Regulations on the National Natural Science Fund of China (the PRC)

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Chapter I — General Provisions

Article 1 — These Regulations are formulated, in accordance with the Law of the People's Republic of China on Scientific and Technological Progress, to standardize the use and administration of the National Natural Science Fund, improve the efficiency of its use, strengthen basic research, cultivate scientific and technological talents, enhance the capability for independent innovation, implement the innovation-driven development strategy, and promote the realization of a high level of scientific and technological self-reliance and self-strengthening.

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Article 2 — The work of the National Natural Science Fund shall uphold the centralized and unified leadership of the Central Committee of the Party.

The work of the National Natural Science Fund shall be oriented toward the world's scientific and technological frontiers, the main economic battlefield, the major needs of the State, and the life and health of the people.

Article 3 — The State establishes the National Natural Science Fund for funding basic research and supporting talent cultivation and team building.

The funding work of the National Natural Science Fund shall implement the policy of respecting science, promoting democracy, advocating competition, promoting cooperation, stimulating innovation and leading the future, cultivate and practice the core socialist values, and follow the principles of openness, fairness and impartiality.

Article 4 — The National Natural Science Fund mainly comes from central budget allocations.

The State encourages local people's governments, enterprises and other organizations to invest funds in joint funding and establish mechanisms for scientific and technological innovation cooperation. The State encourages social forces to donate to the National Natural Science Fund.

The funds of the National Natural Science Fund shall be fully incorporated into budget administration.

Article 5 — The projects funded by the National Natural Science Fund (hereinafter "funded projects") shall promote the organic integration of free exploration and goal orientation in basic research, and shall be determined according to the Fund development plan and the annual Fund project guide.

In determining funded projects, the role of experts shall be brought into full play, and the mechanisms of macro guidance, independent application, equal competition, peer review and merit-based support shall be adopted.

Article 6 — The National Natural Science Fund management institution (hereinafter the "Fund management institution") administers the National Natural Science Fund in accordance with the law, formulates the funding and administration systems of the National Natural Science Fund, and is responsible for the organization and implementation of the funding plan, project setting, review, project approval and supervision, so as to enhance the funding efficiency of the National Natural Science Fund.

The science and technology competent department of the State Council conducts macro-administration, overall coordination and supervision and inspection of the work of the National Natural Science Fund in accordance with the law. The finance department of the State Council administers and supervises the budget, finance and accounting of the National Natural Science Fund in accordance with the law, conducts performance evaluation of the operation of the Fund, and adjusts and improves policies, improves administration and optimizes budget arrangements based on the evaluation results. Audit institutions conduct audit supervision of the use and administration of the National Natural Science Fund in accordance with the law.

Article 7 — The Fund management institution shall strengthen the informatization construction of the work of the National Natural Science Fund, promote the improvement of mechanisms for research integrity management information sharing and for the sharing of funded project results, and strengthen the linkage and coordination between funded projects and other scientific and technological plan projects.

Chapter II — Organization and Planning

Article 8 — The Fund management institution shall formulate the Fund development plan and the annual Fund project guide according to the national economic and social development plan, the scientific and technological development plan and the state of scientific and technological development. The Fund

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development plan shall specify the priority development fields, and the annual Fund project guide shall specify the scope of priority-supported projects.

The National Natural Science Fund shall set up special funds for cultivating young scientific and technological talents and supporting young talents who have achieved outstanding results in the field of science and technology and have obvious innovation potential.

In formulating the Fund development plan and the annual Fund project guide, the Fund management institution shall extensively listen to the opinions of higher education institutions, scientific research institutions, academic organizations and relevant state organs and enterprises, and organize relevant experts to conduct scientific demonstration. The annual Fund project guide shall be published 30 days before the starting date of acceptance of funded project applications.

Article 9 — The Fund management institution shall designate host institutions as the responsibility subjects for the administration of funded projects and their funds.

