensuring that investments are resilient to environmental risks.
 - 2.3. State Aid
 - 2.3.1. The return grant does not constitute state aid within the meaning of Article 107(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU and will be provided under the following conditions:
 - the supported researcher may only carry out non-economic activities as defined in paragraph 20 of the R&D&I Framework;

- the know-how of the supported researcher must not be used for the economic activity of the research organization in which they are employed, to avoid providing an advantage within the meaning of state aid rules.
- 2.3.2. To confirm the above conditions, a scan of the employment contract between ICPF and the supported researcher will be provided to OP JAK. This will demonstrate that the researcher will perform exclusively non-economic activities during the support period under the return grant.

A.2 Basic Parameters of Return Grants

A.2.1 Eligible Principal Investigators

1. An eligible applicant (principal investigator) for a return grant is a researcher who meets the following criteria:
 - 1.1. as of the date of submission of the return grant application, is either a student enrolled in a doctoral study programme or has previously completed such studies, i.e., holds the academic title Ph.D. (or its equivalent); and concurrently
is currently on a career break (this must be documented by the applicant with confirmation from the relevant authority or equivalent evidence), or no more than 12 months have elapsed between the end of the career break and the date of submission of the return grant application (the applicant must, as of the date of application submission, provide confirmation from the relevant authority (or equivalent) proving that the period since the career break does not exceed 12 months). If ICPF holds the relevant documents, these may also be used for this purpose, i.e., through internal verification/documentation from the HR system.
2. Return grants will be awarded to specific principal investigators—researchers returning to research after a career break.
3. A researcher may serve as principal investigator for only one return grant.
4. The principal investigator is responsible for managing the return grant.
5. The principal investigator's involvement in the return grant must be 0.5 to 1.0 FTE each month throughout the return grant.

A.2.2 Principal Investigator's Team

1. The principal investigator may involve additional members of a supporting professional team – professional/technical/other relevant staff – who participate under their supervision in implementing the return grant (these team members are not returning from a career break).
2. The team (excluding the principal investigator) may consist of up to 4 additional members, with the total sum of their FTEs (excluding the principal investigator) not exceeding 2 FTE.
3. The maximum FTE for an individual team member is 1.0. The FTE must correspond to the job description and the overall nature of the return grant.

A.2.3 Mentor

1. The return grant may optionally include a mentor. This is a researcher employed at ICPF who provides the principal investigator with professional and methodological support.
2. The mentor's maximum involvement is 0.2 FTE (maximum per month for the entire duration of the return grant).
3. The minimum qualification requirements for the mentor are that the mentor be a senior researcher with adequate experience in the field relevant to the return grant.

A.2.4 Contribution for Child or Dependent Care

1. The purpose is to contribute to expenses that are expected to arise for the principal investigator of the return grant in connection with the long-term personal care of a child who has not yet started compulsory pre-school education, or in connection with the long-term personal care of a dependent person, during the time the principal investigator is implementing the return grant and is therefore unable to provide this care.
2. The principal investigator of the return grant is entitled to the contribution for each commenced calendar month in which they meet the above condition of caring for a child or dependent person while the return grant is being implemented.

A.3 Grant Duration

1. The return grant must be completed before 30 June 2029.
2. The duration of return grants is a minimum of 1 year and a maximum of 3 years.
3. The return grant may be interrupted, provided the planned end date does not exceed 30 June 2029. The period of interruption is not counted toward the duration of the return grant.

A.4 Application of Open Science Principles

1. A mandatory condition for funding a return grant is the application of open science principles as an approach to the scientific process based on open collaboration and effective dissemination of knowledge. For effective and practical implementation of cooperation in applying open science principles, published project results must adhere to the principle of *as open as possible, as closed as necessary*.
2. The principal investigator of the return grant is specifically required to ensure:
 - open access to peer-reviewed scientific publications resulting from research funded under the project;
 - management of research data following FAIR principles and open access to these data.
3. Open Access to Peer-Reviewed Scientific Publications
 - 3.1. If such publications arise, the principal investigator must ensure open access to peer-reviewed scientific publications related to the research results. In particular, they must ensure:
 - 3.1.1. the deposit of the machine-readable electronic final publisher's version or the final version of the peer-reviewed manuscript accepted for publication (i.e., the version incorporating all revisions from peer review) in a trusted repository without undue delay after the date of publication¹;
 - 3.1.2. immediate open access (i.e., no embargo period, free of charge, permanent and unrestricted) to the deposited publication with the possibility of further reuse under the terms of the latest available version of the Creative Commons² Attribution International (CC BY 4.0)³; public

¹ The date of publication is considered the date of publication by the publisher, specifically for digital forms of publication.

² Creative Commons licenses are a set of public licenses that bring new possibilities in the field of publishing copyrighted works and strengthen the position of the author in deciding under what conditions the work will be made publicly available. CC BY 4.0 license – allows the work to be freely shared (reproduced and distributed through any medium in any format) and modified (remixed, changed and based on the original work for any purpose, including commercial) provided that the condition of attribution is met. For an explanation of other variants, see the summary link <http://www.creativecommons.cz/licence-cc/varianty-licence/>.

³ If the publisher does not allow the CC BY license, a more restrictive license may be accepted in exceptional cases. This must be proven.

license; monographs and other long-form text formats may be made available under a public license restricting modification or commercial use (e.g., CC BY-NC 4.0, CC BY-ND 4.0, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0);

- 3.1.3. provision of information (references) about any other research outputs or tools necessary to verify the conclusions of the peer-reviewed publication as part of the record (metadata) of the publication in the trusted repository.
- 3.2. The principal investigator must retain copyright to the publication to the extent necessary to meet these obligations.
- 3.3. The metadata of deposited publications in the repository must be publicly available and machine-readable, complying with FAIR⁷ principles and the General Recommendation for Metadata Description⁴.
4. Research Data Management
 - 4.1. The principal investigator shall ensure responsible management of research data collected or generated during the project following FAIR principles, in particular through:
 - 4.1.1. developing and regularly updating a Data Management Plan (DMP) in line with FAIR principles. The DMP must be submitted by the principal investigator for review at ICPF, initially 6 months after the start of the physical implementation of the return grant, and subsequently updated and submitted as needed;
 - 4.1.2. depositing research data, especially those associated with peer-reviewed scientific publications, as soon as possible in a trusted repository following the DMP;
 - 4.1.3. ensuring open access to research data deposited in the repository, following the DMP, preferably under the latest available version of the Creative Commons Attribution International (CC BY 4.0) public license or its equivalent, where appropriate. The principle governs Open access to data “as open as possible, as closed as necessary,” considering privacy, personal data protection, confidentiality, legitimate business interests, third-party rights, national security, or other legitimate interests and restrictions. If open access (to some or all data) is not provided, this must be justified in the DMP, and the justification must be regularly reviewed;
 - 4.1.4. providing information (references) about any other research outputs or tools and instruments necessary for the reuse or validation of the research data as part of the record (metadata) of the research data in a trusted repository (unless there are legitimate reasons to restrict such information).
 - 4.2. Metadata of deposited research data in the repository must be publicly available (to the extent consistent with legitimate interests or restrictions) and machine-readable, following the General Recommendation for Metadata Description of research results (particularly publications and data)⁵.
 - 4.3. ICPF will also require applicants for return grants to adopt additional open science practices⁶.
 - 4.4. ICPF will cover the following costs (beyond the return grant itself):

⁴ See General recommendations for metadata description of research outputs and research data <https://doi.org/10.48813/yt6w-6h15>.

⁵ General recommendations for metadata description of research results (especially publications and data) <https://doi.org/10.48813/yt6w-6h15>.

⁶ A more detailed explanation of the open science procedures in this call is provided in the Open Science Procedures Manual in OP JAK, which is available on the OP JAK website (<https://opjak.cz/dokumenty/otevrena-veda/>).

