

Foreword

2013 is a fully implementing year for the spirit of the 18th Party Congress and the 3rd Plenary Session of the 18th Party Congress, and the 3rd year for implementation of the 12th Five-Year Plan. In view of the new requirement on basic research for building China into an innovative country and S&T power, the National Natural Science Foundation of China (hereinafter abbreviated as NSFC) fully implemented the National Program for Medium- and Long-Term Scientific and Technological Development (2006-2020), the 12th Five-Year Plan, and its strategy of “supporting basic research, encouraging free exploration and playing a guiding role”, and its working guideline of “respecting science, enhancing democracy, expediting competition, encouraging cooperation, nurturing innovation and leading the future”, as well as adhered to its evaluation principle of “relying on experts, promoting democracy, funding excellent research, and advocating fairness and justness” to nurture creative ideas and foster talents, further strengthen support to the development of research tools, and has made positive contributions to the maturity of the national innovation system and the construction of an innovation-oriented country.

NSFC’s funding portfolio consists of 3 categories of programs with respective preferential focuses, i.e. Research Program, Talent-Training Program, and Research Environment Program, which constitute an integrated funding system of the National Natural Science Fund. The Research Program is aimed at achieving innovative results in basic research, fostering a balanced and coordinated development of disciplines with special emphasis on certain key areas, facilitating interdisciplinary research, and stimulating original innovation, with a view to improving the level of basic research. Through funding young researchers to conduct independent research and assisting researchers in regions weak in basic research, Talent-Training Program is targeted at nurturing top talents and innovative research teams and enhancing China’s S&T competitiveness in the future.

Research Environment Program is mainly intended to improve research facilities, especially to increase support for the development of indigenous scientific instruments and boost the sharing of resources, to guide social resources to invest in basic research, and to optimize favorable environments for basic research.

Most of the applications for the National Natural Science Fund are accepted during the batch application period every year. A total of 157,986 research proposals were received during that period in 2013, which meant a year-on-year reduction of 7.50% (12,806 applications) over that in 2012. The applications for the General Program reduced by 16.19% (13,932 applications) from that in 2012. The applications for the Young Scientists Fund reduced by 17.56% (630 applications) from that in 2012. Applications to the Special Fund for Research on Major S & T Instrument (free applications) reduced by 21.34% (67 applications), and International (Regional) Cooperation and Exchange Programs increased 28.48% (137 applications). Compared with 2012, applications for the Young Scientists Fund and the Fund for Less Developed Regions had a slight increase, 1,184 and 580 applications or 1.98% and 5.15% respectively. The number of applications for the Key Program, the National Science Fund for Distinguished Young Scholars and the Special Funds for Basic Research on Scientific Instruments were remained stable.

After preliminary evaluation, NSFC notified in public that 4,461 applications were declined, accounting for 2.8% of the total applications received, a little lower than 3.0% of 2012. A total of 574 appeals for re-evaluation were received before the deadline for appeal, and 431 of them were accepted and the other 143 appeals were rejected because of the lack of required documents and other reasons. After serious checking and verification, the previous decisions of rejection, both well-founded and justified in nature, were maintained for 394 appeals, and the other 37 appeals were approved in that the previous decisions of rejection were wrongly made, accounting for 0.8% of all the declined.

After compulsory review procedures, in 2013, 16,194 projects in the General Program including Young Scientists Fund Program extended for funding under the category of General Program, 564 projects in the Key Program, 368 projects in the Major Research Plan Program, 109 projects in the Major International (Regional) Joint Research Program, 198 projects in the National Science Fund for Distinguished Young Scholars, 399 projects in the Excellent Young Scientists Fund, 15,367 projects in the Young Scientists Fund, 2,497 projects in the Fund for Less Developed Regions, 29 projects in the Science Fund for Creative Research Groups, 140 projects in the Joint Research Fund for Overseas Chinese Scholars and Scholars in Hong Kong and Macao, 52 projects in the National Science Fund for Talent Training in Basic Research, 50 projects in the Special Fund for Basic Research on Scientific Instruments, 40 projects in the Special Fund for Research on Major S&T Instrument, 9 recommended projects in the Special Fund for Research on Major S&T Instrument, 495 projects for Joint Funds, 27 projects in the Fund for Promoting Public Understanding of S&T, 101 projects in the Research Fund for International Young Scientists, and 25 projects in the Special Fund for Teenage Participation in S&T Activities, and 16 projects to the Fund for Excellent State Key Labs were funded. For more information about the statistics and analysis of the applications and final approvals, please refer to the respective relevant sections of this *Guide to Programs*.

In 2014, based on the overall layout of the 12th Five-Year Plan, NSFC will adhere to its strategic orientation of “more emphasis on basic research, frontier research and talent training” and make greater efforts to optimize the funding mechanism and integrate the funding structure. To achieve the vision of “deepening the pool of exploration, widening the source of innovation, furthering the depth of intercrossing, and fulfilling the dreams of the talents”, NSFC will strive to develop a more dynamic, more efficient and more open science funding system with Chinese characteristics, thereby facilitating a balanced, coordinated and sustainable development of scientific disciplines, promoting the country into the world’s best in some mainstream scientific disciplines, nurturing high-caliber scientists and

innovation teams with international reputation, enhancing excellence of basic research, amplifying the international visibility of basic research, and strengthening the capacity for indigenous innovation in a number of key areas for laying a sound S&T foundation for achieving a sustainable social and economic development and accelerating China into an innovation-oriented country.

In order to give expression to the principle of openness, fairness and justness and help scientists better understand NSFC's funding policies, the *Guide to Programs of the National Natural Science Fund: 2014* (hereinafter abbreviated as the *Guide to Programs*) is published to all applicants for the selection of the proper categories of programs, research areas and orientations of investigation in applying for the National Natural Science Fund with research topics proposed on their own initiative.

This *Guide to Programs* introduces various types of programs, of which applications will be accepted during the batch application period in 2014. Notes on application and regulations on the limits of the total number of applications for one applicant are introduced in detail. The overall funding facts and priority areas of the General Program, Key Program, the Young Scientists Fund, and the Fund for Less Developed Regions are introduced in the section of each scientific department. For the General Program, the overall funding principles and specified requirements as well as notes on applications are provided in addition to the introduction of the overall funding statistics of each scientific department. Apart from that, the trend of development, funding scopes and requirements in diverse disciplines are described by respective divisions of the scientific departments. Other types of programs are introduced in general terms. Special requirements for each of them are introduced in the main text of this *Guide to Programs*.

Applications for programs which are not listed in the *Guide to Programs* will not be accepted during the batch application period, and the call for proposals of these programs and related guiding information will be announced at NSFC's website (<http://www.nsf.gov.cn>). Applicants are

advised to pay due attention to the updating of related information.

In the consecutive procedures of application acceptance, evaluation and program management, NSFC will, in light of the Regulations on the National Natural Science Fund and relevant guidelines for program management, strive to standardize management procedures, optimize the peer review mechanism, encourage indigenous innovation, emphasize on research merits, nurture a favorable environment for research, support disciplinary intercrossing and tolerance of different academic ideas, strictly observe pertinent regulations on conflict of interest and confidentiality, and sincerely cherish the supervision from the scientific community and the general public. All scientists are welcome to submit high-quality applications for the National Natural Science Fund.

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