Higher education institutions, scientific research institutions and other public welfare institutions that have independent legal person status and basic research capability within the territory of the People's Republic of China, as well as other units that conform to the provisions of the State, may register with the Fund management institution as host institutions. The Fund management institution shall regularly publish the list of registered host institutions.

Host institutions shall establish and improve systems for funded project administration, research integrity and research ethics administration, and comply with the norms for the administration of scientific and technological activities.

Article 10 — Host institutions shall perform the following duties in funded project administration work:

(1) organizing applicants to apply for funding from the National Natural Science Fund;

(2) reviewing the authenticity, completeness and legality of the materials submitted by applicants or project leaders;

(3) providing the conditions for the implementation of funded projects and ensuring the time for project leaders and participants to implement funded projects;

(4) tracking the implementation of funded projects and administering and supervising the use of funded project funds;

(5) cooperating with the Fund management institution, the science and technology competent department and the relevant industry competent departments in supervising, inspecting and conducting performance evaluation of the implementation of funded projects and the use of funds;

(6) strengthening the intellectual property administration of the research results of funded projects, supporting open access to research results, and promoting the transformation of research results;

(7) investigating and handling acts that violate research integrity and research ethics; and

(8) completing other work entrusted by the Fund management institution.

The Fund management institution, the science and technology competent department and the relevant industry competent departments shall guide and supervise the funded project administration work of host institutions.

Chapter III — Application and Review

Article 11 — Scientific and technical personnel of host institutions may apply for funding from the National Natural Science Fund if they meet the following conditions:

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(1) having experience in undertaking basic research projects or otherwise engaging in basic research; and

(2) holding a senior professional technical position (title) or a doctoral degree, or having the recommendation of two scientific and technical personnel in the same research field who hold senior professional technical positions (titles).

Where eligible scientific and technical personnel engaging in basic research have no work unit or whose work unit is not a host institution, they may, with the consent of a host institution, apply for funding from the National Natural Science Fund in accordance with these Regulations.

The applicant shall be the person in charge of the funded project for which he or she applies.

Article 12 — To apply for funding from the National Natural Science Fund, an applicant shall determine the research project based on the annual Fund project guide and submit a written application to the Fund management institution through the host institution within the prescribed period.

An applicant applying for funding from the National Natural Science Fund shall submit materials certifying that the applicant meets the conditions prescribed in Article 11 of these Regulations.

Where the research content of the project for which the applicant applies has received other funding, the funding status shall be stated in the application materials. The applicant shall be responsible for the authenticity, completeness and legality of the submitted application materials.

Applicants, participants and their host institutions shall comply with the requirements of research integrity and research ethics, sign research integrity and research ethics commitment letters, and undertake not to engage in scientific and technological research, development and application activities that endanger national security, harm the public interest, endanger human health, or violate research integrity and research ethics, and not to commit acts of fabrication, forgery, plagiarism or falsification.

Article 13 — The Fund management institution shall complete the preliminary review of application materials within 45 days from the deadline for funded project applications. Under any of the following circumstances, the application shall not be accepted, and the applicant shall be notified in writing through the host institution with the reasons stated:

(1) the applicant does not meet the conditions prescribed in these Regulations;

(2) the application materials do not meet the requirements of the annual Fund project guide;

(3) the applicant or participant has been prohibited from undertaking or participating in scientific and technological activities funded by fiscal funds due to acts violating research integrity and research ethics; or

(4) the number of funded project applications by the applicant or participant exceeds the number prescribed by the Fund management institution.

Article 14 — The Fund management institution shall engage peer experts with high academic standards and good professional ethics to review the accepted funded project applications. The specific measures for the engagement of review experts, the administration of review activities and the relevant supervision and safeguard mechanisms shall be formulated by the Fund management institution.

