



REF Operational Guidelines

For	REF Entities
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Table of Contents

1	MISSION AND PRINCIPLES	7
1.1	MISSION OF REF.....	7
1.2	PRINCIPLES.....	7
2	GOVERNANCE.....	8
2.1	GOVERNING BOARD OF REF.....	8
2.2	<i>EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE</i>	10
2.3	<i>OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES</i>	10
2.4	<i>GOVERNING BOARD OF THE REF HUNGARY</i>	10
2.5	<i>GOVERNING BOARD OF THE REF ROMANIA</i>	11
2.6	<i>GOVERNING BOARD OF THE REF SLOVAKIA</i>	11
3	MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATION	12
3.1	STAFF POSITIONS	12
3.2	USE OF CONSULTANTS TO SUPPORT REF	14
3.3	COUNTRY FACILITATORS	14
3.4	COUNTRY COORDINATORS	15
3.5	SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM.....	15
3.6	PROJECT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE	15
4	DONOR FUNDS & GRANT WINDOWS	16
4.1	GRANT WINDOWS.....	16
4.2	ADMINISTRATION COSTS.....	16
4.3	CO-FINANCING	16
5	REF PROGRAMS.....	17
5.1	PROJECT GRANTS PROGRAM	17
5.1.1	<i>General Eligibility Criteria</i>	17
5.1.2	<i>Leveraging funds for Roma Education</i>	18
5.1.3	<i>Basic Eligibility Criteria</i>	19
5.1.4	<i>Detailed Project Evaluation Criteria</i>	19
5.1.5	<i>Country Assessments</i>	21
5.1.6	<i>Project Priorities</i>	21
5.1.7	<i>Rules on Governance as part of REF’s contractual requirement</i>	22
a)	Good Governance.....	22
5.1.8	<i>Rules on Financing and Procurement for REF Financed Projects</i>	22
a)	Administrative Costs.....	22
b)	Financing of Salaries	22
c)	Financing of Per Diem and Travel Costs.....	23
d)	Financing of Investment Costs.....	23
e)	Financing of Study Trips.....	24
5.1.9	<i>Project Cycle</i>	24
a)	Information Campaign and Program Promotion	24
b)	Development of Grant Proposals	24

c)	Grant Evaluation	25
d)	Board Approval or Rejection.....	25
e)	Preparation of Project Implementation Plan, Project Monitoring, Evaluation Plan and Final Approval	26
f)	Signing the Grant Agreement	26
g)	Grant Implementation and Monitoring	26
h)	Implementing the Monitoring and Evaluation Plan.....	27
i)	Implementing Organization Reporting	27
j)	REF Monitoring Visits.....	28
k)	Change in PIP, Budget or Grant Agreement	29
l)	Grant Completion	30
m)	Dispute Resolution.....	31
5.1.10	<i>Call for Proposals</i>	31
a)	Identification and Review of the Need for a Call for Proposals	31
b)	Advertising the Call for Proposals.....	31
c)	Reviewing Applications.....	31
5.1.11	<i>Learning from Projects</i>	32
a)	Information Processed on a Regular Basis.....	32
b)	Special External Evaluations Carried Out by REF Consultants	32
c)	Annual Synthesis of the Monitoring Reports and Evaluation Reports.....	32
5.2	REIMBURSABLE GRANTS	33
5.2.1	<i>Evaluation Criteria</i>	33
5.2.2	<i>Application</i>	33
5.2.3	<i>Review</i>	33
5.2.4	<i>Contracting and Implementation</i>	33
5.3	POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAM	34
5.4	COMMUNICATION AND CROSS COUNTRY LEARNING PROGRAM	34
5.5	REF IMPLEMENTED COUNTRY PROGRAMS	34
5.6	REF/TERTIARY SCHOLARSHIPS PROGRAM	35
5.6.1	<i>Introduction</i>	35
5.6.2	<i>Country Coverage and Education Fields</i>	36
a)	Roma Memorial University Scholarship Program (RMUSP).....	36
b)	Law and Humanities Program (LHP)	36
c)	Roma International Scholar Program (RISP)	36
d)	Roma Health Scholarship Program (RHSP)	36
e)	Professional Development Fund (PDF)	37
5.6.3	<i>Scholars</i>	37
5.6.4	<i>Application Process</i>	37
a)	Roma Memorial University Scholarship Program (RMUSP).....	37
b)	Law and Humanities Program (LHP)	37
c)	Roma International Scholar Program (RISP)	38
d)	Roma Health Scholarship Program (RHSP)	38
e)	Professional Development Fund (PDF)	38
5.6.5	<i>Eligibility Criteria</i>	39
a)	Eligibility Criteria (relevant for all Scholarships Schemes)	39
b)	Specific Eligibility Criteria for RMUSP applicants	40
c)	Specific Eligibility Criteria for LHP applicants.....	40
d)	Specific Eligibility Criteria for RHSP applicants	41
e)	Specific Eligibility Criteria for RISP applicants.....	41
5.6.6	<i>Selection procedures and criteria</i>	42
a)	Application and document validity check.....	42

b)	Decision-making mechanisms.....	42
c)	Decision-making bodies:.....	43
d)	Selection Criteria	43
e)	Interviews in the Scholarships Programs.....	43
f)	Further considerations	44
g)	Evaluation Process.....	44
h)	'Black list' policy.....	45
i)	Communication of selection decisions	45
5.6.7	<i>Disclosure of Personal Information</i>	45
5.6.8	<i>Outreach / Orientation Sessions</i>	46
a)	Outreach strategies and in-country contact person	46
b)	Orientation Sessions	47
c)	Students Workshop	47
d)	Coordinators Meeting.....	47
5.6.9	<i>Administration of Scholarship Programs</i>	48
a)	Communication policies with applicants	48
6	MONITORING, REPORTING AND EVALUATION	50
6.1	STATUS REPORT	50
6.2	PROGRESS REPORTS.....	50
6.3	ACTIVITY REPORT	50
6.4	REPORTS TO THE THIRD PARTY (DONOR) ORGANIZATIONS	50
7	ADMINISTRATION	51
7.1	REF'S OFFICIAL AND WORKING LANGUAGES.....	51
7.2	FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT	51
7.3	PROCUREMENT	51
7.4	WEBSITE.....	52
7.5	INFORMATION SYSTEMS	52
7.6	ANNUAL AND AUDIT REPORTS	52
7.7	CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY.....	53



Annexes

(available as attached documents)

ANNEX 1:	REF STATUTES
ANNEX 2:	REF DIRECTOR TOR
ANNEX 3:	REF COUNTRY FACILITATOR
ANNEX 4_1:	MODEL PROJECT APPLICATION PACKAGE PIP 1.DOC
ANNEX 4_2:	MODEL PROJECT APPLICATION PACKAGE PIP 2.DOC
ANNEX 4_3:	MODEL PROJECT APPLICATION PACKAGE_ INDICATORS .DOC
ANNEX 4_4:	MODEL PROJECT APPLICATION PACKAGETIMELINE.DOC
ANNEX 4_5:	MODEL PROJECT APPLICATION PACKAGE GLOSSARY OF TERMS.DOC
ANNEX 5:	MODEL REF GRANT AGREEMENT.DOC
ANNEX 6:	MODEL PROJECT SUMMARY FOR BOARD REVIEW.DOC
ANNEX 7:	MODEL REIMBURSABLE GRANT APPLICATION.DOC
ANNEX 8:	MODEL REIMBURSABLE GRANT AGREEMENT.DOC
ANNEX 10:	MODEL REF ASSESSMENT OF THE QUARTERLY REPORT.DOC
ANNEX 11_1:	MODEL REGULAR PROJECT MONITORING REF.DOC
ANNEX 11_2:	GUIDELINES FOR MONITORING TEAM COMPOSITION
ANNEX 11_3:	PROJECT MONITORING REPORT GUIDELINES
ANNEX 12:	MODEL FINAL PROJECT MONITORING REPORT REF.DOC
ANNEX 13:	MODEL FINAL PROJECT REPORT BY IMPLEMENTER.DOC
ANNEX 14_1:	MODEL LETTER REQUESTING QUARTERLY REPORT.DOC
ANNEX 14_2:	MODEL QUARTERLY REPORT-NARRATIVE.DOC
ANNEX 14_3:	MODEL FINANCIAL REPORT_SCHEDULE.XLS
ANNEX 14_4:	MODEL SUMMARY TABLE_SCHEDULE.XLS
ANNEX 16:	MODEL TOR FOR EXTERNAL EVALUATION
ANNEX 17:	MODEL QUARTERLY REPORTS
ANNEX 18:	MODEL INFORMATION SHEET FOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT
ANNEX 19:	REF NETWORK MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING
ANNEX 20:	REF ORGANIZATIONAL CHART
ANNEX 21:	SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM TOR
ANNEX 22:	REF FINANCIAL MANUAL
ANNEX 23:	ANNUAL DISCLOSURE QUESTIONNAIRE

1 Mission and Principles

1.1 Mission of REF

The goal of the Roma Education Fund (hereinafter also referred to as REF) is to contribute to closing the gap in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma through policies and programs, and to support the provision of quality education for Roma including the desegregation of educational systems.

In the context of the Roma Education Fund, the term “Roma” is used as an inclusive collective term and is not intended to exclude any related groups including (but not limited to) Sinti, Travelers, Ashkaelia, or Egyptians. In general, REF follows the local official policy as to whether other groups are considered as, or together with, Roma.

1.2 Principles

The Roma Education Fund:

- supports ideas, projects and programs that improve educational access and outcomes for Roma in the context of the Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005-2015) with a particular emphasis on supporting systemic policy reforms, changes in education systems and increasing coverage of programs that have been successfully piloted;
- operates in countries part of the Decade and in other European countries that have shown strong commitment to improving the inclusion of Roma in educational systems;
- involves Roma in all aspects of the Fund’s operations and management
- interprets “education” broadly to include formal and non-formal education and training of skills for both children and adults;
- operates as a financial policy guidance and information sharing organization;
- carries out leverage of additional financial resources not directly managed by REF (EU structural funds, other donors loans or grants);
- operates in a balanced manner with respect to different beneficiary countries and Romani communities;
- supports activities that are respectful and inclusive to Roma and the wishes of the Romani community, also taking into account issues faced by Romani women;
- operates a simple and rapid grant-making process that is transparent and accountable;
- provides a forum for advocacy and discussion of Roma related education issues;
- evaluates the outcomes of REF projects and the progress in education reforms in countries in order to inform and improve existing and future activities;
- becomes a centralized source of information on Roma issues in the field of education.

2 Governance

REF was established as a foundation under the laws of Switzerland in 2005. Swiss registration was chosen because Swiss law is particularly accommodating to the establishment of international foundations and because Switzerland is well-suited in terms of undertaking pan-European operations. Bylaws are attached as Annex 1 of the Operational Manual.

A Hungarian foundation (REF Hungary) was created, also in 2005, to host the Budapest office of the REF and to support activities in Hungary and in other EU countries.

In 2009, a Romanian foundation (REF Romania) was established to expand REF's activities in the country, especially through the use of EU Structural Funds.