⁷ A more detailed description of the FAIR principles: <https://www.go-fair.org/fair-principles/>

- 4.4.1. costs related to research data management (e.g., processing and storage costs, data anonymization, etc.);
- 4.4.2. the position of data steward – a specialist in data management (a detailed description of this role is provided in the Open Science Procedures Guide for OP JAK) or a similar professional role dedicated to the coordination/management of research data;
- 4.4.3. costs of open-access publishing fees.

A.5 Gender in Research Content

1. To enhance the quality and societal relevance of research outputs, ICPF will assess and monitor, within the framework of return grants, how the return grant applicant addresses the consideration of the gender dimension in the proposed research.
2. The evaluation will focus on whether the principal investigator has adequately assessed the relevance of considering sex and/or gender within their research agenda. If such considerations arise in the subject matter, the evaluation will assess whether gender aspects are integrated into the research agenda, the applied methodology and procedures, and whether gender-related issues are sufficiently addressed in the research content.
3. If gender aspects are deemed irrelevant to the research agenda, this must be justified. ICPF will evaluate the adequacy of the justification and the arguments provided by the principal investigator.

A.6 Allocation

1. The total anticipated allocation for return grants is CZK 37,344,234.

A.7 Eligibility / Financial Parameters

1. Eligible cost items within the return grant may include:
 - research conducted by the principal investigator of the return grant (mandatory);
 - use of a mentor (optional);
 - supporting professional team (optional);
 - contribution for child or dependent care (optional);
 - costs for materials, services, and travel expenses related to implementing the return grant (optional, but capped at a maximum of **15% of the principal investigator's personnel costs** under the return grant).
2. The return grant budget is defined by the structure and justifications of the selected parameters as entered in the "Return Grant Budget Calculator" file.
3. To be financially eligible, an expenditure must meet several criteria:
 - it must comply with EU and Czech legal regulations;
 - it must comply with OP JAK rules and the support conditions;
 - it must be related to the project (the expenditure must be directly linked to the implementation of the funded project);
 - it must be reasonable and economical (i.e., incurred following the principles of economy, effectiveness, and efficiency, and reflect prices customary in the place and time);
 - it must have been incurred by the beneficiary during the grant implementation period;
 - it must be properly verifiable and documented.

A.8 Grant Scheme Timeline

The grant process can be divided into several phases:

1. **Grant Call**—This rolling call begins on 1 June 2025. It runs until 30 April 2028 (35 months) and includes 9 partial deadlines for submitting applications. The first deadline is 30 September 2025, the second is 31 December 2025, and all subsequent deadlines fall on the last day of every fourth month thereafter.
2. **Evaluation Process** – begins on the first day of the month following the partial deadline for applications and lasts up to 3 months.
3. **Announcement of Return Grant Evaluation Results** – takes place no later than 10 working days after the conclusion of the grant application evaluation process.
4. **Implementation of Return Grants** – may begin as early as the first day of the month following the announcement of the results of the first partial deadline. The applicant determines the specific duration of the return grant, with a minimum duration of 12 months and a maximum of 24 months. A return grant may be interrupted for justified reasons, provided the implementation must end no later than 30 June 2029.
5. **Submission of Interim and Final Grant Reports** – interim reports must be submitted for each 6-month period of the return grant implementation, with the report due no later than the last day of the final month of each 6-month period (except for the last period). No interim report is submitted for the final period of the return grant; instead, a final report covering the entire grant period must be submitted no later than the last day of the month following the end of the return grant.
6. **Evaluation of Return Grants** – begins on the first day of the month following submission of the final report for each return grant and lasts up to 5 months.

A.9 Expected Outcomes and Deliverables

1. Indicators (the definition of Indicators is specified in Call No. 02_24_037 “Returns” under OP JAK, available at https://opjak.cz/vyzvy/vyzva-c-02_24_037-navraty/):
 - Publication Indicators
 - 214 021 **Publications from supported projects**
 - Grant applications
 - 203 111 **Number of grant applications submitted – national**
2. Reports beyond the Indicators
 - Interim activity report
 - Final activity report
3. Additional outputs and results beyond the Indicators
 - Number of conducted grant call rounds
 - Evaluation of the return grant scheme
 - Establishment of the new ICPG Grant Agency (GA ICPF)
 - Creation of a new internal electronic portal with a module for submitting internal projects
 - Number of conference/seminar/workshop attendances
 - Number of granted accesses to libraries and databases

B. Application Requirements for Return Grants

A return grant application is a comprehensive set of information and documents necessary for assessing its scientific merit, quality, and feasibility. The application must be completed using the prescribed “Return Grant Application” form, which will be part of the call documentation. The application **must be submitted in English** and consists of the following sections:

1. Basic applicant identification details – first name, last name, position at ICPF, including the research group in which the return grant will be implemented.
2. Basic return grant identification details – title, abstract, keywords, description of project objectives.
3. Justification of the scientific focus of the return grant – research focus of the return grant, summary of the current state of knowledge, explanation of motivation and justification of the originality and timeliness of the topic, description of the approach including methodological procedures and instrumentation, risk analysis associated with project implementation.
4. Information about the project team – identification of the implementation team, including expected working capacity and job descriptions.
5. Project implementation schedule – timeline for carrying out individual tasks.
6. Justification of individual budget items – information on the necessity of each budget item.
7. Alignment with the RIS3 Strategy – brief description of how the return grant project aligns with the National RIS3 Strategy.
8. Gender dimension in research content – brief description of how the gender dimension is considered within the return grant.
9. Information on compliance with Open Science principles – brief description of data management within the return grant and information on data availability.
10. List of mandatory attachments to the application.

B.1 Basic Applicant Identification

B.1.1 Applicant Identification

The applicant for a return grant must meet the requirements for a principal investigator as defined in Section 1 of Chapter A.2.1 Eligible Principal Investigators. These are applicants who meet the conditions of a career break.

The applicant for a return grant **may or may not** have an employment relationship with ICPF. Therefore, individuals who have never been employed at ICPF can also apply for a return grant.

An applicant for a return grant **may be** on a career break when applying. However, if the return grant is awarded, the career break will end as of the start date of the return grant implementation.

The applicant for a return grant must demonstrate their eligibility using the mandatory attachments to the application as defined in *Chapter B.10 Mandatory Attachments to the Application*.

The applicant must also demonstrate their professional qualification by submitting a curriculum vitae, which is a mandatory attachment to the return grant application (see the list of mandatory attachments in Chapter B.10). The CV must be submitted in English and should include a concise, structured resume and a summary of activities covering the applicant’s entire career in the field relevant to the proposed return grant. The CV may also include a list of the applicant’s most important publications with citation counts, teaching activities, and project involvement before the career break. The maximum length is 2 A4 pages using standard font (size 11, single spacing).

In addition to the above, the **CV** must also include at a minimum the following information for identification purposes:

- First name and last name
- Date of birth
- Highest level of education achieved
- Date of Ph.D. defense, or in the case of a Ph.D. student, the start date of study
- Definition of the career break; if the HR department at ICPF does not already have the relevant documentation, the applicant must provide these documents as part of the mandatory attachments (see B.10 Mandatory Attachments to the Application). If ICPF already possesses the necessary documentation, the application may simply refer to this fact
- ORCID (Open Researcher and Contributor ID), Scopus Author ID, or ResearcherID (WoS)

B.1.2 Workplace Identification

A return grant may only be implemented at ICPF.

A return grant may be carried out within any research group according to [the ICPF organizational chart](#). In the application, the applicant must specify which research group will host the implementation of the return grant. The head of this research group will provide a brief statement on the applicant's integration and their potential to contribute to the research group's development (see the mandatory attachment specified in Chapter B.10 Mandatory Attachments to the Application).