Article 15 — For accepted funded project applications, the Fund management institution shall first randomly select three or more experts from the peer expert database for correspondence review. The Fund management institution shall determine the project applications entering panel review based on the correspondence review scores and other circumstances, and organize experts to conduct panel review. For funded project applications temporarily submitted due to special needs of national economic and social development or other special circumstances, only correspondence review or panel review may be conducted.

Where a review expert considers that it is difficult to make an academic judgment on, or that he or she lacks the energy to review, a funded project application assigned by the Fund management institution, he or she shall promptly notify the Fund management institution; the Fund management institution shall select another review expert for review in accordance with these Regulations.

Article 16 — Review experts shall, in accordance with the funding orientation of the National Natural Science Fund, independently judge and evaluate funded project applications from the aspects of scientific value, innovativeness, social impact and the feasibility of the research plan, and put forward review opinions.

In putting forward review opinions on funded project applications, review experts shall also consider the research experience of applicants and participants, the reasonableness of the plan for the use of funded project funds, the status of other funding received for the research content, the implementation of funded projects by applicants, and the necessity of continued funding.

Review opinions put forward in panel review shall be adopted by voting.

Article 17 — To encourage original basic research work, the Fund management institution may formulate special application and review provisions for funded projects of major originality, interdisciplinary innovation and the like.

Article 18 — The Fund management institution shall decide on the research projects to be funded in accordance with these Regulations and the review opinions put forward by experts. The Fund management institution shall not negate the review opinions of experts on the ground that it holds a different academic viewpoint.

Before making a funding decision, the Fund management institution shall, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the State, promptly carry out data comparison, verification and other work on serious discreditable acts through the research integrity management information system.

Where the Fund management institution decides to fund a project, it shall promptly notify the applicant and the host institution in writing; where it decides not to fund a project, it shall promptly notify the applicant and the host institution in writing with the reasons stated.

The Fund management institution shall organize the expert review opinions and provide them to the applicant.

Article 19 — Where an applicant is dissatisfied with a decision of the Fund management institution not to accept or not to fund, he or she may submit a written request for review to the Fund management institution within 15 days from the date of receipt of the notice. Disagreement with the academic judgment of review experts shall not serve as a reason for submitting a request for review.

The Fund management institution shall complete the review of a request for review submitted by an applicant within 60 days from the date of receipt. Where the Fund management institution considers that the original decision conforms to these Regulations, it shall uphold the decision and notify the applicant in writing; where it considers that the original decision does not conform to these Regulations, it shall revoke the original decision, re-organize review experts to review the applicant's funded project application and make a decision, and notify the applicant and the host institution in writing.

Article 20 — In the review of funded projects, where staff members of the Fund management institution or review experts fall under any of the following circumstances, they shall apply for recusal:

(1) the staff member or review expert is a close relative of the applicant or participant, or has another relationship with them that may affect impartial review;

(2) the funded project applied for by the review expert himself or herself is the same as or similar to the applicant's funded project; or

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(3) the review expert and the applicant or participant belong to the same legal person unit.

The Fund management institution shall, based on the application and after review, make a decision on whether to recuse. In making a recusal decision, the Fund management institution shall state the reasons.

Where the Fund management institution discovers that its staff members or review experts have circumstances requiring recusal as prescribed in paragraph 1 of this Article, it may directly make a recusal decision without application.

A funded project applicant may provide the Fund management institution with a list of no more than three review experts who are unsuitable to review his or her application, and the Fund management institution shall take this into account when selecting review experts according to the actual circumstances.

Article 21 — Staff members of the Fund management institution and review experts shall all sign research integrity commitment letters. Staff members of the Fund management institution shall not apply for or participate in applying for funding from the National Natural Science Fund, and shall not interfere with the review work of review experts. Review experts shall comply with research integrity requirements and review behavior norms, conduct review work independently, objectively and impartially, shall not have the review conducted by others on their behalf, shall not engage in unfair review acts such as accepting entrustment or lobbying, and shall not use work convenience to seek illegitimate benefits.