Roma Education Fund Hungary opened a branch office in 2013 in Serbia (REF Serbia) and in Montenegro (REF Montenegro) in order to expand activities of REF, especially through the use of IPA Funds. The books of these branch offices are kept by and reflected in the financial statements of REF Hungary.

In 2014, a Slovak foundation (REF Slovakia) was established to expand activities in Slovakia, especially through the use of EU Structural Funds.

In 2015, an Agreement of Cooperation was signed by REF, REF Hungary, REF Romania and REF Slovakia. The Agreement of Cooperation defines REF Network, the relationship and cooperation among the foundations in the REF Network (Annex 19).

2.1 Governing Board of REF

The primary responsibilities of the Governing Board are as follows:

- Setting REF's policies;
- Approval and amendment of REF's Operational Guidelines;
- Selection of REF's Director;
- Approval of REF's annual budgets and programs until December before the next financial year;
- Approval of the REF's annual financial audits;
- Consulting with Romani stakeholders on education related issues as necessary to inform general REF policies;
- Resolution of issues confronting the REF, as necessary;
- Approval of projects and programs;

- Deciding on the financial transfers to the Hungarian Foundation to support the REF office in Budapest and to the Romanian Foundation to support/complement its activities in Romania;
- Approval of the board meeting minutes (by email) confirming approval of the next board meeting, signed by the chair and director;
- A designated Board member should approve the expenses incurred by the Executive Director.

The Governing Board consists of a minimum of 9 members appointed in the following manner:

- The Open Society Institute appoints one member in its role as co-founder of REF;
- The World Bank appoints one member in its role as co-founder of the REF;
- The Open Society Institute and the World Bank mutually agree on the appointment of a member who is a Swiss national (Swiss law requires a Swiss national on the Governing Board);
- The Open Society Institute and the World Bank appoint on the basis of a transparent process at least three (3) members who are Roma;
- The two (2) largest donors of the REF apart from the founding members (or more under founding member's discretion), whether governments or multilateral organizations, are invited by the founding members to appoint members;
- The largest private donor or consortium of private donors to REF is invited by the founding members to appoint a member. In the event that donors decline to accept an invitation to appoint a member to the Governing Board, the founders invite the next largest donor to the REF.

Board members are subject to replacement every two years. Board members can also be reappointed for successive terms.

The Board members mutually agree on the appointment of one of its members as Chair. The Chair organizes board meetings and proposes the agenda in consultation with the REF Director. The Chair has signature authority to sign for the Governing Board for all decisions and financial transfers.

The Board has two vice-chairs who can replace the chair in case of his/her absence.

The Governing Board meets at least twice a year. The Board members have equal voting rights. At least five Board members must be present in order to form a quorum. The Director of the REF acts as secretary to the Governing Board.

Board members are not paid, but have their travel and subsistence for attending meetings reimbursed by the REF. If the Board members participate in specific tasks required by the

Board, the founding members can decide that the REF will provide them with a consultant contract for undertaking these specific tasks. The REF office acts as secretariat of the Board.

The founding members can decide to create a human resources committee (HR Committee) composed of four Board members to advise REF management on issues related to REF human resources management and to search for an Executive Director.

2.2 Executive Committee

The Governing Board has established an Executive Committee in order to take forward the work of the Board between Board meetings for more efficient operation of the Foundation. The Executive Committee has full powers to act for the Board between meetings of the full Board, subject to reporting back to the Board on its activities. The Executive Committee consists of at least five members appointed by the Board: it consists of the Chair, the representatives of the founding members, and the Swiss Board member and the Treasurer. The REF Governing Boards have also decided that the membership of the Executive Committee and the HR Committee should be the same.

2.3 Operational Guidelines

The Governing Board approves the Operational Guidelines that guide all decisions made by REF management. These guidelines can be modified any time by the REF Board of Directors after consultation with REF management. The REF operational guidelines are a public document and are accessible on the REF website.

2.4 Governing Board of the REF Hungary

The governing Board of REF Hungary is composed of three members.

- One member of the Executive Committee of the REF is also the chair of the Hungarian Foundation;
- Two Hungarian citizens are nominated by the founding members of REF.

The Hungarian Foundation Board members meet at least once a year. The REF Executive Director acts as secretary of the Hungarian Foundation Board. The Board members have equal voting rights.

The Hungarian Foundation Board members discuss the specific programs managed by the Hungarian Foundation and all issues related to the management of the head office of REF in

Budapest.

2.5 Governing Board of the REF Romania

The governing Board of REF Romania is composed of four members:

- One member of the Executive Committee of the REF is also the chair of the Romanian Foundation;
- Three members nominated by the founding members of REF.

The REF Romania Board members meet at least once a year. The REF Executive Director acts as secretary of the Romanian Foundation Board. The Board members have equal voting rights.

The REF Romania Board members discuss the specific programs managed by the Romanian Foundation and all issues related to the management of the office of REF in Bucharest.

2.6 Governing Board of the REF Slovakia

The governing Board of REF Slovakia is composed of three members:

- One member of the Executive Committee of the REF is also the chair of the Slovak Foundation.
- Two members nominated by the founding members of REF.

The REF Slovakia Board members meet at least once a year. The Board members have equal voting rights.

The REF Slovakia Board members discuss the specific programs managed by the Slovak Foundation and all issues related to the management of the office of REF in Presov, Slovakia.

3 Management and Organization

Headquarters of REF Network is located in Budapest, Hungary. The Board appoints the Executive Director of REF on the basis of a competitive selection process. The Board itself acts as the interview panel for evaluating potential Executive Director candidates, while the HR committee of REF has the responsibility to screen candidates. A brief justification of the Board's decision making process and final choice is made publicly available to REF donors and other interested parties.

A position description for the Executive Director is attached in Annex 2. The Executive Director recruits all other staff and provides a no-objection on the assignment of staff seconded from other organizations. All staff are accountable to the Executive Director, not to their sponsoring organization, for carrying out REF related activities.

For each recruitment, a staff selection committee of at least three persons is established on an ad hoc basis. The committee includes the Executive Director, a senior staff member of the REF, and staff and consultants who might be working with the potential candidate. REF Staff are recruited on a competitive basis using transparent processes. REF management will try to ensure that qualified Roma are given the opportunity to be represented among the staff. Short lists shall be prepared for all positions, consisting of at least three persons. A brief report on the selection process and final decision is made and is placed in REF's official records.

3.1 Staff Positions

The staff works closely together as a team supporting each other's efforts. Teamworking skill is an important criterion for staff selection and is considered in staff performance evaluations. REF staff based in its Budapest headquarters includes the following:

- **Senior Advisors:** Advise the REF Director, REF staff and REF Board of Directors on all aspects of REF activities and programs, as defined by the terms of reference. The senior advisors provide mentoring to REF staff.
- **Chief Financial Officer (CFO):** The primary task of the CFO is the financial management of all REF Entities, including REF, REF Hungary as well as REF Network Entities (including REF Romania, REF Slovakia, REF Serbia, REF Montenegro and any other new branch offices opened by REF Switzerland or REF Hungary). The CFO is a member of REF's senior management team and manages the unit including the Network Manager and Financial and Administrative team.

- **Higher Education Program Manager:** is responsible for ensuring the effectiveness of the REF in all higher education related programs and the management of program officers, ensuring effective and transparent procedures and policies are in place.
- **Manager of the Project Grants Program:** is responsible for ensuring the effectiveness of the REF Grants Program through management of the project officers and other relevant staff, ensuring procedures and policies are in place and utilized, and extracting and disseminating lessons learnt.

Program and Studies Officer

- : plans and manages the research portfolio; contributes to all REF publications and programs.
- **Network Manager:** coordinates and assist the administration related to the operations and financial management of REF Network entities, including REF Romania, REF Slovakia, REF Serbia, REF Montenegro and any other new branch offices opened by REF Switzerland or REF Hungary.
- **Program Managers:** support the Director in coordinating and managing some of the larger REF programs. The Executive Director can delegate some of his/her responsibilities to the Program Managers. The REF includes, in particular, a Project Grant Program Manager, a Scholarships Manager and Capacity Building and Policy Development Manager. An organizational chart can be found in Annex 20.
- **Program Officers:** carry out REF activities in the project grant and scholarship programs, conduct the policy discussions in various countries and manage specific REF activities as assigned by the REF Executive Director and relevant managers, such as monitoring and evaluation and the Management Information System.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation Officer:** oversees the whole monitoring process of the grants, by ensuring liaises with the program officers and the Grant Project Manager. Identify needs for external project evaluations. Make arrangements so that external evaluation reports are carried out in time and are of adequate quality
- **Communication and Fundraising Officers:** undertake tasks related to the dissemination of REF messages and information produced through various programs; carry out advocacy campaigns and manage fundraising activities.
- **Administrative Officers or Assistants:** assist the Manager of Finance and Administration in tasks related to REF administration. Staff are also employed in the REF Romania office in Bucharest.
- **National Director:** with overall responsibility for managing the office, overseeing the implementation of its activities, outreach to and communication with external stakeholders and fundraising. The Head of Office reports to the REF Executive Director in Budapest.

- **Finance Expert:** supports the Management Team with financial forecasts and finance. Maintains procedures manuals, gives recommendations on how the internal control system should be improved to reduce the business risks. Assures that the procedure manuals are complied with.
- **Project staff:** implement activities under their respective projects in accordance with their terms of reference.

3.2 Use of Consultants to Support REF

The REF has access to short-term and long-term technical support from external consultants to carry out some of its functions and activities. A competitive selection process is used to select consultants. The REF also appoints consultants to serve as peer reviewers with respect to quantitative and qualitative studies and research undertaken by REF staff.

REF has established a network of field-based consultants serving as Country Facilitators and Country Coordinators. Country Facilitators have a focus on supporting the implementation of projects under the project grant program, while Country Coordinators work mainly on the scholarships program.

3.3 Country Facilitators

REF recruits Country Facilitators as long-term consultants in countries where it maintains very active programs. The country facilitator provides support to requesting and implementing organizations for REF financed projects. This support is provided upon the request of organizations in order to facilitate smooth processing of the project through the approval, contracting, implementation and evaluation cycle. The Country Facilitator provides information to the REF on Roma education issues in the concerning country and helps the REF identify major policy or program and project implementation issues including areas for potential REF support.

REF Country Facilitators provide information about the REF to local stakeholders, and facilitate communication and coordination between the REF and other organizations involved in Roma education, in particular NGOs, development agencies and donor organizations.

The country facilitator is not responsible for decisions on projects or on policies on behalf of the REF, but ensures smooth flow of information between REF and all country based stakeholders and builds up capacity of local institutions as requested by the REF. Skills needed by country facilitators include the following: solid project management skills, strong diplomatic skills and a good judgment of when to refer an issue to the REF and when to directly interact with the concerned organization. This also means that the Country Facilitators need to remain in very close contact with REF headquarters. (See Annex 3 Country Facilitator TOR attached)

3.4 Country Coordinators

The REF/SP has an extensive network of the coordinators in larger Program countries. The country Coordinators are contracted by the Program with a TOR covering in-country administration and coordination of the Program.