The alignment of the return grant's research focus with the long-term strategy of the relevant research group (<https://www.icpf.cas.cz/en/departments/>) will be assessed during the evaluation process (see Chap. C.2 Areas of Evaluation for Return Grants Including Weighting of Individual Criteria, Section 1.6).

B.2 Basic Project Identification

Basic project identification details include:

- Project title – submitted in both Czech and English
- Abstract – see details in *Chapter B.2.1*
- Keywords – max of 5 keywords separated by commas, submitted in both Czech and English
- Description of project objectives – see details in *Chapter B.2.2*

B.2.1 Abstract

The return grant abstract summarizes the scientific essence of the proposed return grant and the motivation for addressing the presented problem. It must be submitted in Czech and English and will be published on the ICPF website if it successfully receives a grant.

The abstract in each language version must not exceed 1,000 characters, including spaces

B.2.2 Project Goals

The objectives reflect the scientific aim of the return grant. Their description may be structured as bullet points. Objectives must be submitted in both Czech and English and, in the event of a successful grant award, will be published on the ICPF website

The objectives of the return grant in each language version must not exceed 500 characters, including spaces.

B.3 Justification of the Scientific Focus

The return grant application must include a justification of the scientific focus of the return grant. This is the main scientific part of the application. The justification includes:

- Motivation: An explanation of the motivation, including why the proposed topic is worth

addressing and how the proposed research will contribute to current knowledge or the innovation of existing technologies.

- Summary of the current state of knowledge: A summary of existing knowledge on the professional topic relevant to the return grant, and a description of the applicant's contribution to this topic.
- Research objectives and sub-tasks: Identification of research objectives and sub-tasks arising from a critical evaluation of the current state of knowledge.
- Justification of the originality and timeliness of the topic: explanation of what makes the proposed topic original or innovative compared to the current state of knowledge.
- Methodological procedures: Explain the approach, including methodological procedures, available instrumentation, and the workplace's readiness to implement the return grant.
- Expected project results: a narrative description of the types of expected results with an emphasis on quality (not quantity), specifying whether these are results of basic or applied research.
- Risk analysis related to project implementation: Identification of risks associated with the scientific implementation of the project, including their severity, likelihood, and proposed mitigation strategies.
- Career development plan for the return grant applicant: A brief description of the applicant's anticipated career development and plans.
- List of references: The format of the list of references should follow the conventions of the relevant field.

The justification must be written in English and no longer than 5 A4 pages using a standard font (size 11, single spacing).

B.4 Research Team

B.4.1 Principal Investigator

The principal investigator of the return grant is responsible for the scientific implementation of the grant, for achieving the grant's objectives, for administration, for submitting interim and final reports, and for the scientific quality of outputs produced within the return grant.

The return grant application must include information about the principal investigator, defining their role and the expected work commitment, which must be 0.5 to 1.0 FTE per month for the entire duration of the return grant. Failure to meet this condition may result in the return grant application being excluded from the competition.

B.4.2 PI's Team

The principal investigator (PI) may establish a professional team within the return grant to participate in implementing it, funded from the return grant budget. The professional team may include undergraduate students, Ph.D. students, postdoctoral researchers (junior researchers), and technical staff. A senior researcher may serve only as a principal investigator or mentor.

If the principal investigator proposes a professional team, the return grant application must include information about this team, defining the roles of individual members and their expected work commitment for the entire duration of the return grant. The description of the proposed team positions must include a justification for the necessity of these positions. The professional team may include a maximum of 4 members (excluding the principal investigator) with a total maximum commitment of 2.0 FTE. Exceeding these limits may result in the exclusion of the return grant application from the competition.

B.4.3 Mentor

In addition to the professional team defined in *Chapter B.4.2 Principal Investigator's Team*, the principal investigator may also propose a mentor position in the return grant application, funded from the return grant budget. A mentor may be a senior researcher employed at ICPF, with experience in the field relevant to the return grant, who will provide the principal investigator with professional and methodological support.

If the principal investigator proposes a mentor position, the return grant application must include information about the mentor, their expertise, and experience related to the thematic focus of the return grant, as well as the expected work commitment for the entire return grant. The maximum involvement of the mentor in the return grant is 0.2 FTE. Exceeding this limit may result in the return grant application being excluded from the competition.

B.5 Timeline

The duration of the return grant is limited to a minimum of 12 months and a maximum of 24 months, with the exact length determined at the applicant's discretion. The return grant may be interrupted, provided that the planned end date does not exceed 30 June 2029. The interruption period is not counted toward the duration of the return grant implementation.

The return grant application must include a timeline (schedule) of the individual tasks, objectives, and topics to be addressed within the return grant. The schedule format is not specified (a narrative explanation, table, Gantt chart, etc., are all acceptable). The schedule must indicate when the partial objectives of the return grant will be achieved.

The length of the schedule, including images and tables, is limited to a maximum of 2 A4 pages.

B.6 Budget and Justification

The return grant application must clearly and comprehensibly specify the proposed budget and its justification. The budget proposal is submitted using the "Return Grant Budget Calculator," which is a separate file included in the call documentation, and includes the following items:

Personnel costs for the principal investigator (*always subject to meeting the conditions defined in B.4.1*)

- In the calculator, the applicant specifies the FTE level and the number of months the principal investigator has been involved in implementing the return grant. The calculator will use this data to calculate the number of productive hours and the total personnel costs.
- The FTE level and the number of months of the principal investigator's involvement will be subject to evaluation by GA ICPF.

Personnel costs for the mentor (*always subject to meeting the conditions defined in B.4.3*)

- The applicant specifies the mentor's FTE level and the number of months of the mentor's involvement in implementing the return grant. The calculator will use this data to calculate the number of productive hours and the total costs for the mentor.
- The number of productive hours, i.e., the FTE level and the number of months of the mentor's involvement, will be subject to evaluation by GA ICPF.

Personnel costs for professional team members (*always subject to meeting the conditions defined in B.4.2*)

- The applicant specifies the FTE level and the number of months of involvement in implementing the return grant for each proposed position on the professional team. The calculator will use this data to calculate, for each position, the number of productive hours and the total costs.
- The number of productive hours, i.e., the FTE level and the number of months of involvement of professional team members, will be subject to evaluation by ICPF.

Contribution for child or dependent care

- The exact amount is specified in the “Return Grant Budget Calculator” file.
- The applicant specifies the number of months, the list of persons, and the expected duration of drawing the contribution.
- The contribution will be paid as part of the salary.

Material costs related to the implementation of the return grant

- These costs may not exceed 15% of the requested personnel costs for the principal investigator.
- Eligible material costs may include, for example, materials, services, short-term trips of the project team, etc.—i.e., costs related to the implementation and dissemination of the return grant.
- If the applicant proposes material costs in the return grant application, they must justify the necessity of these costs and proceed following the principles of economy, purposefulness, and efficiency (costs must reflect prices customary in the place and time). If all cost items are not properly justified, this may result in budget reductions or exclusion of the return grant application from the competition.

B.7 Mobility

The return grant application does not support long-term outbound mobility of the principal investigator or any member of the project team. Long-term outbound mobility is defined as a foreign stay of at least one month.

Short-term trips by the project team to conferences and workshops are supported within the return grant. Such trips are expected to involve active participation with a presentation of project results, either in the form of a talk or a poster. Funding for participation in short-term trips from the return grant (NG) is limited by the maximum amount of material costs (15% of the requested personnel costs for the principal investigator, see *Chapter B.6*). For this reason, any additional costs for short-term trips within the return grant can also be covered from ICPF institutional resources.

If the applicant requests funding for short-term trips within the return grant, they must properly justify their participation, provide details about the trip, and **specify which portion of the costs will be covered by the return grant and which portion by ICPF institutional resources.**

Failure to include this information in the budget justification may result in a budget reduction or the exclusion of the return grant application from the competition.