Staff members of the Fund management institution and review experts shall all bear confidentiality obligations in accordance with the law, and shall not disclose by any means undisclosed information related to review, such as the basic situation of review experts, review opinions and review results.

Chapter IV — Funding and Implementation

Article 22 — After receiving the funding notice from the Fund management institution, the applicant shall, as the person in charge of the funded project, organize and carry out the research work.

The host institution and the project leader shall, within 20 days from the date of receipt of the funding notice, complete the project plan in accordance with the review opinions of the review experts and the funding amount determined by the Fund management institution, and submit it to the Fund management institution for approval.

In completing the project plan, the host institution and the project leader shall not change any content other than the adjustment of the submitted application content based on the review opinions of the review experts and the funding amount determined by the Fund management institution.

Article 23 — The Fund management institution shall handle the appropriation of funded project funds for research projects funded in the current year in accordance with the Budget Law of the People's Republic of China and the treasury centralized payment system and other relevant provisions.

The project leader shall use the funded project funds in accordance with the law and regulations, and the host institution shall administer and supervise the use of funded project funds by the project leader, and promptly approve project fund adjustment matters within the scope of its duties. Project leaders, participants and their host institutions shall not falsely report, falsely claim, embezzle, misappropriate, divert or withhold funded project funds by any means.

The specific measures for the use and administration of funded project funds shall be formulated by the finance department of the State Council in conjunction with the Fund management institution.

Article 24 — The project leader shall organize and carry out the research work in accordance with the project plan, keep original records of the implementation of the funded project, and submit an annual progress report of the project to the Fund management institution through the host institution.

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The host institution shall review the annual progress report of the project, inspect the original records of the implementation of the funded project, and submit an annual funded project administration report to the Fund management institution.

The Fund management institution shall review the annual progress report of the project and the annual funded project administration report.

Article 25 — During the implementation of a funded project, the host institution shall not change the project leader without authorization.

Where the project leader falls under any of the following circumstances, the host institution shall promptly submit an application for changing the project leader or terminating the implementation of the funded project to the Fund management institution for approval; the Fund management institution may also directly make a decision to terminate the implementation of the funded project:

(1) he or she is no longer a scientific and technical person of the host institution;

(2) he or she cannot continue to carry out research work; or

(3) the project cannot continue to be implemented due to other objective reasons.

Where the project leader is transferred to another host institution, upon agreement between the current host institution and the original host institution, the original host institution shall submit an application for changing the host institution to the Fund management institution for approval. Where agreement cannot be reached, the Fund management institution shall make a decision to terminate the implementation of the funded project for which the project leader is responsible.

Article 26 — Where major adjustments to the research content or research plan are needed during the implementation of a funded project, the project leader shall promptly submit an application, which shall be reviewed by the host institution and reported to the Fund management institution for approval.

Article 27 — Within 60 days from the expiration of the funding period of a funded project, the project leader shall submit a project completion report to the Fund management institution through the host institution; where the funded project has produced research results, a research results report shall be submitted simultaneously.

The host institution shall review the project completion report and establish funded project archives. In reviewing the project completion report, the host institution shall inspect the original records of the implementation of the funded project.

Article 28 — The Fund management institution shall promptly review the project completion report. Where the project does not meet the completion requirements, it shall put forward handling opinions and notify the host institution and the project leader in writing.

The Fund management institution shall, in accordance with the requirements of the national science and technology reporting system, publish the project completion report, the research results report and the funded project abstract, so as to promote the dissemination and sharing of funded project results.

Article 29 — When publishing research results obtained from a funded project, the funding by the National Natural Science Fund shall be acknowledged.

Scientific data generated by funded projects shall be submitted by the host institution to the relevant scientific data centers in accordance with the relevant provisions of the State on the administration of scientific data.