Generally the coordinators are affiliated with OSI Network offices or spin-offs as well as from NGOs working on Roma issues in respective countries. In case of turn-over of the individual Coordinators, REF opens a call in respective country for application. The selection is carried out by the Program in collaboration with the Senior Management Team of REF and the REF Director.

3.5 Senior Management Team

The Executive Director shall establish a Senior Management Team to advise and help in the management of the Fund. The Team is formed from the managers of REF Hungary, including the CFO, Scholarship, Project Grants and Network Manager. The Terms of Reference of the Senior Management Team are at Annex 21.

3.6 Project Management Committee

The Executive Director establishes a Project Management Committee (PMC) composed of all concerned staff to analyze and review project proposals. The PMC members decide on immediate rejections of project proposals that do not meet REF criteria and analyze other proposals before they are transmitted with a recommendation to the Board for final discussion for approval or rejection. The PMC members discuss project's monitoring activities and the findings of monitoring visits and discuss actions to be taken by the REF on certain projects. The PMC members also decide on projects requiring external evaluation. The PMC members discuss the REF program related to studies and evaluations, the composition of the teams that will carry out the studies and evaluations, and the draft studies as well as the dissemination of findings of the program on studies and policy development. The PMC is chaired by the Project Grant Program Manager or by the Executive Director. Decisions, including recommendations to the Board, are made by majority votes or by consensus. In the event a majority or consensus cannot be reached, the Executive Director shall make decisions after having consulted with the Senior Management Team, or, if necessary, shall bring the issue to the attention of the Board.

4 Donor Funds & Grant Windows

4.1 Grant Windows

It is understood that some donors may wish to restrict the use of some of their funds in certain ways, such as limiting them to certain countries or to the NGO sector.

The REF has developed two Grant Windows: one for the disbursement of unrestricted funds and another for restricted funds as explained below.

- **Unrestricted Funds:** The funds are managed by the REF in accordance with plans and budgets approved by the Swiss Foundation Board.
- **Restricted Funds:** These are managed by the REF according to exactly the same criteria and procedures as in the case of unrestricted funds. Acceptable restrictions are determined by the Board before accepting the management of particular funds, but will likely include beneficiary countries (e.g., only for a specified country or countries), beneficiary organizations (e.g., only NGOs), purposes (e.g., only preschool or only university education) or only policy development and capacity building. Restrictions on such matters as technical decision criteria or procurement will not be acceptable.

4.2 Administration Costs

REF has set a target that up to 15 percent of its program costs will be used for administrative purposes.

4.3 Co-Financing

In its role of leveraging financial resources, REF attempts to secure co-financing for its grants. It does not, however, in any way take responsibility for, or manage, such co-financing. For example, countries could use REF resources to meet the co-financing requirements for EU Structural Funds.

5 REF Programs

The Roma Education Fund manages five programs:

- Project Grants Program
- Reimbursable Grants for Accessing Structural Funds
- Directly Implemented Strategic Projects (ESF, IPA, EEA, other)
- Policy Development and Capacity Building Program
- Tertiary Education Scholarships Program

All programs have a specific budget approved at the beginning of the year and an activity plan presented by the Executive Director to the Governing Board at the end of each fiscal year (for implementation in the following year). The implementation, impact and lessons learned from each program are described in the REF annual report after it has been discussed with the Governing Board. Each of these programs is managed or coordinated by a program manager or coordinator, or directly by the Executive Director.

In November 2014, REF adopted its 2015-2020 Strategy, which maintained these six programs. The main focus of the Strategy is to scale up REF's activities.

5.1 Project Grants Program

REF finances projects implemented by a variety of implementing organizations that meet REF eligibility criteria. These criteria include: (i) general criteria regarding the eligible countries, eligible types of projects and eligible applicants; (ii) basic criteria which outline some key principles which must be observed; (iii) specific criteria used to evaluate the strength of project applications and (iv) country-based project priority areas established on the basis of REF country assessments.

5.1.1 General Eligibility Criteria

Grant applications are accepted from public and private entities, and special attention is focused on the countries which have formally joined the Decade of Roma Inclusion¹

Grants are awarded mainly to one of the three categories described below:

Grants aimed at education-related systemic reform and at scaling up successful pilots.

- Grants that pilot and test Roma educational interventions that can be scaled up or that directly influence policy changes.
- Grants that support the analysis of Roma-related education issues and which help develop policies and institutional capacity

Grants can be made to both the public and the private sectors, as well as to combinations (partnerships) of these. The public sector can include national, regional and local governments. The private sector can include Romani and non-Romani civil society organizations, and private educational establishments and policy institutes; however, REF gives priority to applications from local initiatives of grassroots Roma NGOs in partnership with public entities, including kindergartens, public schools and managing authorities, be they local, regional or central authorities. Multi-country grants can also be considered so long as there is one clear organization taking overall responsibility.

International organizations and large national non-governmental entities are encouraged to leverage funds together with REF for Roma education, rather than requesting direct funding support from REF.

There is no pre-established limit for a grant application, in terms of either total grant amounts or the proportion of co-financing of project costs. However, the average grant request should be considered alongside the indicative country financing allocation table², which helps REF's Board make decisions on amount of grants for each country. In line with its 2010-2015 Strategy, REF will expect increasing levels of co-financing by the grant's applicants as it helps governments and organizations to scale up their activities.

In an attempt to allocate REF funding equitably across the Decade countries, grants are processed taking into account the cumulative amount of grants in each country in light of the relative size of the Romani population, relative income levels and the availability of funding from alternative sources. REF maintains an indicative country financing allocation table², updated annually using the above mentioned indicators, which helps the REF Board make decisions on amount of grants for each country. REF abides by country allocation restrictions set by donors.

¹Applications from non-Decade countries may be considered exceptionally on a case-by-case basis.

²Published on REF's webpage: under Grants chapter updated annually

5.1.2 Leveraging funds for Roma Education

REF works to leverage funding, in line with REF's strategic direction from EU Structural Funds, Instrument for Pre-Accession funds or some of the other funds managed in the same way such

as the EEA financial mechanisms, the Norwegian Financial Mechanisms and the Swiss Contribution.

REF accepts and initiates proposals for leading or partnering a consortium for absorbing available funds at country or regional level and at cross-country level.

With respect to international organizations and/or large national entities REF prioritizes co-funding and matching funds to scale up Roma education activities in line with REF principle support, if the country allocation is close to or below this organizations' annual budget.

5.1.3 Basic Eligibility Criteria

All grants are required to meet basic eligibility criteria before being reviewed by the REF Project Management Committee. The criteria for consideration of a proposal by the REF are as follows:

- The proposal supports and is consistent with REF's Goal and Principles.
- The proposal supports and is consistent with one of REF's five educational models.
- The proposal demonstrates the leadership and direct involvement and support of Roma in its development and proposed implementation.
- The proposal supports the education and/or training of Roma.
- The proposal demonstrates that Roma are the majority among project beneficiaries, but, in this context, the project may also support some non-Roma beneficiaries facing the same challenges.
- If the public sector is involved in a project, where applicable, there should be a demonstrated commitment for developing and adopting an appropriate policy framework, including provisions for the project in the consolidated public sector budget.
- Proposals will require counterpart funding if implemented by governments.

5.1.4 Detailed Project Evaluation Criteria

Specific evaluation criteria for projects include, but are not limited to, the following:

- The proposal has potentially or directly an impact on the systemic changes of the education system and on national, regional or municipal policies.
- The project is innovative and has some potential for scaling up or informing the design of large scale policies or programs.
- The implementation, financial management and procurement procedures are appropriate (see section 16 and 17 on Financial and Procurement Rule for Grant Program).
- The level of co-financing – in-kind or in-cash. Higher level of co-financing will be assessed favorably.

- External and local consultant expenditure and fees are justified with reference to established norms in the respective country
- Appropriate mechanisms are included for monitoring and performance evaluation, including standardized progress reports required by REF.
- Requires an independent yearly financial audit and an external project evaluation for projects higher than 200,000 Euro following project completion. The cost of the audit needs to be included in the grant proposal (to be financed out of the grant itself or co-financing resources). For projects under 200,000 Euro, the annual audit of the implementing organization should include the REF-financed project.
- The activities and objectives are in line with the REF strategic directions in the country concerned. These are detailed in the Country Assessment and the REF's Strategic Direction document which is public and available on the REF website.
- The proposal includes clear and measurable objectives and precise indicators to be used in monitoring progress and eventual success.
- The proposal includes a financing plan, and implementation and institutional arrangements to allow effective implementation, as well as continuation of project activities (if applicable), once the grant has been fully disbursed.
- The cost per intended beneficiary is within reasonable norms, compared to other similar projects and not more than double of the per pupil normative of the respective country
- The proposal provides evidence from pilots or other programs that the intervention will likely be both efficient and cost-effective.
- Proposals will require counterpart funding if implemented by the public sector, and enjoy preference if it is expected to be supported by significant co-financing, or in-kind contributions, thus leveraging REF resources.
- The project proposal should demonstrate the financial and institutional sustainability of the proposed activities.
- The proposal recognizes and reflects relevant experience, analysis and research, and is demonstrated to fill a gap in current practices in Roma education.
- There is a plan for evaluating the grant at its completion that includes baseline data and measurable performance criteria, and to disseminate the result in the country, especially to local government and the central government.
- The proposal recognizes and reflects existing analysis and research, and is demonstrated to address policy and institutional issues closely related to the educational objectives and goals of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, and is consistent with the goal and principles of the REF.
- A clear plan for disseminating the findings of the research activities is included.
- Proposals demonstrating local, regional, and national, cooperation with the line ministries and other stakeholders such as school inspectorates, higher education institutions etc.

- Country-specific activities of local government initiatives for improving the educational situation of Roma (as a basis for directing project funding and scaling up in cooperation with regional and/or national authorities).

5.1.5 Country Assessments

- A series of Country Assessments are produced by the Roma Education Fund (REF), and the documents seek to provide an analysis of education and the ongoing education reforms from the perspective of the inclusion of Romani children in the countries taking part in the Decade of Roma Inclusion. The country documents also review the different programs and activities REF has carried out since its establishment in 2005 and highlights the thematic and program areas on which REF plans to focus during the coming three years. In addition to serving as a tool for the Roma Education Fund's own programming, REF intends that these documents will offer a useful instrument for:
 - Policymakers seeking to improve education policies that address the education
 - Outcome gap between Roma and non-Roma.
 - Civil society representatives who wish to improve the effectiveness of their educational programs by making them more relevant to the overall education reform of their country.
 - The overall development and donor community, which needs to better understand the situation faced by Romani children in order to identify niche areas where available resources would produce the greatest impact.

5.1.6 Project Priorities

- Different Project Priorities are established based on the Country assessment documents for the next three years and are published by REF on its webpage; in addition a single-page document is updated by REF staff once per year, which indicates priorities for funding of projects in a particular country
- The PMC evaluates each grant application if it's in line with the country priority and based on detailed project evaluation criteria

5.1.7 Rules on Governance as part of REF's contractual requirement

a) Good Governance

Governance matters can play an important role in helping organizations to support communities that depend on their programs and services. Listening to the community before embarking on a full-scale program education program for Roma children is important.