B.8 PI Education

Costs for the education of the principal investigator or other team members are ineligible for return grants. Education for return grant principal investigators will be provided through institutional training.

Recommended educational activities for the principal investigator of the return grant include:

- Project management
- Managerial competencies
- Principles of Open Science
- Courses on effective academic writing
- Presentation skills

B.9 Care Allowance

The return grant may include a contribution for child or dependent care (if relevant to the career break). This is an important motivational element designed to facilitate an easier return after a career break. The purpose is to help cover expenses that are expected to arise for the principal investigator of the return grant in connection with long-term personal care of a child who has not yet started compulsory pre-school education, or in connection with long-term personal care of a dependent

person, during the time the principal investigator is implementing the return grant and is therefore unable to provide this care.

The principal investigator of the return grant is entitled to the contribution for child or dependent care for each commenced calendar month in which the above condition is met and the return grant is being implemented.

If the return grant includes a contribution for child or dependent care, the budget specification in the return grant application must include this item and its time frame. The contribution amounts to CZK 9,114.00 per person per month. The application must specify for which person(s) the contribution is being requested and include the necessary documentation proving entitlement to this contribution. For more information, see *Chapter B.10 Mandatory Attachments* to the Application.

B.10 Compliance with RIS3 Strategy

The return grant application must include a description of the alignment of the proposed topic with the RIS3 Strategy. This should be a brief identification of whether the research objective aligns with a specific thematic area or mission, and if so, which one. The return grant must be consistent with the topics of the National RIS3 Strategy, as listed in Appendix 1 “Thematic Area Cards” (Version 6) (topics within specialization domains and RIS3 missions) (<https://ris3.gov.cz/en>).

The description of the alignment with the National RIS3 Strategy must not exceed 2,000 characters, including spaces.

B.11 Gender Dimension

The return grant application must include a statement on the gender dimension within the return grant. For guidance on identifying the gender dimension, see the document “Gender Dimension in R&D Projects under OP JAK.” (<https://opjak.cz/dokumenty/genderova-dimenze/>) In this section, the applicant must indicate whether the thematic focus of the return grant is sensitive to the gender dimension and, if so, how this gender dimension is integrated into the content and implementation of the return grant. If the gender dimension is irrelevant to the specific return grant, the applicant must provide an appropriate justification in the application.

The return grant application must also include a statement on compliance with the horizontal principles of equal opportunities. Regarding equal opportunities, the return grant must ensure adherence to the following horizontal principles: gender equality; non-discrimination based on gender, race, ethnic origin, religious belief, worldview, disability, age, or sexual orientation.

Based on the contribution level to the specific horizontal principle, the applicant must specify in the application whether their project is neutral, positive, or specifically targeted toward that principle. The return grant must not conflict with any of the horizontal principles.

Compliance of the return grant with the principles of equal opportunities will be verified during the project eligibility assessment process.

The specification of the gender dimension in the return grant must not exceed 1 A4 page using a standard font (size 11, single spacing).

B.12 Open Science Compliance

The return grant application must include information on how the principles of [Open Science](#) will be observed. Detailed information on the application of Open Science principles is provided in *Chapter A.4*. The required information includes, in particular:

- A brief description of the research data that will be generated, used, or collected within the return grant, including its nature and file specifications.
- Availability and dissemination of research results and research data, following the principle that research results and research data are published unless there are justified reasons not to do so.

The principal investigator of the return grant commits to submitting a DMP no later than the date of submission of the first interim report. The DMP must be updated and submitted with each subsequent interim or final report.

The information on compliance with Open Science principles in the return grant must not exceed 2,000 characters, including spaces.

B.13 Mandatory Attachments

The applicant for a return grant must include the following mandatory attachments with the application:

- **Applicant's professional CV** (for more details, see *Chapter B.1 Applicant Identification*)
- If the applicant does not have an employment relationship with ICPF, they must **confirm the relevant authority documenting the career break**, including the exact start and (if applicable) end dates. The confirmation must indicate the duration of the career break. If the applicant has an employment relationship with ICPF at the time of application submission, this confirmation is not required, as the information is recorded in the ICPF HR system.
- If the applicant does not have an employment relationship with ICPF, they must submit **a copy of the diploma for their highest level of education**.
- **Motivation letter from the applicant** for the return grant
- **Affidavit declaring** that, if awarded the return grant at ICPF, **the applicant will not simultaneously serve as principal investigator for any other return grant**.
- If the applicant is a Ph.D. student, they must submit an **affidavit stating that the topic addressed in the return grant is not identical to or significantly overlapping with the topic of their dissertation**.
- **Statement from the head of the research group** in which the return grant will be implemented, regarding the integration of the return grant applicant into the research group and their potential to contribute to the development of the workplace (max. length 1 A4 page using standard font).
- **Return Grant Budget Calculator** (for more details, see *Chapter B.8 Budget*)
- **If the applicant is requesting a contribution for care, they must submit:** For child care, a copy of the child's birth certificate. For care of a dependent person: copies of documentation proving the provision of field, outpatient, or respite services to the person cared for by the principal investigator / copy of the application for care allowance submitted by the person cared for / copy of the decision granting the care allowance to the person cared for / copy of a medical certificate stating that personal care for the dependent person is necessary even after using long-term caregiver leave.

B.14 Grant Application Submission

If, at the time of collecting return grant applications, an electronic system for submitting project applications at ICPF is not available, the return grant application must be submitted in printed form to the Director's Office registry. Upon submission, the date of receipt will be recorded, and the application will be assigned an official registry number.

If an electronic system for submitting project applications at ICPF is available, the application must be submitted through this system. The system will record the date of receipt and assign the official registry number.

If minor formal deficiencies are identified in the return grant application, the applicant will be asked to provide all necessary corrections no later than 1 month from the date of the request. Identifying serious formal deficiencies in the return grant application may result in the application being excluded from the competition.

C. Evaluation Process for Return Grant Applications

C.1 Evaluation Process

1. Process of Evaluating Return Grant Applications

The evaluation process for return grant applications consists of five phases. Each project proposal receives a score based on predefined criteria (see *Section C.2*), and each project is evaluated by an evaluation committee composed of a coordinator, a rapporteur, and two reviewers. The individual evaluation phases are:

1.1. Receipt of Return Grant Applications, Formal Evaluation, and Eligibility Check – coordinated by the GA ICPF coordinator, who assesses compliance with the required formal elements:

- Requirements for proving the eligibility of the applicant and the application (eligibility of the return grant applicant, eligibility of the application);
- Completeness of the project proposal (all required parts, including attachments);
- Failure to meet the above conditions may result in exclusion from the competition.

If minor formal deficiencies are identified in the return grant application, the applicant will be asked to provide all necessary corrections within 1 month of the request. Identification of serious formal deficiencies in the return grant application is grounds for exclusion from the competition.

1.2. Scientific Quality Evaluation (Peer Review) – coordinated by the GA ICPF rapporteur based on reviews by internal and external reviewers selected by the rapporteur for each application (reviewer selection process detailed in *Subsection 2*). Evaluation of scientific quality includes assessment of:

- Quality and originality of the project proposal, formulation of objectives, and feasibility of achieving them;
- Alignment of the project topic with ICPF's thematic focus;
- Approach and methodology, its originality and feasibility;
- Applicant's qualifications (number of publications, international collaborations, conference participation);
- Potential for further career development (career plan).

1.3. Evaluation of Proposed Costs – coordinated by the GA ICPF rapporteur based on reviews by reviewers selected as described in *Subsection 2*. Reviewers assess the justification of individual cost items (appropriateness and FTE levels in relation to the project and anticipated results).

1.4. Overall Scoring of All Project Proposals – carried out by the evaluation committee, which, based on the prepared reviews, compares the quality of all project proposals and proposes a scoring for all evaluated applications. If necessary, applicants may be invited to present their project proposal in an interview. In the case of a tie in scores, the deciding criterion will be the applicant's prior scientific achievements. Based on the scoring, applications will be ranked from highest to lowest. Projects with the highest scores will be supported up to the limit of available funding.