Chapter V — Supervision and Administration

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Article 30 — The Fund management institution shall conduct supervision and inspection, mainly by random inspection, of the implementation of funded projects and the performance of duties by host institutions, so as to ensure full coverage of supervision and inspection. During random inspection, the original records of the implementation of funded projects and the use and administration of funds shall be inspected. The results of random inspection shall be recorded and published.

The Fund management institution shall establish credibility archives for funded projects of project leaders and host institutions.

Article 31 — The Fund management institution shall regularly evaluate the performance of review duties by review experts, and shall refer to the opinions of applicants in the evaluation; based on the evaluation results, it shall establish credibility archives for review experts.

Article 32 — The Fund management institution shall, at the end of each fiscal year, publish the projects funded in the current year, the appropriation of funded project funds, and the penalties for acts violating these Regulations.

The Fund management institution shall cooperate with the finance department and the science and technology competent department of the State Council in carrying out Fund performance evaluation, and shall, in accordance with the requirements of fully implementing budget performance administration, establish and improve the performance administration system, regularly conduct performance evaluation of the use of the Fund, strengthen the application of performance evaluation results, and increase the disclosure of performance information.

Article 33 — Where any unit or individual discovers that the Fund management institution or its staff members, review experts, host institutions or their relevant staff members, applicants or project leaders, or participants have violated these Regulations, it may report or accuse them.

The Fund management institution shall publish its contact telephone number, mailing address and email address.

Article 34 — When the Fund management institution discloses relevant information to the public in accordance with these Regulations, it shall comply with the relevant provisions of the State on confidentiality.

The Fund management institution shall improve the science and technology security system and risk prevention mechanism, strengthen the safety administration of scientific and technological research, development and application activities, support scientific and technological innovation in the field of national security, and enhance the capability and level of scientific and technological innovation to support national security.

Article 35 — Individuals and organizations that commit serious discreditable acts of research integrity in violation of these Regulations shall be recorded in the database of serious discreditable acts of research integrity in accordance with the relevant provisions of the State and subjected to joint disciplinary action.

Chapter VI — Legal Liability

Article 36 — Where an applicant or participant commits any of the following acts, the Fund management institution shall give a warning; where an application for funding is in progress, the qualification to apply for or participate in applying for funding from the National Natural Science Fund in the current year shall be cancelled; where the applied project has already been funded, the original funding decision shall be revoked and the appropriated funded project funds recovered; where the circumstances are relatively serious, he or she shall not apply for or participate in applying for funding from the National Natural Science Fund for one to three years; where the circumstances are serious, he or she shall not apply for or participate in applying for funding from the National Natural Science Fund for three to five years:

(1) fabricating, forging, plagiarizing or falsifying application materials;

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(2) interfering with review work by improper means such as entrustment or bribery; or

(3) committing other acts that violate research integrity and research ethics.

Where an applicant or participant commits the acts listed in the preceding paragraph, the host institution shall cancel his or her qualification to participate in the review of professional technical titles within a certain period in accordance with the relevant provisions on personnel administration.

Article 37 — Where a project leader or participant commits any of the following acts, the Fund management institution shall give a warning, temporarily withhold the appropriation of funded project funds, and order rectification within a prescribed time limit; where rectification is not made within the time limit, the original funding decision shall be revoked and the appropriated funded project funds recovered; where the circumstances are relatively serious, he or she shall not apply for or participate in applying for funding from the National Natural Science Fund for one to five years; where the circumstances are serious, he or she shall not apply for or participate in applying for funding from the National Natural Science Fund for five to seven years:

(1) changing the research direction or lowering the declared indicators without authorization;

(2) failing to submit the annual progress report, project completion report or research results report in accordance with these Regulations;

(3) submitting falsified reports, original records or relevant materials;

(4) falsely attributing authorship of published results or falsely marking funding information;

(5) failing to cooperate with supervision, inspection or performance evaluation work;

(6) falsely reporting, falsely claiming, embezzling, misappropriating, diverting or withholding funded project funds;

(7) fabricating, forging, plagiarizing or falsifying research data or results; or

(8) committing other acts that violate research integrity and research ethics.