REF's role is to support its grantees to incorporate Good Governance into the existing activities of their organizations; it takes staff time, knowledge and financial resources to offer structured capacity-building initiatives around good governance, however organizations can advance governance in less resource-intensive ways, such as:

- Establishing a Board for Diversity of opinions – individuals who can bring perspective based on their experience, gender, ethnicity, professional background helping the organization to reaffirm its mission and goals.
- Get engaged in learning – to support continuous learning in thoughtful dialogue and fruitful discussions among staff members of the organization and external audience.
- Establish respectful relationships – to build constructive relationships with treated communities by ensuring mutual respect, confidentiality and understanding, while ensuring transparency – in relationships with selection of beneficiaries, by being clear, consistent and timely in communication with them; applying non-biased decision-making.
- Embattling conflict of interest rules, self-assessment and commitment – to uphold the highest standards, avoiding co-management of the organization by direct family members and relatives, selecting project staff based on competitive criteria relevant for the project components and activities by respecting ethics and law – to have public trust and fully obey national laws and regulations.

5.1.8 Rules on Financing and Procurement for REF Financed Projects

a) Administrative Costs

Project administrative costs include keeping documentation of reporting to REF procurement and purchase activities, disbursement and payments, staff and consultant management, and project accounting. Generally, costs should not be higher than 25 per cent of the total project cost.

b) Financing of Salaries

Salaries of staff members and fees to consultants of an organization receiving REF funding and working full-time on the supported project can be paid using REF funding for the project period.

The salaries and fees should be reasonable, that is, in line with the average for the region, the professional qualifications of the respective individuals and the type of activity performed.

When staff members devote only part of their work time to the realization of the project, their partial salaries may be financed under the grant only if there is a system in place, such as task-specific timesheets, which enables the staff member to clearly document the actual allocation of his/her work time, that is, the time the given employee has spent on project-related tasks.

Staff already receiving a long-term salary as part of an employment contract should not receive additional compensation under REF financed projects. The exception to this rule would be when the task required under the project clearly differs from the regular job of the concerned staff, and the project related activities are performed outside work hours. In this case, some limited honorarium can be granted for such tasks, but it should be reasonable and related to the actual specific outputs.

In all cases, all employment and consultancy contracts should be documented for project monitoring purposes. All such contracts should conform to the respective national regulations.

In case of public institutions receiving funding, local law may include restrictions on payments to civil servants by third parties. It is the sole responsibility of the grant recipient to comply with such applicable regulations, if any. The grant recipient shall disclose to the REF all information available pertaining to cases where such restrictions apply.

REF's policy is that teachers should not be paid through the project for activities which are part of their normal duties. Nor should teachers be paid for additional tutoring activities for children whom they teach during the normal school day. For additional activities, teachers should not be paid more than 1.5 times the hourly wage they receive as public servants. The same principles apply to civil servants involved in REF supported projects. An exception can be made only after careful evaluation of the given locality/situation after consultation with and approval of the Project Management Committee.

c) Financing of Per Diem and Travel Costs

These costs should be on a par with the average per diem and travel costs paid by local organizations in the country. The length and purpose of travel needs to be clearly documented in all cases by mission statements, trip reports and other required accounting documentation. Travel should be limited to economy class. Per diem and travel cost should also conform to national regulations.

d) Financing of Investment Costs

REF can finance investment costs in equipment or limited civil work (for rehabilitation or maintenance). These costs need to be clearly documented and described in the project budget.

Grant recipients should adhere to prudent procurement practices when choosing the source for the investment, which includes, but is not limited to, obtaining competition in the widest circles possible, and documenting the competition and source selection process.

e) Financing of Study Trips

The REF can finance study visits directly related to meeting the goals of the project. As with all other budget items, study trips should be in line with the practice among NGOs and governments in the particular country involved, and should also be clearly indicated in the budget.

5.1.9 Project Cycle

The project cycle is coordinated by the Project Grant Program Manager who plans the process and ensures that all steps are followed. The Management Information System supports REF staff in managing the grant program.

a) Information Campaign and Program Promotion

REF provides information on its activities through its website, various other communication tools, and regular visits and meetings with stakeholders in participating and donor countries. REF also makes use of local consultants and country facilitators to help local organizations develop proposals. It organizes, from time to time, conferences and seminars in countries to discuss education policy issues and organize communication activities with the local press.

b) Development of Grant Proposals

An application is officially received by the REF when it is sent to the info@romaeducationfund.org email address using the standard format available on REF's website (Annex 4). An electronic mail response is sent to the requesting organization within five days acknowledging its receipt and the proposal is entered into the REF Management Information System and is given a project identification code.

If the basic eligibility criteria are met, the proposal is transmitted to the responsible REF staff (RS), in most cases the program officer in charge of the country where the grant will be implemented. The RS will communicate with the requesting organization in order to discuss the proposal within two weeks. The RS will provide comments to the organization, including any proposed improvements, and can also ask the country facilitator or a consultant to visit the site and discuss the proposal with the applicant to get a better understanding of the project. The staff may also recommend technical assistance as a prerequisite to further consideration of the application. Provision of technical assistance to a requesting organization (generally through the use of local consultants) is discussed in the PMC, and has to be authorized by the Executive Director. No proposal should remain under discussion for more than three months from the

date of REF reception. If insufficient progress has been made on preparation after a written request of the program officer in the three months following receipt of the project, and if the requesting organization has not submitted a modified project proposal, the project is sent to the Board with a recommendation to reject the proposal.

c) Grant Evaluation

If the basic eligibility criteria (p. 14) are not met, the PMC rejects the proposal. The decision is recorded in the minutes of the PMC prepared by the Project Grant Program Manager, and a rejection letter is sent to the applicant.

When the responsible officer decides that a grant project is ready to be submitted to the Board, the RS prepares a Summary Sheet for each application (see Annex 6), and the project is discussed by the PMC. The PMC reviews whether the proposal meets the various above mentioned criteria, and prepares the project application with recommendations to the Board. If the application is submitted to the Board for review, a recommendation is also made by the PMC as to whether an application should be accepted or rejected by the Board. When it is presented for acceptance, possible REF conditions are also discussed. The PMC decisions are recorded in the PMC minutes (internal document_) by the Grant Program Manager. The Grant Program Manager includes all these proposals in a Board Book that is sent by the Executive Director to the Board. The Summary Sheet is also saved in the REF MIS. The Executive Director reviews the Board Book and sends it electronically to the Board Members.

If the requested grant is 20,000 EUR or below the Project Management Committee is authorized to decide whether the grant should be funded, provided that no more than

200,000 EUR is spent per year overall in the grant's program and there are sufficient resources available. In all other respects the project cycle is the same. At the end of the year, a list of projects approved for less than 20,000 EUR is submitted for information to the Board.

d) Board Approval or Rejection

The Board reviews the grant proposals either electronically or when it meets. The Board receives the grant proposals and a summary with recommendations from the Project Management Committee as to whether accept or reject each of the proposals. The REF Grants Manager and responsible program officers prepare minutes of the Board review. The minutes are thereafter approved by the Board and, within two weeks, decisions are communicated to each project applicant. The list with approved projects is also available at the website of the REF. Approval letters clearly set forth any conditions and required modifications, and are sent together with the Project Implementation Plan (PIP) and Monitoring and Evaluation Plan templates (if applicable) (Annexes 9-11). The Approval letter indicates the name and contact

information of the RS who will provide support in preparing the next phase of the approval, the submission of the PIP and the Project Monitoring Plan.

e) Preparation of Project Implementation Plan, Project Monitoring, Evaluation Plan and Final Approval

The Project Implementation Plans (PIP1 and PIP2) set out the expected outputs and outcomes from the project (PIP1) and the planned activities and inputs (PIP2). These documents form part of the contract with the implementing organization. The country facilitator and the assigned REF staff member explain to the applicant how to fill the two PIP tables, and the list of indicators (PIP1 and PIP2 as set forth in Annexes 4_1 and 4_2). They also help the applicant to prepare a table of monitoring indicators and a list of monitoring activities to be undertaken during the project life. The Board might require the preparation of a full monitoring and evaluation plan. In case the project does require a monitoring and evaluation plan, the REF contracts a consultant to work with the organization and prepares this plan.

If the information and documents requested by the REF are not received within 6 weeks from the date the Board approval letter is sent, the project is rejected automatically. Once the PIP1 and PIP 2 and the list of indicators are received by the REF, they are reviewed by the REF RS, and, if found to be satisfactory, are discussed with the Grant Program Manager and the Monitoring and Evaluation officer. When the Grant Program Manager approves the PIP tables, and the Monitoring and Evaluation Plan in the case that it is required, the information is sent to the Finance and Administration Manager to prepare the Grant Agreement. If the monitoring and evaluation plan requires additional funding, this is to be added in the contract agreement and the budget of the project.

f) Signing the Grant Agreement

Once the Grant Agreement (Annex 8) is ready, all information is entered in the MIS by the RS in charge of the project, including the plan for monitoring visits and the plan for external evaluation and audits. The schedule of payment for the project is entered by the Finance and Administration Manager. The contract is then sent to the applicant for signing. When it is signed and returned to the REF, the REF Executive Director signs it, and the status of the project is changed in the MIS to reflect that the project cycle is under implementation.

g) Grant Implementation and Monitoring

The implementing organization implements the grant according to the PIP attached to the Grant agreement. If changes that require a modification of the PIP occur because of changes in the activity or in timing, the implementing organization discusses it with the RS. If issues arise or support to the implementing organization deems needed, the RS asks the country facilitator to provide support and advice to the implementing organization. If the implementing

organization makes small changes in the implementation plan, it should inform the REF Staff of these changes in written form, either in a letter, fax or in electronic mail. The RS consults as often as needed with the Grant Program Manager to ensure consistency in the treatment of different projects.

In case of any delay in the implementation the organization shall inform the REF on the possible extension of the project period. REF has a sole right to approve or reject the request.

h) Implementing the Monitoring and Evaluation Plan

When the project includes a monitoring and evaluation plan (Annex 11), it usually requires a survey to be carried out before the activities start. The implementing agency hires the necessary specialists (an individual or a firm), and ensures that the baseline data is collected. Usually the collection and analysis of baseline data is a condition for the release of the second tranche of financing by REF. REF ensures that the organization receives adequate technical advice to implement the plan, and provides additional technical assistance when requested by the implementing agency. The REF also works closely with the implementing agencies in ensuring that the final survey and evaluation is carried out properly, and that the implementing agencies receive the support needed.

i) Implementing Organization Reporting

The implementing organization sends quarterly reports to the REF. The quarterly report format is designed so that it can be easily prepared (see Annex 17). It consists of PIP table 2 with a supplementary column to indicate progress on each item of the PIP. It is accompanied by a short narrative report focused on how well the organization is meeting the objectives of the project. This report needs to be sent to the REF every three months. When it is received by the REF, it is reviewed by the Country Facilitator and the RS who ensures that all the requirements are met. If requirements are not met, the RS will send a reminder letter to the recipient organization and informs the Monitoring and MIS officer and the Project Grant Program Manager. When the report is final and is considered acceptable, it is saved in the REF MIS. Disbursements cannot be processed by the REF if the implementing agency is late in reporting, or if the reports are inadequate. The implementing organization is also required to send a scanned copy (CD format) of all deliverable documents to REF to be archived. When the project is fully disbursed, the implementing organization submits an evaluation report to REF (see model in Annex 15) which is reviewed by the RS and the Monitoring and MIS officer to assess whether it is satisfactory. New project proposals from organizations that have not submitted their evaluation report of a previous REF as a satisfactory project to REF, are automatically rejected.