1.5. Announcement of Evaluation Results and Grant Awards – coordinated by the GA ICPF coordinator. All applicants will be informed about the evaluation of their project proposals and the awarding or non-awarding of financial resources for implementation.

2. Selection of Reviewers for Evaluating Return Grant Applications

Selection of reviewers for evaluating project proposals is carried out by the GA ICPF rapporteur based on the criteria below to ensure a transparent, objective, independent, and expert assessment of each application. Minimum requirements and criteria for selecting reviewers are:

2.1. Number of Reviewers – each project proposal must be assessed by at least two reviewers, with at least one external reviewer (an expert who is free from conflicts of interest, i.e., not employed at ICPF and without other obligations that could compromise impartiality).

2.2. Minimum Qualification Criteria for Reviewers – reviewers must meet the following professional requirements:

- Education and Expertise – holder of a Ph.D. (or equivalent) in a relevant field, with significant scientific results in the given research area;
- Active Publication Record in the last 5 years in reputable scholarly journals (ideally indexed in WoS/Scopus);
- Experience in Evaluating Scientific Projects or Grant Applications;
- No Conflict of Interest with the applicant (e.g., not the applicant's supervisor or co-author of publications with the applicant in the last 5 years).

C.2 Evaluation Criteria and Weighting

1. GA ICPF Criteria for Evaluating Return Grant Project Proposals:

1.1. Eligibility of the Return Grant Applicant (yes/no)

Is the applicant eligible to submit a return grant application? Does the applicant meet the requirements in line with the defined parameters for an eligible principal investigator and the general conditions of the OP JAK call? Failure to meet these conditions is grounds for exclusion.

1.2. Eligibility of the Return Grant Application (yes/no)

Is the project proposal in line with the defined parameters of the return grant and the general conditions of the OP JAK call (especially for excluded activities)? Failure to meet these conditions is grounds for exclusion.

1.3. Scientific Quality and Standard of the Project Proposal (maximum 24 points)

Does the applicant demonstrate knowledge of the topic and expertise? (8 points) Can they critically evaluate the current state of knowledge and justify the need for further research? (8 points) Does the text of the proposal rely on quality sources? (4 points) Is the project schedule realistic? (4 points)

1.4. Formulation of Objectives and Feasibility of Achievement (maximum 16 points)

Are the project's objectives well-defined, sufficiently ambitious, original, and achievable? (12 points) Does the applicant have a clear idea of what they want to achieve? (4 points)

1.5. Methodological Aspects of the Project – Approach and Originality (maximum 12 points)

Are the methods for achieving the objectives described in sufficient detail and specificity? (6 points) Does the applicant understand how the objectives will be achieved, including analysis methods? (6 points)

1.6. Alignment and Benefit to the Institution (maximum 8 points)

Is the project proposal aligned with the institution's research focus (2 points), the research group's focus (4 points), or the institution's infrastructure and equipment (2 points)?

1.7. Alignment with the Topic and Approach of the Ph.D. Dissertation for Ph.D. Students (yes/no)

Is it specified in the proposal how the topic of the proposed project does or does not overlap with the dissertation topic? Excessive overlap or insufficient specification is grounds for exclusion.

1.8. Applicant's Qualifications (maximum 20 points)

Assessment of the applicant's CV and expertise (previous and current scientific activity, international collaboration, conference presentations, supervision of students) (16 points). Does the applicant have the skills and experience, including the potential to lead a team? (4 points)

1.9. Applicant's Career Development Potential (maximum 8 points)

Is there sufficient potential for the applicant to remain in the field (career plan) in connection with this return project? (4 points) What is the applicant's opportunity for career advancement (e.g., habilitation, leading a project or group)? (4 points)

1.10. Justification of Individual Budget Items (maximum 12 points)

Appropriateness of proposed costs (6 points) and FTE levels (including the team) (6 points) in relation to the project and expected outcomes.

1.11. Alignment with the RIS3 Strategy (yes/no)

Does the return grant application include a description of alignment with the RIS3 Strategy?

1.12. Gender Dimension in Research Content and Compliance with Horizontal Principles (yes/no)

Does the return grant application include a statement on the gender dimension within the grant? Is this dimension discussed? Does the application include a statement on compliance with horizontal principles? This criterion has only a statistical value.

1.13. Compliance with Open Science Principles (yes/no)

Does the return grant application include a description of the research data that will be used, generated, and collected within the project? Does it specify how the research data will be published or provide justification for non-publication? This criterion has only a statistical value.

2. Overall Scoring of the Project Proposal:

- 85–100 points – excellent
- 70–84 points – very good
- 55–69 points – good
- 40–54 points – average
- 0–39 points – below average

The reviewer will also provide an overall narrative evaluation of the project proposal:

- Strengths of the project:
- Weaknesses of the project:
- Recommendation for funding (yes/no):

D. Implementation of Return Grants

D.1 Administration and Monitoring

1. Project Start and Implementation Setup:

- Contract Signing: If there is no existing employment relationship between ICPF and the successful return grant applicant, an employment contract will be concluded for a position corresponding to the principal investigator's career level based on their professional experience, following [the Career Regulations of the Czech Academy of Sciences](#). The return grant principal investigator will receive an official mandate from the Director to implement the return grant in accordance with the approved application.
- Establishment of the Grant in ICPF Internal Systems: Based on the approved return grant application, economic, accounting, and administrative records for the return grant will be created.

2. Financial and Administrative Management of the Return Grant:

- Utilization of Material Resources: The principal investigator is responsible for spending the material costs in the return grant budget, which must be managed according to the rules specified in Chapter B.6. Regular interim monitoring will also include checking expenditures to ensure compliance with the approved budget.
- Utilization of Payroll Funds: Managed administratively by the ICPF HR department following the breakdown of payroll funds defined in the return grant application and in compliance with labor law.
- Changes in Grant Implementation: Changes in the utilization of the return grant will be monitored. Appropriate measures will be taken if unauthorized changes are identified (see *Chapter E.2 Immutable Parameters*).

3. Monitoring of Scientific Progress in Grant Implementation:

- Interim Reports: The principal investigator will submit regular interim reports (every 6 months) on research activities under the return grant, in line with the details summarized in *Chapter D.3*. The GA ICPF evaluation committee will assess the scientific progress based on the submitted interim report. If progress is deemed insufficient, the committee will propose corrective measures.
- Final Report: After the completion of the return grant, the principal investigator will submit a final report no later than the last day of the calendar month following the end of the grant. The final report must be prepared following the details summarized in *Chapter F.1*. The GA ICPF evaluation committee will assess the overall scientific progress based on the submitted final report.
- Return Grant Outputs: All outputs of the return grant (publications, conference contributions, application outputs) will be recorded in the ASEP outputs database operated by the Library of the Czech Academy of Sciences. The ICPF library staff will carry out the entry of all outputs into the database in cooperation with the principal investigator. All outputs under the return grant must comply with the publicity rules of OP JAK (see *Chapter G*).

D.2 Legal Relationship with the PI

Since the return grant may only be implemented at ICPF, the legal relationship between the principal investigator of the return grant and ICPF must be defined by an employment contract between the employer (ICPF) and the employee (the principal investigator of the return grant).

If the principal investigator is a long-term employee of ICPF, the legal relationship is already defined by an existing employment contract.

If the principal investigator has not previously been employed by ICPF, an employment contract will be concluded between them for the duration of the return grant implementation. Following positive evaluations of interim reports for the return grant and based on the recommendation of the head of the research group in which the grant is implemented, the employment contract may be extended following ICPF's internal rules and [the Career Regulations of the Czech Academy of Sciences](#).