Where a project leader or participant commits the acts listed in the preceding paragraph, the host institution shall cancel his or her qualification to participate in the review of professional technical titles within a certain period in accordance with the relevant provisions on personnel administration.

Article 38 — Where a host institution falls under any of the following circumstances, the Fund management institution shall give a warning and order rectification within a prescribed time limit; where rectification is not made within the time limit, the funded project funds shall be reduced, and the appropriation of funded project funds may be suspended or the appropriated funds recovered; where the circumstances are relatively serious, it shall not serve as a host institution for one to three years; where the circumstances are serious, its illegal acts shall be published to the public, and it shall not serve as a host institution for three to five years:

(1) failing to perform the duty of guaranteeing the research conditions of funded projects;

(2) failing to review the authenticity, completeness and legality of the materials submitted by applicants or project leaders;

(3) failing to submit the annual progress report, annual funded project administration report, project completion report and research results report in accordance with these Regulations;

(4) organizing, participating in, conniving at or shielding applicants, project leaders or participants in committing fraud;

(5) changing the project leader without authorization;

(6) failing to cooperate with the Fund management institution in supervising and inspecting the implementation of funded projects;

(7) falsely reporting, falsely claiming, embezzling, misappropriating, diverting or withholding funded project funds;

(8) violating confidentiality provisions or committing serious dereliction of duty in administration, causing adverse effects or losses;

(9) interfering with review work by improper means such as entrustment or bribery; or

(10) failing to perform the administration duties related to research integrity and research ethics.

Article 39 — Where a review expert commits any of the following acts, the Fund management institution shall give a warning and order rectification within a prescribed time limit; where the circumstances are relatively serious, he or she shall not be engaged as a review expert for two to seven years; where the circumstances are serious, his or her illegal acts shall be published to the public, and he or she shall no longer be engaged as a review expert:

(1) failing to perform the review duties prescribed by the Fund management institution;

(2) failing to apply for recusal in accordance with these Regulations;

(3) disclosing undisclosed information related to review;

(4) engaging in unfair review acts such as accepting entrustment or lobbying with respect to funded project applications; or

(5) using work convenience to seek illegitimate benefits.

Article 40 — Where a staff member of the Fund management institution commits any of the following acts, organizational handling or sanctions shall be imposed in accordance with the law and regulations:

(1) failing to apply for recusal in accordance with these Regulations;

(2) disclosing undisclosed information related to review;

(3) interfering with the review work of review experts;

(4) using work convenience to seek illegitimate benefits; or

(5) committing other acts of abuse of power, dereliction of duty or malpractice for personal gain.

Article 41 — Where the relevant fiscal laws and administrative regulations are violated, penalties and sanctions shall be imposed in accordance with the law and regulations.

Article 42 — Where an applicant, project leader or participant violates these Regulations with particularly serious circumstances, or engages in scientific and technological research, development and application activities that endanger national security, harm the public interest, endanger human health, or violate research integrity and research ethics, he or she shall not, for life, apply for or participate in applying for funding from the National Natural Science Fund.

Scientific and technical personnel dealt with for violating these Regulations shall not be engaged as review experts during the handling period; where the circumstances are particularly serious, they shall not be engaged as review experts for life.

Article 43 — Where a violation of these Regulations constitutes a violation of public security administration, a public security administrative penalty shall be imposed in accordance with the law; where a crime is constituted, criminal liability shall be pursued in accordance with the law.

Chapter VII — Supplementary Provisions

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Article 44 — In the funding work of the Fund management institution, the use and administration of funded project funds involving project organization and implementation costs and academic exchange activities related to basic research and basic research environment construction activities shall be carried out in accordance with the relevant provisions of the finance department of the State Council.

Article 45 — These Regulations shall come into force as of January 1, 2025.

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