Financial monitoring of REF grantees includes the receipt of the following kinds of documentation in support of the grantee's report:

- Invoices, capitalization minutes
- Offers from different suppliers
- Supplier, grant and working contracts
- Payroll documentation and activity reports
- Take over receipts and attendance registers
- Bank statement and petty cash report

In addition REF controls the expense accounting system, and obliges every grantee to manage all financial transactions through a separate bank account opened for the REF project. In case of purchasing equipment, REF's financial manager, country facilitator and country officer also monitor the existence of tangible assets such as a vehicles, computers and furniture.

j) REF Monitoring Visits

A REF team, composed by the responsible program officer, the country facilitator, a randomly assigned REF staff member and a financial staff member (in some cases a board member or external experts participates), visits the project site. These visits take place approximately every 6 months but not less than once a year, and always before project completion and/or before suspending disbursements on a project. Every month, one PMC meeting reviews the quarterly plan for monitoring visits and discusses the composition of the monitoring teams. The Grant Program Manager regularly updates this plan and ensures that it is followed.

The purpose of monitoring visits is to offer assistance to the implementing organization as it works through the project cycle as well as to review to date progress in the project implementation based on the PIPs including financial monitoring of disbursed funds. The REF team reviews:

- progress made by the implementing organization in meeting the objectives of the project as described in the project implementation plan, and agrees on any modifications needed to the implementation plan;
- the implementation of the activities as planned in the PIP and any changes in the activities;
- the relation of the implementing agencies with other stakeholders, and, in particular, with the ultimate beneficiaries. For this purpose, the team meets with key stakeholders including representatives from national governments;
- a sample of the contracts for purchases of goods and services to ensure that the procurement procedures are being followed and expenditures are in line with the project budget;
- the accounts of the project, including bank statements and petty cash reports, to make sure they reflect actual purchases and that they are in line with the budget;

- the quality and adequacy of the project impact monitoring by the implementing organization. Any modification or change is described in the Monitoring Report which is discussed with the implementing organization.
- the existence of those equipment and materials, which are the results of any procurement and investments. Furthermore, every supporting document which can underpin spending/expenditures during the project implementation

The team visits as many sites where the project is being implemented as possible in order to meet with the beneficiaries and various stakeholders. If the project is being implemented in too many sites, the RS can contract a consultant to carry out site visits before the official monitoring visit will take place.

A Monitoring Report, including the rating of the project as satisfactory, unsatisfactory or best practice is prepared in the two weeks that follow the visit, and is sent officially to the implementing organization. The report is reviewed by the Project Grant Program Manager. The report includes recommendations for the implementing organization in the field (see Annex 12). Every project rated as best practice or unsatisfactory is discussed in the PMC to determine the appropriateness of the rating. After the report is reviewed by the Project Grant Program Manager, it is sent to the implementing organization and filed in the MIS.

At any time, RS, in agreement with the REF Executive Director and the implementing organization, can contract an independent external evaluation of the project in order to help project stakeholders document the impact of the project, to analyze best practices, help in correcting problems that can occur during project implementation, or for any other well justified and documented reason.

REF's main auditor partner (PriceWaterhouseCooper) may yearly and randomly selected projects are to be audited by them as a part of the institutional annual audit of REF.

k) Change in PIP, Budget or Grant Agreement

If significant delays, cost overruns, addition or dropping of major activities or shortfalls in results are experienced (delays in implementation of more than 10 percent of the time frame set in the implementation plan, or 10 percent change in the amount of funding in each budget category, or addition or dropping of a major activity in the PIP), the implementing organization needs to inform the REF of the situation in written form before it takes any action. The implementing organization needs also to formally request for any newly proposed changes in a special reallocation request form (Annex 22) in the PIP and project budget categories (if above the 10 percent already mentioned). These changes are also discussed with the implementing organizations during monitoring visits.

The letter requesting the changes is discussed by the responsible officer with the Project Grant Program Manager. All changes have to be agreed in writing by the REF Director. Three scenarios are possible:

- If the shortcomings in implementation do not jeopardize reaching the objectives of the project, there is no evidence of fraudulent activities, and the situation can still be corrected, a letter is sent to the implementing organization with recommendations for improving the situation with clear requirements, a time frame to implement the changes, and the PIP and the budget will be modified accordingly. REF can also hire a technical assistant to support the implementing organization in improving project implementation.
- If the changes are due to external circumstances independent from the action of the implementing organization (e.g., change in government, change in legislation or other financing made available to the implementing organization), the implementing organization should also inform REF in writing and discussion could take place on a modification of the project or the cancellation of the ongoing project and a submission of a new proposal.
- If the changes are due to fraudulent activities, or clear ineffectiveness on the part of the implementing organization is assessed, the project can be suspended and disbursements halted. The REF can require reimbursement of the funds already spent, or may choose to discontinue the project and cancel undisbursed funds.

I) Grant Completion

A Final Project Report (FPR) (see Annex 15), which includes all performance indicators, shall be delivered to the REF within 30 days of project completion. Failure to submit a FPR will result in ineligibility of the recipient for further REF support. Some projects will include an independent external evaluation (Annex 16). The selection of the consultants of the external evaluation as well as the TOR of the evaluation must be approved by the REF before the external evaluation is undertaken. The final evaluation reports will need to be provided to REF in English. The TOR and the external evaluators are reviewed by the monitoring and MIS officer in consultation with the Senior Management Team to ensure high quality. Once these documents are produced, REF carries out a final monitoring visit and produces a final monitoring report (Annex 14). This report also gives the final rating of the project.

In addition to the FRP, for the projects of more than 200,000 Euro, the recipient shall enter into a contract with an independent financial auditor, chosen through a competitive process, to undertake a comprehensive audit of financial accounts. The project also needs an external evaluation made by independent consultant. For projects of less than 200,000 Euro, the latest audit of the accounts of the implementing organization including the accounts of the REF project is required. The audit report will be submitted by the independent auditor to the REF

office no later than three months following the completion of the project. As with the evaluation report, failure to submit an audit report will result in ineligibility for future projects, as well as potential legal action. The recipient will be asked to reimburse REF for any expenditure that is not consistent with the approved grant budget.

m) Dispute Resolution

Disputes and appeals, either from organizations who have submitted grant proposals or are implementing projects, shall be addressed to the Executive Director who will inform the REF Chairman of the Board. The Executive Director is responsible for taking action in response to the complaint.

5.1.10 Call for Proposals

In some cases, the REF staff can identify a very important uncovered need in a country for which no project proposals have been submitted to the REF. It might also be a special project done in partnership with another institution. In this case, the REF can recommend to the Board to initiate a call for proposals.

a) Identification and Review of the Need for a Call for Proposals

When a staff member identifies the need for a call for proposals, a short note is prepared by the staff member indicating the objective of the call for proposal, the reasons why no applications have been received on the topic, some of the activities, and an estimated budget. This proposal is discussed by the Project Management Committee and, if approved, sent to the Board for review. If the Board accepts the call for proposals, then the relevant documentation is prepared.

b) Advertising the Call for Proposals

The call for proposal is prepared with all necessary indication. The call is advertised on the REF website, and can also be sent directly to organizations that can potentially be interested. It can also be advertised on the Roma internet-based information network, and other relevant methods of dissemination may be considered as well.

c) Reviewing Applications

The applications received are reviewed by the RS responsible for the call, and are presented to the PMC. The PMC selects the best applicant to undertake the project. The reasons for the selection are documented in the minutes of the PMC. The application is then sent like any other application to the Board for final approval with the relevant summary sheet. The process thereafter follows the normal project cycle.

5.1.11 Learning from Projects

The ability for the REF to learn as much as possible from grants and to disseminate these lessons is essential to improve REF's performance and approach and to ensure that good projects and good ideas and practices can be scaled up, and that learning is taking place at national and global level. Information is collected both by the implementing organization through its monitoring and evaluation process, and by the REF during its

a) Information Processed on a Regular Basis

The following information is processed on a regular basis:

- Information on costs: The different costs of implementing education programs and the most relevant ratios such as cost per beneficiary and cost per text book are collected and analyzed. The REF maintains a database of various costs, and regularly updates various efficiency ratios such as cost per beneficiaries and others.
- Main education indicators: For each relevant project, information is collected systematically in order to measure the contribution of each project to a number of national indicators. The complete list and description of indicators can be found in Annex 12. They are indicators of access to and participation in education, quality of education, and education policy development.
- Specific project indicators related to the project activities and assessment of opinion from parents, Roma and non-Roma, teachers, inspectors, school directors, among others about the project and its impact. These indicators are determined by the project implementation agencies with the support of the country facilitators and REF staff for simple projects. For more complex or larger projects a consultant is hired by the REF to help the organization prepare a monitoring and evaluation plan.

b) Special External Evaluations Carried Out by REF Consultants

A specific evaluation can be contracted by the REF for complex, large projects that represent best practices or bad practices. The REF may also evaluate processes (such as the desegregation process in Bulgaria which have been supported by a number of REF projects.)

c) Annual Synthesis of the Monitoring Reports and Evaluation Reports

All monitoring and evaluation report findings by implementing organizations are analyzed so that they can be integrated in REF's Annual Report.

5.2 Reimbursable Grants

The Reimbursable Grant Program is a mechanism through which NGOs can receive a reimbursable grant in order to implement a education-related project which has secured funding from EU Structural Funds, Instrument for Pre-Accession funds or some of the other funds managed in the same way such as the EEA financial mechanisms, the Norwegian Financial Mechanisms and the Swiss Contribution. REF support is provided to those projects whose implementation is significantly delayed and the objectives endangered because of delays in receipt of financing from the relevant funding authority. Projects implemented in any country for which REF provides project grant support through its project grant program are eligible to receive support under the Reimbursable Grant Program

5.2.1 Evaluation Criteria

The projects financed under this facility must meet REF's overall goals. Only projects that have already been contracted by the national authority managing the structural funds are eligible. A maximum of 20 percent of the amount of the project can be obtained through the REF reimbursable grants. Because of the smaller size of REF financing for these grants and the fact that these funds are reimbursable, the project cycle is simplified.

5.2.2 Application

The organization should provide the contract signed with the national authority managing the structural funds, complete the application for reimbursable grants (Annex 5) available on the REF website, and send a copy of the original contract signed with the national authority. The application is then registered with the REF and is acknowledged following the same procedures as other grant proposals.

5.2.3 Review

The Project Management Committee (PMC) reviews all applications. The Executive Director approves reimbursable grant requests up to 30,000 Euro after receiving positive reviews in the PMC. Grants requesting more than 30,000 Euros are sent to the Board for review with a summary sheet. Decisions made by the PMC on reimbursable grants are noted in the minutes.