Based on the approved return grant application, an addendum to the employment contract will be concluded between ICPF and the principal investigator for the duration of the return grant, in which the principal investigator will be formally assigned to implement the project with the specified FTE.

Salary funds paid to the principal investigator will be defined following ICPF's internal salary regulations and the approved return grant application based on the defined FTE, and will be subject to social security and health insurance contributions.

D.3 Progress Report

The interim activity report for the return grant project team must be submitted by the principal investigator using the prescribed form, which will be part of the call documentation.

The interim report must be submitted by **the last day of every sixth month of the return grant implementation**.

The interim report **must be written in English** and must include the following elements:

- Basic grant identification details – see Chapter B.2.
- Basic identification details of the principal investigator and the implementation team:
 - Full name of the principal investigator
 - Full names of all other team members (including the mentor)
 - FTE level of the principal investigator
 - FTE levels of all other team members (including the mentor)
 - Name of the research group where the return grant is implemented
- Description of activities for the reporting period – a brief overview of activities carried out under the return grant, description of research work, experiments conducted, results obtained, publications, conference contributions, and collaborations with other institutions or partners.
- Assessment of progress and work on outputs – comparison of the current status with the project plan, achieved milestones, and outputs (publications, conference contributions, application outputs, etc.). Commentary on any delays or obstacles.
- Changes in the return grant – a brief description of any changes during the reporting period: changes in the project team, schedule, methodologies used, etc. A brief explanation of the reasons for these changes and their impact on the grant implementation, and any steps taken to address them. See also *Chapter E* for more details.
- Plans for the next reporting period – a brief description of the main research activities planned for the next period and the expected outputs, publication, or application goals.
- Data Management Plan (DMP) – if this is the first interim report for the return grant, the principal investigator must submit a DMP containing: (i) a brief description of the research data that will be created, used, or collected within the return grant, their nature and file specifications; (ii) availability and dissemination of research results and data in line with the principle that research results and data are published unless there are justified reasons not to do so. For subsequent interim reports, the principal investigator must update the existing DMP.

- Short-term trip report – if a short-term trip took place during the reporting period, the principal investigator must briefly describe the activities undertaken during the trip, lessons learned, and any benefits gained.
- Budget statement for the reporting period and justification – budget accounting will be completed using the Return Grant Implementation Calculator, which will be provided to the principal investigator no later than one month before the first interim report deadline. The principal investigator must complete the calculator file exactly in line with grant spending, including justification for each budget item. A mandatory attachment to the interim report is the breakdown of expenditures incurred under the grant and other relevant documents for each selected unit cost.⁷

Submission of the interim report:

If ICPF does not have an electronic system for project monitoring at the time of submission, the interim report must be submitted in printed form to the Director's Office registry. The date of receipt will be recorded, and the report will be assigned an official registry number.

If an electronic system for project monitoring at ICPF is available, interim reports must be submitted through this system. The system will record the date of receipt and assign the registry number.

If minor formal deficiencies are found in the interim report, the applicant will be asked to provide all necessary corrections no later than 1 month after the request. Identifying serious formal deficiencies in the report may result in suspension of funding or termination of the grant implementation.

Evaluation of the interim report:

The GA ICPF evaluation committee will prepare an assessment of the principal investigator's scientific progress based on the interim report. If progress is deemed insufficient, the committee will propose corrective measures.

If ICPF does not have an electronic system for project monitoring at the time of issuing the assessment, the principal investigator will be informed of it via official email.

If an electronic system is in place, the principal investigator will also be informed of the assessment through the system, which will record the date the response to the request for changes was sent and assign a registry number.

⁷ These mandatory documents are specified in *Chapter 8.2.2* of the Specific Rules.

E. Changes in Grant Implementation

E.1 Method of Administration / Assessment

During the implementation of the return grant, changes may arise compared to the originally approved return grant application. These changes must be transparently assessed and administratively processed. Changes can be categorized as follows:

- **Prohibited changes** in implementing the return grant – see specific details in *Chapter E.2 Immutable Parameters*.
- **Permissible changes** in implementing the return grant – see specific details in *Chapter E.3 Mutable Parameters*. Chapter E.3 also defines parameters that require a formal request for a change in the implementation of the return grant.

The ICPF Grant Agency (GA ICPF) is responsible for administering and assessing changes in the implementation of the return grant.

Procedure for changes during the implementation of the return grant:

1. **Changes initiated by the ICPF Grant Agency:** If there is a substantial change in circumstances affecting the implementation of return grants that neither the GA ICPF coordinator nor the ICPF management could have foreseen or caused, GA ICPF will propose the relevant change to the principal investigator (e.g., change in the amount of eligible costs, change in the total FTE of the project team, change in the funding decision) no later than seven calendar days from the day it became aware of such circumstances. The principal investigator must respond to the official proposal within 1 month of receiving it. The official response must be submitted to the Director's Office registry in printed, signed form.
2. **Changes initiated by the grant implementation team:** If there is a substantial change in circumstances affecting the implementation of the return grant that the principal investigator could not have foreseen or caused, they must request a change from GA ICPF no later than seven calendar days from the day they became aware of such circumstances. GA ICPF will assess the request and respond no later than 1 month from the day the request was received.

A request for a change in the implementation of the return grant must include the following elements:

- Basic grant identification details – see *Chapter B.2*
- Basic details of the principal investigator – full name, name of the research group where the return grant is implemented
- Specification of the requested change
- Detailed explanation of the cause and justification for the requested change
- Date on which the cause of the requested change occurred

Submission of change requests:

Requests for changes in implementing the return grant must be submitted in printed form to the Director's Office registry. Upon submission, the date of receipt will be recorded, and the request will be assigned an official registry number.

If no electronic system for project monitoring exists at ICPF at the time of submission, the principal investigator must also submit the change request via official email to the GA ICPF coordinator.

If an electronic system for project monitoring is available, the change request must also be submitted through that system. The system will record the date of receipt and assign a registry number.

Assessment of change requests:

The GA ICPF coordinator handles primary administration, recording, and categorization of change requests:

- **Requests concerning immutable parameters** – the GA ICPF coordinator automatically rejects these requests.
- **Requests concerning mutable parameters** – the GA ICPF coordinator forwards these requests to the rapporteur for the relevant return grant, who will evaluate the proposed changes in cooperation with the evaluation committee.

If the evaluation committee determines that the proposed changes would affect any immutable parameter and/or indirectly cause such a change, it has the authority to reject them.

If the committee concludes that the proposed changes are inconsistent with the call documentation or would unreasonably affect the grant budget, it also has the authority to reject the proposed change.

If the committee determines that the proposed changes are consistent with the call documentation and do not indirectly affect any immutable parameters, the committee will approve the requested change.

Response to the change request:

GA ICPF must respond in writing to every change request no later than 1 month from the day the request was received. The written response will be recorded at the Director's Office registry. Upon submission, the date of receipt will be recorded, and the response will be assigned an official registry number.

If no electronic system for project monitoring exists at ICPF when the response is issued, the principal investigator will be informed of the result via official email.

If an electronic system is available, the principal investigator will also be informed through that system. The system will include recording the date the response to the change request was sent and assigning a registry number.

E.2 Immutable Parameters

Within the return grant, changes to so-called **Immutable Parameters are prohibited**. These parameters are strictly defined, and any deviation would constitute a breach of grant conditions. The list of immutable parameters is as follows:

- **Change of the principal investigator position** – if the principal investigator cannot continue implementing the return grant for any reason, the project must be terminated.
- **Change of the objective and main research topic** – within the return grant, it is impossible to change the scientific direction, main research question, or fundamental objectives of the grant. All activities must correspond to the originally approved return grant application.
- **Increase in the total amount of financial resources** – it is not permitted to increase the budget above the approved amount. The recipient must implement the project within the financial limits proposed in the original return grant application.
- **Personal costs of the project team may not be lower than those specified in the calculator that is part of the call documentation** – salaries and personal costs for the project team must be calculated using the *Return Grant Budget Calculator* included in the call documentation. These salaries represent minimum requirements set by the OP JAK call and cannot be reduced, even if the recipient wishes to save costs.
- **Increase in the total FTE defined in the approved return grant application**—during implementation, it is not permitted to increase the total FTE of the project team beyond the value defined in the originally approved application. An increase is not allowed even if the total budget remains unchanged.

- **Return Grant Budget Calculator**—throughout implementation, the same version of the calculator file used during project approval must remain in force. Even if updated, it is not permitted to use a newer or modified version of the calculator.

Any changes to the immutable parameters defined above will result in termination of funding for the return grant and, therefore, its cancellation.

E.3 Modifiable Parameters

Parameters may be changed during the implementation of the return grant, but such changes are subject to specific conditions and, in some cases, require approval by the GA ICPF.

List of mutable parameters **requiring GA ICPF approval**:

- **Transfers between budget items exceeding 10% of the value of the item to which the higher amount was originally allocated** – transfers between budget items are permissible if they do not conflict with the call documentation (see *Chapter B.6* for the definition of individual budget items) and do not affect any of the immutable parameters defined in *Chapter E.2*. Approval of such transfers depends on the specific amount being transferred and the justification for the change.
- **Changes in the project team**—Changes to the team or their FTE are permissible if they do not affect the total grant budget or the total FTE defined in the approved application and are consistent with the conditions defined in *Chapter B.4*. Changes in the team must not affect any of the immutable parameters in *Chapter E.2*. Approval of team changes depends on meeting these conditions and the justification for the change.
- **Early termination of the return grant** – If, for justified reasons, it is not possible to complete the grant within the originally set timeframe or other unforeseen circumstances arise, it is possible to request early termination of the grant. Early termination requires submission of:
 - **Justification for the early termination**
 - **Final report** on activities carried out within the return grant.
 - **Statement of expenses** incurred under the grant, showing eligible costs. For personnel costs, pro-rated salaries will be paid in proportion to the actual duration of the grant implementation.

The formal procedure for early termination is detailed in *Chapter F.2*.

- **Suspension of the return grant** – In justified cases, it is possible to request a grant suspension, provided that the planned completion date does not exceed 30 June 2029. The suspension period is not counted towards the overall duration of the grant. A formal request for suspension must include:
 - **Justification for the suspension**
 - **Interim report** for the period implemented to date – see *Chapter D.3*.
 - **Statement of expenses** incurred to date – showing all eligible costs. For personnel costs, pro-rated salaries will be paid corresponding to the actual duration of implementation.
 - **Proposal for resumption** – including the suspension schedule, the planned date of resumption, and the continuation plan for the grant.

Approval of the suspension depends on the justification provided and the proposed conditions for continuation. The proposed conditions must not affect any immutable parameters in *Chapter E.2*.

During grant implementation, changes that do not require GA ICPF approval are also possible. Such changes must not affect the immutable parameters defined in *Chapter E.2* and must be specified and properly justified in interim and final grant reports.

List of mutable parameters **not requiring GA ICPF approval**:

- **Transfers up to 10% of the item's value between budget items with the higher allocation** – such transfers do not require GA ICPF approval.
- **Transfers within material costs** – transfers between material costs, travel costs, and service costs are permitted without restriction.
- **Change in the research methodology** – changes to research methods or approaches are allowed without restriction if they do not affect the project's key objectives or their achievement.
- **Change in the grant schedule** – changes to the grant schedule are permitted without restriction if they do not affect the project's key objectives or their achievement.
- **Change in the destination of a short-term trip** – changes to the destination of a short-term trip for a conference or workshop are permitted without restriction if they do not affect the overall budget or any of the immutable parameters defined in Chapter E.2.
- **Change in planned results and outputs of the return grant** – changes in results and outputs are allowed without restriction if they do not affect the project's key objectives or achievement. Examples include switching from a conference presentation to a journal publication or increasing the number of publications compared to the originally proposed number.

F. Completion and Final Evaluation of Return Grants

F.1 Final Report

The return grant's final report contains a comprehensive summary of the results achieved over the entire implementation period, including the potential impact of these results on the scientific work of the research group for which the return grant was implemented.

The principal investigator must submit the project team's final activity report within the return grant using the prescribed form, which will be provided to investigators no later than one month before the end of the grant implementation.

The final report must be submitted **no later than the last day of the month following the end of the return grant**.

The final report **must be written in English** and must include the following elements:

- Basic grant identification details – see *Chapter B.2*.
- Basic identification details of the principal investigator and the project team:
 - Full name of the principal investigator
 - Full names of all other team members (including the mentor)
 - FTE level of the principal investigator
 - FTE levels of all other team members (including the mentor)
 - Name of the research group where the return grant was implemented.
- Summary of grant implementation – a concise overview of activities carried out over the entire duration of the return grant, including description of research activities, experiments conducted, results obtained, goals achieved, and collaborations with other institutions or partners.
- Summary of achieved results – a concise overview of all results achieved, completed milestones, and outputs (publications, conference contributions, application outputs, etc.). A brief evaluation of the achievement of the grant's objectives.
- Changes during the return grant – a concise description of all changes that occurred since the submission of the last interim report, including changes in the project team, schedule, methodologies used, etc. A brief explanation of the reasons for these changes, their impact on the implementation of the grant, and any steps taken to address them. See also *Chapter E* for more details.
- Summary of all short-term trips undertaken – a concise overview of all short-term trips (conferences, workshops), including description of activities carried out during these trips, lessons learned, potential benefits, or established collaborations.
- Final budget accounting for the entire period – budget accounting will be completed using the dedicated file "Return Grant Implementation Calculator", in which the principal investigator updates the final accounting for the last period in exact accordance with actual grant spending, including justification for each item. A mandatory attachment to the final report is a breakdown of expenditures incurred under the grant and other relevant documents for each selected unit cost.⁸

Mandatory attachments to the final report:

- **Further career plan of the principal investigator** – the principal investigator will outline plans in the context of the grant topic, future research directions, lessons learned, plans for project

⁸ These mandatory documents are specified in *Chapter 8.2.2* of the Specific Rules.

applications, and assess their position within the research group.

- **Statement from the head of the research group** – the head of the research group in which the return grant was implemented will briefly evaluate the principal investigator's work on the grant, involvement in other research directions within the group, their contribution to the group, and scientific potential.

Submission of the final report:

If there is no electronic system for project monitoring at ICPF at the time of submission, the final report must be submitted in printed form to the Director's Office registry. Upon submission, the date of receipt will be recorded, and the report will be assigned an official registry number.

If an electronic system for project monitoring is available, the final report must be submitted through this system. The system will include recording the date of receipt and assigning a registry number.

If minor formal deficiencies are found in the final report, the applicant will be asked to provide all necessary corrections no later than 1 month after the request.

F.2 Final Evaluation

The final evaluation of the return grant is conducted by the GA ICPF evaluation committee, which includes the assigned rapporteur for the given grant, the GA ICPF coordinator, and the reviewers of the original application. Based on the submitted interim reports and the final report, the committee evaluates the following parameters:

- Fulfillment of the research objectives of the return grant
- Quality of outputs and results produced during grant implementation
- Consistency of work performed with the defined objectives and schedule
- Assessment of overall financial management
- Engagement of the principal investigator in the activities of the research group

Evaluation of these individual parameters will be prepared in writing by the assigned rapporteur and recorded by the GA ICPF coordinator. Based on consensus among all members of the evaluation committee, one of the following ratings will be assigned to each completed return grant:

- **Completed with excellent results** – The principal investigator with this rating has fulfilled all research objectives, fully engaged with the research group, and produced excellent results. GA ICPF will recommend further support for the investigator's career development. GA ICPF may recommend the principal investigator for promotion to a higher pay grade (following the valid Internal Salary Regulations of ICPF).
- **Completed** – The principal investigator with this rating has fulfilled all research objectives and is fully engaged with the research group. GA ICPF will recommend further support for the investigator's career development.
- **Completed with reservations** – The principal investigator with this rating did not fulfill all research objectives or did not fully engage with the research group. This evaluation may affect the principal investigator's assessment process. Future career support will depend on the recommendation of the head of the research group.
- **Not completed** – The principal investigator with this rating failed to meet the research objectives or did not fully engage with the research group. This evaluation will affect the principal investigator's assessment process. GA ICPF may recommend reassigning the principal investigator to a lower pay grade or salary class (following the valid Internal Salary Regulations of ICPF).