5.2.4 Contracting and Implementation

Once the project is approved, the REF contracts an implementing organization. A specific reimbursable grant contract is used for this purpose. All information is entered in the MIS. REF is not required to carry out monitoring visits for reimbursable grants. REF receives copies of the reports sent to the national authority. The MIS indicates the expected date for reimbursement of the grant, and the Manager of Administration and Finance ensures that the reimbursements

are made on time. Delays in reimbursing the grant and requests for extension of the grant period are discussed in the PMC.

5.3 Policy Development and Capacity Building Program

Funding is set aside for policy development and capacity building initiated by REF management and staff in order to meet its objectives. This program covers specific studies, evaluations, policy analysis, technical support and training for REF partners and public institutions on policy and program related issues. Each year, REF Executive Director with the Manager for Policy Development and Capacity Building prepares a yearly program of activities and assesses its cost. The program is approved by the Board, but can be adapted during implementation after Board agreement.

Each activity is documented in the form of an information sheet that describes the objective of the activity, provides a short description, the implementing mechanism, the time line and an estimate of the costs. This information sheet is attached to the annual program and is also saved in the MIS. Each activity is managed by an assigned REF staff member who works with a team. The Policy Development and Capacity Building Manager ensures that the activities are implemented in a timely manner, and supports the team in implementing them.

5.4 Communication and Cross Country Learning Program

REF has an important role to play in supporting Roma inclusion in education systems and in reducing school segregation. The REF prepares an annual program of communication and dissemination on Roma education for Board approval. It consists of REF initiated activities such as conferences, seminars, publications, press releases, media campaigns, and magazines. The program is managed in the same way as the Policy Development and Capacity Program with each activity described in an information sheet. The communication and country learning program reports to the Executive Director.

5.5 REF Implemented Country Programs

The REF can also take the initiative and responsibility to manage special programs that meet its objectives. After obtaining the REF Board agreement, such special programs are financed through call for proposals by donors, and, in particular, the European Union or national governments through the use of structural funds.

In this case, it is essential that the REF does not enter in competition with Roma NGOs for accessing these funds. The REF should apply only when it can help Romani NGOs accessing

funds that they would not be able to access by themselves. The following criteria should be followed by the REF when applying for such calls for proposals:

- The proposal shall be in line with the REF mandate and objectives.
- REF shall ensure the participation of Romani NGOs and, as much as possible, shall present the proposal in association with the local Romani NGOs, or sub- contract Romani NGOs for implementation.
- The proposal shall not represent serious reputation related risks for the REF.
- The proposal shall be in line with the REF strategic direction in the concerned country or country.
- REF shall not enter in competition with Romani NGOs for accessing these funds.

REF can also contribute its own fund to the proposal. Call for proposals are discussed in the PMC, and a decision is subsequently made. Because of the frequent short notice given for the call for proposals, a copy of the proposal is sent to the Board members with a one-page summary sheet. In case the proposal has a very short deadline, the Executive Director can decide to submit it before having received an answer from the Board. In case the Board rejects the request received from the Executive Director, the REF retrieves the proposal.

5.6 REF/Tertiary Scholarships Program

5.6.1 Introduction

The Roma Education Fund Scholarships Program operates four tertiary education scholarship programs in the countries of Central, Eastern and Southern Europe and Turkey. The programs are geared towards giving opportunities and opening access to eligible Romani students in tertiary education in the countries of their residence as well as internationally.

The REF Scholarship Program runs an open, merit-based academic competition for eligible Romani students at the university level. In order to assist the potential applicants in learning about the selection process and criteria in the scholarships schemes, below is the detailed information of the program on selection procedures and requirements that may assist applicants in filing the relevant documents and succeeding in the academic competition.

REF can support under each Scholarship scheme the same applicant throughout his/her studies for:

- one Bachelor degree, for maximum 4/5 years (if integrated study model), with one transfer to another university/faculty/field of studies being allowed only once;
- one Master degree, for maximum two years;
- one PhD degree, for maximum three years.

Each year, the REF Board decides how much money to allocate to each program and the estimated number of scholars that will be served by each program. All scholarships are for one year only, with no commitment from REF to fund subsequent years study. However, students who receive a scholarship in one year and are in good academic standing are encouraged to re-apply for funding for the following year and in general returning students are given priority over new applicants. The REF Board, based on recommendations of the Program staff, determines the countries in which each program operates and the selection criteria, taking into account available resources and the preferences of donors.

There is no cost to apply for a scholarship. All forms and information about how to apply are freely available for download on the REF website. However, each program has specific application procedures and requirements, which are set out in the sections below.

5.6.2 Country Coverage and Education Fields

a) Roma Memorial University Scholarship Program (RMUSP)

The RMUSP is implemented in the countries of the Decade of Roma Inclusion (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and Slovakia) and Turkey. The program aims at 1,000 scholarships annually with a basic grant of 800 EUR per year. The Program is open to all subject matters and covers scholars pursuing Bachelor, Master, Ph.D and postgraduate studies.

b) Law and Humanities Program (LHP)

The Law and Humanities Program (LHP) is funded by the Remembrance, Responsibility and Future Foundation and REF. The program covers Moldova, Russia and Ukraine and aims to fund 100-180 scholars annually. The basic scholarship in LHP program is 1,300 EUR. Distinct priority is given to applicants who study law; however the program is opened, as far as funds permit, to students of humanities as well as technical and natural science fields.

c) Roma International Scholar Program (RISP)

The Roma International Scholar Program, formerly known as Roma Supplementary- and Roma Interregional Scholarships grants, started in 2007. The scholarship scheme supports scholars who study internationally for Master or Ph.D/postgraduate degrees. The program aims to fund up to 100 scholars annually. The scholarship amount ranges from 1,000 to 9,050 EUR per annum.

d) Roma Health Scholarship Program (RHSP)

The Roma Health Scholarship Program is funded and overseen by Open Society Institute Roma Health Program under the Health Initiative Programs. The program consists of 4 components, out of which scholarships and tutoring programs are administered by REF/Scholarships

Program. The basic scholarship varies by the academic level pursued (vocational vs. university) and by country. The range of the scholarship is 2,400 - 4,000 Euro. Priority is given to vocational medical degree, undergraduate medical degree, graduate medical degree and Postgraduate Medical degree.

e) Professional Development Fund (PDF)

The purpose of the Professional Development Fund is to support the participation of the scholars in activities such as research projects, fellowship programs, summer schools, internships or language courses within recognized universities, language schools and other organizations in their own countries or abroad. The program is open only to the recipients of other REF/SP schemes. The program aims to fund up to 10 scholars annually and the amount granted under PDF may reach 2,000 Euro.

5.6.3 Scholars

REF Scholarship Program beneficiaries are Roma, who are accepted as full-time¹ (exceptions Czech Republic, and MA and PhD Scholars in all Program countries) students at recognized universities in their home countries or countries of residence and demonstrate awareness of Roma-related issues. The eligible scholarship recipients are candidates for Bachelor, Master or PhD degrees and postgraduate programs from the program countries.

The Program does not discriminate based on age, sex or social background of applicants.

5.6.4 Application Process

a) Roma Memorial University Scholarship Program (RMUSP)

Applicants (new and renewal) must submit their applications respecting two Program deadlines, by April 30th (Report form, GPA Certificate, Recommendation Letter, Contractual Obligation, Bank Account Document, copy of ID); and by September 15 or October 31st (provide enrollment certificate and tuition fee certificate if applicable. The deadlines are country based).

New applicants are also required to participate in Program Orientation Sessions².

b) Law and Humanities Program (LHP)

Applicants (new and renewal) have to comply with two deadlines of document submission: April 15th (Scholarship Form, Recommendation Letter, Grade Transcript certificate, copy of ID); and September 15th (Original Enrollment and Tuition Fee Certificates)

New applicants are required to participate in Program Orientation Sessions and personal interviews.

¹ RMUSP applicants shall be full time students. Exceptions: in case of renewal applicants part time applicants are supported until graduation; in Law and Humanities Program the goal is to have all the applicants full time students, however given the low number of applicants, the Program, accepts part time students within the limits of funding available.

²For more details please see paragraph 'Orientation Sessions'

c) Roma International Scholar Program (RISP)

Given the international dimension of the program the application materials are filled in English. The application materials are delivered in one package and comply with one deadline only. Preference is given to applicants pursuing Master, PhD, or Postdoctoral education.

Applicants are required to submit their applications by September 15th (online Application Form, Statement of Purpose, Curriculum Vitae, scanned Academic Reference Form, scanned letter of admission to university, scanned Enrolment Certificate ,scanned notarized copies and English translations of all high school, undergraduate and, if applicable, postgraduate grade transcripts and diplomas, scanned copy of ID, scanned letters of already approved financial support -if applicable).

d) Roma Health Scholarship Program (RHSP)

Applicants have to comply with three deadlines of document submission: May 30th (Application Form, Recommendation Letter, Grade Transcript certificate, Contractual Obligations copy of ID); and October 31st (scanned Enrollment and Tuition Fee Certificates).

New applicants must additionally attend orientation/information program session and Advocacy Training Camp

The academic progress of RHSP beneficiaries is reviewed in the Spring each year to determine whether they are entitled to receive the second payment of their scholarship, Roma Health Scholarship Program beneficiaries must submit an Intermediate Report Form, Grade Point Average Transcript, and Language Tutoring Application Form (optional) to the Program by the deadline of February 28th.

e) Professional Development Fund (PDF)

Applicants for the Professional Development Fund need to be accepted into the one of the other three programs of the scholarship schemes. Applications are considered in two rounds, with applications due on 28 February and 30 May. Applicants must send: Application Form,

Grade Transcript for all completed academic years and of the first completed semester of the academic year, official bank note with account data, Recommendation Letter(s), Contractual Obligations, and a copy of ID.

5.6.5 Eligibility Criteria

Eligibility criteria of the REF/Scholarships Program set the standards according to which applicants' qualifications are assessed. Program applications are screened for appropriate academic standards, completeness of submitted documents and deadlines met. The applicants who do not meet the eligibility criteria of the program(s) are not further considered in the academic competition of the programs.

a) Eligibility Criteria (relevant for all Scholarships Schemes)

Applicants should:

- be openly Roma, willing to appear publicly as Roma;
- have been or will be accepted at a state accredited university in their home country or country of residence as full-time students in the upcoming academic year. Persons planning to get enrolled in a university in the upcoming year, but not enrolled in one at the moment of application, are also eligible. Please note that the home country and country of residence has to be one of the program countries as listed under the additional eligibility criteria (see the list of eligible countries for each scholarship scheme below);
- apply by the set deadline;
- pursue studies in obtaining a Bachelor, Master, or PhD degree (or also medical vocational studies for RHSP);
- submit a completed Application Form;
- submit a motivation letter that expresses their academic goals and/or accomplishments and shows their commitment and motivation to study;
- submit an essay that considers the most outstanding issues that Roma face in the applicants country, how those issues affect the local community and what are the possible means to address them;
- provide an official transcript of the university grades from all completed academic years as well as the latest completed semester of September ñ December. If the applicant has not been enrolled in school/university recently, should provide certified copies of the latest received grade transcripts and /or diplomas;
- submit at least one detailed and informative recommendation letter, describing the academic performance and/or extra-curricular activities of the applicant;
- sign electronically the Contractual Obligations section of the online application form.

b) Specific Eligibility Criteria for RMUSP applicants

Applicants should:

- study in one of the following fields: law, public administration, journalism, political science, sociology, psychology, pedagogy, philosophy, economics, finance and banking, business administration, history, international relations and European studies, communications and public relations, medicine, engineering, ecology or environmental studies, biology, mathematics, physics and arts;
- be a resident or citizen of one of the following countries: Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Kosovo, Montenegro, Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia, Serbia and Turkey;
- provide evidence of acceptance in full-time university studies within a recognized university in the applicants own country or country of residence by presentation of an original university enrollment certificate for the academic year for which s/he is applying for scholarship support.

Note 1: Part-time students are eligible to apply for RMUSP only if they are studying for a Master or PhD (in any program country) or are studying in Czech Republic (and Slovakia starting from 2011 for any degree).

RMUSP: http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/programme-introduction#eligibility_criteria_for_applicants

c) Specific Eligibility Criteria for LHP applicants

The applicants should:

- provide evidence of acceptance in full-time university studies within a recognized university in the applicants own country or country of residence by presentation of an original university enrollment certificate for the academic year for which s/he is applying for scholarship support;
- study in the field of Law and Humanities;
- be a resident or citizen of one of the following countries: Belorussia, Moldova, Russia or Ukraine.

Note: shortlisted applicants for LHP Program will be invited to personal interviews

LHP: http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/programme-overview#eligibility_criteria_for_applicants

d) Specific Eligibility Criteria for RHSP applicants

The applicants should:

- provide evidence of acceptance in full-time university studies within a recognized university or post-secondary vocational school in the applicants own country or country of residence by presentation of an original university enrollment certificate for the academic year for which s/he is applying for scholarship support;
- study in the Medical field;
- be a resident or citizen of one of the following countries: Bulgaria, Macedonia or Serbia.

Note: The program considers applicants for both tertiary and post-secondary vocational school levels.

RHSP: http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/roma-health-scholarship-programme#eligibility_criteria

e) Specific Eligibility Criteria for RISP applicants

The applicants should:

- provide evidence of acceptance in full-time university studies within a recognized university in a country other than the country where s/he resides or has citizenship;
- present an original university enrollment certificate for the academic year for which s/he is applying for scholarship support;
- be a resident and a citizen of one of the following countries: Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Czech Republic, Kosovo, Hungary, Montenegro, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Serbia, Ukraine and Turkey.

RISP: http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/roma-international-scholar-programme#eligibility_criteria

5.6.6 Selection procedures and criteria

a) **Application and document validity check**

The Program/Country Coordinator and/or relevant staff member conducts general screening of documents for all applicants. The screening helps identify irrelevant documents in the application packages and the Program/Country Coordinator and/or relevant staff member allows an applicant in particular cases an additional week to submit missing documents or substitute the inadequate document. The applicants are contacted individually by e-mail. If the applicant fails to respond to the request, the application will not be considered further for that year's competition.

The Program/Country Coordinator and/or relevant staff member verifies the validity of the submitted official documents (GPA, Enrollment Certificate) with the schools and/or individual professors.

The Program/ Country Coordinator and/or relevant staff member conducts reference calls when additional information or validity check is needed

b) **Decision-making mechanisms**

The decision-making mechanism consists of several steps and levels, with slight variations according to the specific program.

Key steps are explained below:

- Step one (relevant for all programs): Verifying whether the requirement of the eligibility criteria of the program/s are met. The step consists of a technical verification of the application materials, which is done by the Scholarships Program administration staff;
- Step two (relevant for all programs): Evaluating the application content. The evaluation is carried out by the REF/SP National Selection Board (NSB) members in respective program countries. The NSB members review the Application Materials and discuss each application in a Selection Board Meeting;
- Step three (relevant only for LHP applicants and for freshmen-to-be RMUSP applicants): Conducting personal interviews with the applicants. The shortlisted applicants are interviewed by the NSB members in each above-mentioned country (see below details on interviews).
- Step four (relevant for all Programs): Forwarding to ISB. This step may be needed if the decisions on the particular applications are not reached by NSBs. The debated applications are forwarded to the International Selection and Advisory Board for further consideration.

c) Decision-making bodies:

REF/SP Staff and the Program Country Coordinators are not directly involved in the process of scholars selection. The program staff has an observing role in the selection process.

Selection of scholars from the pool of applicants is carried out by a **National Selection Board (NSB)**. The NSB members for the Law and Humanities Scholarships Program (LHP) and Roma Memorial University Scholarship Program (RMUSP) are selected for their positions through an open competition and serve in the boards from 3 to 5 years. The program strives to select representatives of academia and Roma communities for the NSBs in all program countries. **NSB Members** in Roma Health Scholarships Program (RHSP) are appointed by the relevant ministries in the program countries

The International Selection and Advisory Board (ISB) of REF carries out selection for the Roma International Scholar Program (RISP) and Professional Development Fund (PDF). The ISB members represent international NGOs, academic programs, experts with experience in managing scholarship schemes, etc. Board members serve on ISB from 3 to 5 years.

d) Selection Criteria

Selection criteria for REF Scholarship programs take into account the quality of the documents submitted. The applicants must strive to comply with the selection criteria and present competitive application materials. The selection criteria for all program countries and programs are as follows:

- Competitive GPA, In case of higher-than-anticipated demand for scholarship support in program countries, the GPA criterion may be made more demanding;
- Motivational letter that expresses the academic goals and/or accomplishments clearly and shows the commitment and motivation to study;
- Essay that considers the most outstanding issues that Roma face in the applicant's country, how those issues affect the local community and what are the possible means to address them;
- Participation in academic seminars, conferences, workshops, summer schools, and/or competitions will be an advantage;
- Performance at the interview.

e) Interviews in the Scholarships Programs

Individual interviews are conducted by the National Selection Board Members and the program staff after screening the application materials in LHP and RMUSP programs. The program interviews all short-listed new applicants in LHP and Freshmen-to-be only in RMUSP. Questions posed to the applicants are aiming to fill in the missing academic/personal information in the application forms. Each individual interview does not exceed 20-25 minutes.

During the interview several points are taken into consideration: fluency of speech in the language of education of the applicants; ability to freely communicate the ideas; ability to reflect on the questions in application form and follow the responses given in writing; and adequate description of goals. The interview also serves to clarify the application where there is a suspicion of plagiarism or forgery.

f) Further considerations

Major considerations of the selection process of the Scholarship Programs include the following:

The program classifies the applicants in two groups for further selection: renewal applicants and new applicants. The two groups do not compete against each other, but are each assigned a quota that allows to give a priority to the renewal applicants and consider affirmative measures for the program countries with low demand for the scholarships. This approach allows the program to run a competition while providing a fair chance to scholars within relevant academic levels.

- **Renewal applicants** - Students/scholars who received the RMUSP Scholarship for the previous academic cycle and are applying to renew their scholarship
- **New applicants** - Students/scholars who did not receive the RMUSP Scholarship in their previous academic year, regardless of whether they received it in earlier years

g) Evaluation Process

When evaluating the applications, the National Selection Board members review applicants responses to asset-based questions and transcripts carefully. In the applications, the National Selection Board members make qualitative assessments on:

- Style and the fluency of applicant's writing
- Comprehensiveness of information provided
- Ability to express the academic goals and/or accomplishments clearly
- Commitment and motivation to study
- Understanding and awareness of issues particularly affecting Roma
- Academic standing (GPA)
- Academic progress from previous year/s (for renewal applicants)
- Originality of application: applicants who submit identical or similar application materials may be disqualified from further consideration for program support

While each applicant is considered on its merits, the National Selection Board Members may disqualify applications based on the following reasons:

(i) Late application (ii) Incomplete applications, (iii) Inadequate application package, (iv) Low GPA, (v) Cross-Referencing, (vi) Forged documents, (vii) Application materials submitted are identical to those submitted by at least one other applicant, (viii) Application completed by someone other than the applicant, (ix) An application includes false information or forged documents

h) 'Black list' policy

Applicants who are proven to submit to REF Scholarships Program forged documents are put on a 'black list' which means that they will not be eligible in the future for any support from REF and REF/Scholarships Program. The program materials (guidelines, application/report forms) carry the warning related to this. The Program's 'black list' will be made available to REF and other OSF Programs, while the status of these applicants will be noted in the grant management system of REF as well.

Program procedure: in case the program staff notices any inconsistency in the application materials, they will check the accuracy of the information with the local contacts (i.e., secretary of the university, recommender, etc). The program will keep the records of such verifications, stating the name and position of the person who confirmed the inconsistency.

i) Communication of selection decisions

The program communicates the outcomes of the selection process to the respective applicants after the second, the third, and the fourth steps of selection via e-mail by sending either an official Rejection Letter (with specified reasons for rejection), or a Notification Letter (with the confirmation that the candidate was shortlisted for the scholarship), or a Grant letter (with details on the stipend to be received).

The applicant may appeal against the National Board decision within set deadlines. The appeals should be sent to REF. The REF team categorizes the appeals and sends them to the Scholarship Program Ombudsman, who reviews individual appeal cases based on the materials provided by the applicants, the Program and the NSBs. While analyzing the appeals, the Ombudsman may choose to turn to the professional advice of the International Selection Board Members.

5.6.7 Disclosure of Personal Information

REF/SP follows the relevant European and national legislation in its handling and use of data. REF uses the data and information provided by the applicant in order to evaluate their eligibility and make judgments about the selection of the scholars. Data is stored in an electronic database. Information is not disclosed to third parties without the consent of the person or persons whose data is being disclosed.

Additional consent is required from the selected scholars to publicize their names and the school affiliation on REF official web page starting from 2011. Each shortlisted applicant has to submit such consent electronically along with the enrollment and tuition fee certificates as a condition for grant disbursement if selected. Only the applicants who have been selected for the scholarship program/s in the current year will be published on the REF web page.

5.6.8 Outreach / Orientation Sessions

The REF/SP has an extensive network of the coordinators in larger program countries. The country coordinators are contracted by the program with a TOR covering in-country administration and coordination of the program.

Generally the coordinators are affiliated with OSI Network offices or spin-offs as well as from NGOs working on Roma issues in respective countries. In case of turn-over of the individual coordinators, REF opens a call in respective country for application. The selection is carried out by the program in collaboration with the Senior Management Team of REF and the REF Director.

a) **Outreach strategies and in-country contact person**

Program outreach lasts for 3 months, between January and March. The Country Coordinators are responsible for the outreach activities in their respective countries. The announcements (guidelines, application and report forms, check list, frequently asked questions) are made public in January each year through national REF networks, local NGOs, mass media, list serves and forum groups etc. Hard copies of announcement materials are mailed to municipalities in Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary, where the numbers of potential applicants are high. The coordinators of program countries and relevant program staff outreach through public sessions, meetings with relevant communities, and schools in all 16 program countries.

As a response to the manifested interest of representatives of several local NGOs, governmental offices working on Roma related issues, and of students interested in applying for scholarships in the future, the REF/Scholarships Program organizes outreach sessions in with a participation of current or former beneficiaries of the program.