Announcement of final evaluation results for return grants

The GA ICPF coordinator ensures the announcement of the results. All principal investigators will be informed of the evaluation of their return grant implementation no later than 5 months after submission of the final report via official email communication and through the electronic system for project monitoring at ICPF. The system will record the date the evaluation was sent and assign a registry number.

F.3 Early Termination

Circumstances may arise during the implementation of the return grant that lead to its early termination. In such cases, **the specific end date of the grant will be determined** in cooperation between GA ICPF and the principal investigator. The overall duration of the grant affects how support will be paid and whether completed activities and indicators can be counted.

The minimum duration of the return grant must be at least 860 productive hours (for a 1.0 FTE commitment) and at least 180 calendar days.

Conditions for different durations of the return grant:

- **Total duration <6 months**

In this case, all costs associated with the return grant are considered ineligible as they do not meet the minimum duration requirement. Indicators associated with such a grant cannot be counted. Such a grant is **not considered to have started**, so there is no requirement to submit a final report. The director's official assignment to the grant and the internal registration of the grant in ICPF systems will be annulled

- **Total duration ≥6 months and <12 months**

Early termination may occur only for **serious reasons**⁹ for a grant with a total duration in this range. Budget payments will only be possible for the period of actual implementation. Salaries for the project team will be paid pro rata to the actual duration of the grant. Early termination requires submission of:

- **Justification for early termination**, if applicable
- **Final activity report** summarising results for the entire duration of the grant (for report requirements and submission method, see *Chapter F.1*)
- **Detailed breakdown of grant expenditures** – listing eligible costs, i.e., pro rata to the actual duration of the grant.

- **Total duration ≥12 months**

Early termination may occur for justified reasons. Budget payments will only be possible for the period of actual implementation. Salaries for the project team will be paid pro rata to the actual duration of the grant. Early termination requires submission of:

- **Justification for early termination**, if applicable
- **Final activity report** summarising results for the entire duration of the grant (for report requirements and submission method, see *Chapter F.1*)
- **Detailed breakdown of grant expenditures** – listing eligible costs, i.e., pro rata to the actual duration of the grant.

⁹ Serious reasons are considered to be the termination of employment in the event of the death of an employee and the emergence of important personal obstacles on the part of the employee pursuant to Section 191 and Section 191a of the Labor Code in the event of incapacity for work or long-term care for a minimum of 3 months, maternity and parental leave.

Submission of documents related to early termination of the return grant:

If there is no electronic system for project monitoring at ICPF at the time of termination, documents related to the termination of the grant must be submitted in printed form to the Director's Office registry. Upon submission, the date of receipt will be recorded, and documents will receive official registry numbers.

If an electronic system for project monitoring is available, documents related to the termination of the grant must be submitted through this system. The system will record the date of receipt and assign registry numbers.

If minor formal deficiencies are found in the final report, the applicant will be asked to correct all necessary information within 1 month of the request.

G. Publicity, Affiliation, Intellectual Property

G.1 Publicity and Affiliation

Publicity in the context of projects funded from public sources, such as OP JAK, means the obligation to ensure visibility and transparency of the use of financial resources. The results and outputs of the Grant Agency, including the return grant, must comply with the publicity rules of the OP JAK programme, making use of [the Mandatory Publicity Tools Generator](#). Publicity will include

- **Funding acknowledgement** – All relevant documents, outputs, and materials (scientific articles, presentations, websites, press releases) must indicate that they were supported by OP JAK (including project number and title). The use of the official OP JAK funding acknowledgement wording will be preferred.
- **Use of logos and visual identity** – Materials (internal and external documents, calls, forms, tender documentation, posters, presentations, websites, etc.) must include the EU, MEYS, and OP JAK logos. Adherence to the OP JAK graphic manual (correct arrangement of logos, their size, and colour scheme) will be preferred.
- **Open Science** – The obligation to ensure open access to scientific outputs wherever possible. Publications must be either freely accessible or deposited in a repository.
- **Acknowledgement of support** – All publications, presentations, or press releases must include a statement that they were produced with the support of OP JAK. The official OP JAK funding acknowledgement wording will be preferred.

G.2 Intellectual Property

Intellectual property (IP) protection within the framework of return grants will be managed in accordance with the internal commercialization system, which is based on two key documents:

- **Strategy for Knowledge and Technology Transfer of the CAS** – a document outlining the strategic direction of AV ČR in knowledge transfer and intellectual property protection within the Academy.
- **Directive_4_2024_Patent Policy Principles** – an internal ICPF document governing the rules for revenue sharing from commercialization

Key steps include identifying the creation of intellectual property, properly determining ownership, protecting IP, assessing its commercial potential, and making efforts to commercialize it by seeking an industry partner. Ensuring the protection of intellectual property arising at ICPF during the implementation of a return grant will be carried out in cooperation with the Technology Transfer Centre of the CAS ([CeTTAV](#)). In the event of the creation of intellectual property, attention will be paid to:

- **Proper determination of ownership** – identifying the rights holder (author, employer, project team).
- **Protection of results** – through patenting, utility models, software protection, etc.
- **Compliance with contractual obligations** – especially when results are developed in collaboration with other entities.
- **Respect for licensing conditions** – ensuring correct licensing for open outputs.
- **Open access vs. IP protection** – publication outputs will be Open Access where possible, provided this does not jeopardize IP protection. If protection is needed, open access may be delayed (e.g., embargo until after filing a patent application).

H. Sanctions

Within the tender documentation for return grants, conditions for project implementation are set out, and non-compliance with these conditions may lead to various penalties. The key obligations and possible sanctions for their breach are listed below:

- **Failure to submit interim or final reports** – The principal investigator is required to prepare interim reports (i.e., regularly provide updates on project progress) and a final report (summarizing achieved results and use of financial resources) within the specified deadlines. Failure to submit reports is considered a breach of obligations and results in the following sanctions:
 - **Suspension of project funding** until the interim report is submitted.
 - **Revocation of the grant** in cases of prolonged failure to fulfill this obligation.
 - **Assessment of the grant as “not fulfilled”** with corresponding consequences (see *Chapter F.2*) if the final report is not submitted even after a formal request.
- **Failure to achieve the results and outputs of the return grant** – The principal investigator must achieve the results and outputs specified in the grant application (scientific outputs, publications, applied outputs). Failure to deliver planned outputs without adequate explanation/justification results in the following sanctions:
 - **Suspension of funding** proportional to the extent of unmet commitments.
 - **Assessment of the grant as “not fulfilled”** with corresponding consequences (see *Chapter F.2*).
- **Penalties for breaching publicity requirements** – The principal investigator must comply with publicity rules (acknowledging funding, use of logos, dissemination of results, see section G.1). Failure to meet these requirements results in the following sanctions:
 - **Suspension of funding** proportional to the extent of unmet commitments.
 - **Impact on the overall assessment of the return grant, potentially leading to assessment as “not fulfilled”** with corresponding consequences (see *Chapter F.2*).
- **Additional consequences for serious breaches of employment or budget rules** – In extreme cases, legal consequences may follow if violations result in the improper use of grant funds.