The outreach sessions are aimed to provide exact information with regard to the application cycle, REF/SP requirements, selection process and criteria, while serving as open forums where the RMUSP representatives will be able to respond the questions/issues as addressed by those present.

b) Orientation Sessions

Orientation sessions are organized in every core program country by the Country Coordinators. The orientation sessions are held for the new applicants only and are designed to help potential scholars to understand roles and responsibilities within the scholarships, learn about policies and procedures, meet the program staff and establish tighter connections with the program. The sessions are interactive and last from 2-4 hours, where applicants use their chance to approach the REF/SP staff with individual questions. The sessions are held by REF/Scholarships staff assisted by translators as necessary. The sessions are attended by in-country coordinator, current scholars and alumni of the program.

The sessions take place during the months of May-July. The program sends via e-mail invitations to participate in the orientation sessions/program meetings to all new applicants.

The orientation sessions are mandatory for all new applicants.

Within the framework of orientation and program meetings, the program will hold Roma identity discussion sessions with the invited students. The session aims at opening a forum for the scholars to express their perceptions on the above topic as well as for the organization to learn in an informal setting how to best assist the future Roma intellectuals in asserting their ethnicity in the knowledge society of the 21st century.

c) Students Workshop

The REF/Scholarship Program Staff is responsible for conducting the annual Students Workshop within the Law and Humanities Program to improve networking, assure better information exchange between the participants and add to the professional skills of the program scholars. Participation in the annual Students Workshop is mandatory. If the student cannot attend the workshop, s/he has to present an official letter explaining the case. The letters presented are discussed by ISB. Absence from the annual Student Workshop may affect the conditions of scholarships you may further apply to.

The annual Student Workshop is hosted each year by one of the program countries. The workshops are organized with the assistance of the Country Coordinators. The resume/workshop evaluation is added to the annual Report to RRF.

d) Coordinators Meeting

The annual Coordinators Meeting serves as a monitoring and evaluation point for the Law and Humanities Program. Country presentations, reports, discussion of new strategies for program development are part of the working agenda for Coordinators Meeting. The resume/ meeting notes are added to the annual report to EVZ.

5.6.9 Administration of Scholarship Programs

a) Communication policies with applicants

i. Phone calls (tracking, depth of inquiries)

The coordination units of REF/SP staff take phone inquiries with regard to the application process, requirements and deadlines; eligibility for scholarship; contracts; bank transfers. Staff however, do not encourage inquiries concerning receipt of different applications, grant status or reasons for rejection.

ii. Emails (tracking, official template replies, depth of inquiries)

All email correspondence with the applicants must be conducted from/or cc-ing scholarships@romaeducationfund.org. Inquiries and appeals received by hard copies will be answered by email as well as and shall be kept in hard copies. An official rejection letter is sent to include the particular cause/s for rejection

iii. Communication by e-mail (tracking, type of communication sent by e-mail, deadlines)

The following communication takes place by e-mail:

- Info message to scholars (different in-country organizations) with info on how to re/apply (mid-February);
- Invitations to the orientation session (May-June)
- Rejections (declined out of Eligibility Guidelines - in July, final rejection - September-November);
- Grant contracts (September - November);

iv. Appeals (records, official)

Appeals can be sent to REF via email (scholarship@romaeducationfund.org, which is supervised by the Higher Education Program manager, the Executive Director and the Finance and Administrative manager). The Program responses are kept in e-folders and hard copies are kept in yearly 'Complaint Folders'.

Your appeal will be responded by:

- The program whenever, the inquiry and the appeals concerns learning the outcome of the decision of the program (staff assigned to the task: Ms. Stela Garaz at sgaraz@romaeducationfund.org)
- An official letter from the REF Director in case the appeals are addressed to REF's Executive Director

- The Ombudsmen of REF/SP if the response/explanation and official reasoning for rejection is not deemed satisfactory by an applicants.

6 Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluation

REF carries out periodic evaluations of its programs, to ensure that the objectives are appropriate, efficient, and effective. REF also carries out evaluations at the request of specific donors. In general, these evaluations are made available to the major donors of REF and to the public.

6.1 Status Report

The program prepares a yearly status report for the REF Board including information about:

- New developments program wise (selection criteria, application process, program requirements);
- Lessons learned (feed-back of Country Coordinators with regard to the program announcements and application procedures, students input during and outside of the orientation sessions);
- Statistical data of applicants and finalist (broken down per country, new and renewing applicants)

6.2 Progress Reports

The program will also send progress reports to the REF Board according to a timeline based on program cycle and program components. The report will contain a narrative and a financial part. The Program Officer will prepare with the assistance of the Program Coordinator the aforementioned reports.

6.3 Activity Report

Activity Reports are written after each program component/activity termination, i.e. Orientation Sessions, Annual Students Workshop, Alumni Training Reports within the next 2 weeks after the activity has been conducted.

6.4 Reports to the Third Party (Donor) Organizations

Reports to the Third Party Organizations follow the agreed time line and framework.

7 Administration

7.1 REF's official and working languages

The official working language of the REF is English and all REF communications are issued in the English language. However, the REF accepts documents, reports, and applications for project financing in both English and Romanes.

7.2 Financial Management

Financial management of REF is the responsibility of the Executive Director and the CFO.

The business and reporting period is defined on a yearly basis, starting at January 1 and ending at December 31.

Organizations in the REF Network maintain double-entry bookkeeping. The bookkeeping is maintained in local currency.

All entities in the REF Network shall also prepare their financial statements according to the prevailing REF Accounting Policy. Financial statements according to REF Accounting Policy shall be presented in EUR (where necessary additionally in local currency) and issued in English language (including the audit reports).

The annual and audit reports of all entities in the REF Network shall be published on the website of REF.

7.3 Procurement

The REF has its own procurement procedures more details in REF Financial Manual (Annex 22). The grant selection involves reviewing and approving procurement proposals. Grant progress reporting is expected to provide a review of procurement actions. REF project monitoring is expected to confirm that procurement arrangements are being respected.

For public sector proposals, government procedures will be acceptable if they have been approved by any of the following international organizations: World Bank, EU Commission, and Council of Europe Development Bank.

For private sector proposals, it is essential that the proposals demonstrate that principles of competition are met in procuring goods and services under the grant. Such devices as competitive tendering and receiving multiple bids can serve as such evidence.

7.4 Website

REF maintains a dynamic and interactive web-based resource on the education of Roma. The website describes best practices in Roma education programs ñ program models, and program-related strategies (involving program integration, organizational collaboration, program sustainability, government engagement, and program assessment/documentation), and is organized around the concept of standardized ‘portfolios’ (for program models, programs, and strategies). These portfolios include gathered information and descriptions, including statistical and narrative information, audio clips, and video clips. The portfolios serve as tools for collecting and categorizing information, descriptions, experiences, and commentary from program staff, sponsors, donors, observers, and other participants. The site also includes the latest developments in policy country-by-country, research, evaluation, case studies, data, statistics, etc. The development of the website is part of the communication program. Resources such as videos, books, and other support-related material are produced and printed as the need arises.

In addition, the REF website provides information on all approved projects, including project financial audits, reports and evaluations. REF manuals, operational guidelines and procedures are also posted on the website.

7.5 Information Systems

REF maintains a Management Information System for managing its project grants with links with to its accounting system. The system supports staff and management in monitoring projects, and facilitates the processing of grants and technical assistance activities. The MIS generates the main information needed for the monthly and quarterly reports, and provides timely information on REF activities.

The scholarship programs are managed through a Grant Management System, which contains information about all scholarships awarded and is used to monitor payments.

7.6 Annual and Audit Reports

The REF produces periodic and annual reports which are made available to the public. These reports have four purposes: to provide a record of the Fund’s activities; to ensure transparency in how the Fund’s administrative resources are used; to advocate on behalf of Roma education; and to share knowledge about Roma education.

The annual report includes a complete statement of revenues and expenditures, the annual performance evaluation report, as well as the summary of the annual audit of accounts by an independent auditor. The annual report also includes a brief review of progress on education issues in the Decade countries.

The REF entities have one independent institutional annual audit beyond the specific project audits, which examines REF operation transparency and accountability. The audit and the annual report shall be published by REF until end of March of every year.

7.7 Conflict of Interest Policy

Be it resolved, because it is essential to the effective operation of the Roma Education Fund (REF): that board members and employees be independent and impartial in all actions involving REF, that funds entrusted to REF not be used for private gain, and that there be complete public confidence in the integrity of REF.

Be it resolved: that it is the policy of the Board of Trustees that REF shall conduct its affairs so that no one shall derive private gain from his/her association with REF except as provided by explicit policies of REF.

The underlying principles that the board desires to uphold in such matters are that all potential and actual conflicts of interest should be declared; no person should be a judge in his or her own case; self-dealing is impermissible; and that furtherance of the goals of REF requires that the opportunity to obtain support should be equitably open to all persons and organizations defined in the charter of REF, and not restricted or partially restricted to a clique.

It is not possible to provide a comprehensive definition of circumstances which necessarily give rise to a conflict of interest, but the following are examples of situations giving rise to perceived conflict of interest. The list is not exhaustive, and in any situation where an individual is uncertain as to the propriety of a given arrangement, advice must be sought from the Board of Trustees.

- A board or staff member takes part in or has influence over a decision of REF in which she/he may be unable to remain impartial or maintain objectivity in choosing between the interests of REF and his/her personal interests.
- A board or staff member (or a relative, close friend, or business associate) has a financial interest, or appears to have a financial interest, in the awarding of a grant or contract, or in a purchasing decision of REF;
- A board or staff member (or a relative, close friend, or business associate) has a present or past personal or business affiliation with a grant applicant or potential contractual

partner, or other conflict of loyalties that may lead to or suggest influence in the decision of REF, even where there is no question of personal financial gain from the particular grant or contract.

- A board or staff member who is a member of the board or supervisory body, or is an official in any capacity of a grant applicant or potential contractual partner, shall (i) inform the Executive Director of that fact in writing without delay, prior to a decision by the Board of REF for grant financing for, or entering into contractual relationship with, such an entity, and (ii) inform immediately in writing the board and management of such potential grantee or entity that he/she will refrain from exercising his/her functions in respect of all business conducted in connection with REF, and shall, in fact, exclude him/herself forthwith from such functions, and furthermore (iii) not participate or be involved to any effect on the side of REF in decision-making, project administration, supervision, or any other aspect of such grant or contractual relationship.

It is the duty of all board members, employees and consultants to disclose any actual or potential conflict of interest. A disclosure should be made in writing and should be directed to them. Failure to disclose an actual conflict of interest may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

In order to duly observe compliance with the above stated it is the duty of all board members, employees and consultants to disclose any actual or potential conflict of interest by completing and submitting an Annual Disclosure Questionnaire to the Executive Director or to the person appointed as COI Officer by the board by a specified date every year. The Annual Disclosure Questionnaire form is attached herein as Annex 23.

Furthermore, it is the duty of all board members, employees, and consultants to disclose any actual or potential conflict of interest arising following the submission of such Annual Disclosure Questionnaire in writing by completing a disclosure letter form attached herein as Annex 22.

