



Societal part of the SBO programme
Manual for the participation of the societal user field
(version 2022)

1. Positioning of this manual

This manual is intended for societal organisations that wish to be involved in an SBO project. The purpose is to clarify their role and involvement in the life cycle of an SBO project in order to strengthen the two-way interactions between researchers and the societal user field from the early stage of the project creation process. Apart from this additional manual, there is also a basic SBO manual that is intended primarily for researchers from research centres (<https://www.fwo.be/en/fellowships-funding/research-projects/sbo-projects/>).

2. What is the SBO programme?

The **SBO programme** is aimed at supporting strategic basic research, i.e. inventive and innovative research of excellent scientific quality that opens up prospects for societal applications in the medium term. The purpose is to generate strategic research results that result in further development and implementation projects with relevant societal users. When assessing an SBO project proposal, the scientific quality and the utilisation potential carry equal weight. It is therefore of great importance that attention is paid to the utilisation aspects already in the project preparation phase.

The SBO channel is positioned between fundamental academic research and applied research. Because of the strategic character of the research, knowledge utilisation or utilisation by the user field will not take place until in the later implementation phase of the project and in many cases even after the end of the project.

The "**societal user field involved**" refers to organisations external to the research centres and that constitute the "consumer field" of the research results of an SBO project. For each project, this means those organisations that have good use for the specific results of an SBO project and, subsequently, seek to create a societal added value through further development and implementation projects within their organisation. The societal stakeholders "involved" are thus specific to each SBO project. There is a priori no strict delimitation. In practice, they belong to civil society, the social profit sector and government departments or entities (in various horizontal fields and vertical policy levels). This list is not meant to be exhaustive. The determining factor is the role that the "societal organisation" plays or seeks to play in the field of societal value creation on the basis of the results of an SBO project. In this manual, the term "**societal organisation**" is used as a collective name for stakeholders from the user field.

3. Life cycle of an SBO project

There are three stages in the life cycle of an SBO project:

- the stage of drafting an SBO project proposal (i.e., the pre-project phase);
- the stage of execution of an SBO project (maximum 48 months);
- the stage of further development, implementation and upscaling of the SBO project results (i.e., the post-project phase).

3.1. The stage of drafting an SBO project proposal (i.e. the pre-project phase)

In the SBO channel, great emphasis is placed on strengthening the active participation of the societal user field involved from the early phase of the project proposal creation. Meaningful interactions with societal users, in fact, offer an opportunity to more clearly delineate and underpin the demand orientation or the problem-driven nature of the project proposal. The primary role of societal organisations from the user field involved in the pre-project stage is:

- to provide relevant practice knowledge and practice insights;

- to participate in the definition of problems for which strategic basic research is necessary;
- to provide input on how the SBO results will lead to effective applications in the societal user field involved.

In the pre-project phase, societal organisations must decide on their role and contribution during the project. Societal organisations can participate in an SBO project in two possible roles:

- By committing themselves as members of the advisory committee of an SBO project;
- By collaborating, as non-funded partner, with the SBO consortium.

These roles are described in detail in paragraph 4 of this manual.

The activities to be carried out prior to submission of an SBO project proposal do not qualify for funding under the SBO programme.

3.2. The SBO project execution stage

A sound pre-project preparation is an essential precondition for the effective implementation of an SBO project. During the project execution, a two-way dialogue and interaction between the researchers and the user field involved remains essential. The primary role of societal organisations from the relevant user field during implementation is:

- to assist in monitoring the research from the societal utilisation aspect of the project;
- to participate in a joint learning process whereby a culture of openness and mutual trust can be developed and innovative solutions are explored;
- to assist in designing and preparing the translation of the results into practice.

A good participation of societal users during the project execution contributes to facilitate the planned knowledge transfer from science to practice. In practice, societal organisations may participate in the advisory committee of the SBO project. They may also decide to work together with the SBO consortium at their own expense. The definition of these roles is given in paragraph 4 of this manual.

3.3. The stage of further development, implementation and upscaling of the SBO project results (i.e. the post-project phase)

A successful SBO project gives rise to subsequent development and implementation projects. The focus then shifts to the organisations from the relevant societal work field. These follow-up development and implementation projects for the SBO project results do not fall within the financing channel for strategic basic research.

4. The involvement of societal organisations in an SBO project

4.1. Contribution as member of the advisory committee of an SBO project

During the creation of an SBO project proposal, researchers may contact you for bilateral consultation or for a preparatory brainstorming together with other societal stakeholders. In addition, you are of course also invited to initiate such contacts or interact with researchers about bottlenecks or opportunities for which strategic research could provide an added value.

If you see a clear added value in an SBO project proposal for your organisation, you may opt to join the advisory committee of the project. In the societal program component, this does not require a financial contribution, but a commitment from your organisation to a substantive

input and a time investment during the execution phase of the SBO project to participate in bilateral consultations with the project implementers, in meetings of the advisory committee and/or workshops. Your role will be to provide your own practice insights or data, to act as a critical sounding board for the (interim) results of researchers, and to assist in steering the scope and orientation of the SBO project as to maintain and strengthen the utilisation potential of the results.

If you have decided to participate in the advisory committee of an SBO project, you will be asked to support this by a substantiated letter of intent. This letter is an integral part of an SBO project proposal and will be submitted to the international experts reviewing the project proposal. Therefore, these letters of intent are preferentially written in English.

It is essential that a letter of intent is concrete, properly substantiated and not limited to a general non-binding expression of interest. The focus here is not so much on the relevance of the societal issues as such, but on the specific added value the project could bring to *your* organisation. What specific utilisation opportunities do successful SBO project results offer? What prospects do you see for the utilisation of the SBO project results within your organisation? What subsequent development and implementation projects are feasible and realistic within your organisation?

The letter of intent for membership of the advisory committee should be signed by a legal representative of the societal organisation or government entity. This provides evidence for the internal support within your organisation for its involvement in the advisory committee.

This letter of intent should be submitted by the deadline for submission of the SBO project proposal and as an integral part of the latter. It should be sent directly to the SBO project supervisor well before the submission deadline. Letters of intent that reach FWO after this deadline will not be taken into consideration during the evaluation. For an overview of deadlines that apply for the current call, see the SBO website: <https://www.fwo.be/en/fellowships-funding/research-projects/sbo-projects/>

4.2. Collaboration without funding

Societal users that are members of the advisory committee may decide to collaborate with the SBO consortium at their own expense by:

- the execution in the course of SBO-project period (from the third year onwards) of application-oriented activities that bridge the gap between the scientific findings and their applications in the users' field.
- the implementation of parallel R&D activities related to the topic of the SBO project, but not belonging to the societal implementation of the SBO results itself.

In both cases, these R&D activities run in parallel with the SBO project execution but are not part of the SBO project and, as such, cannot be budgeted on the SBO project.

In assessing the project proposals, such collaborations may result in a selective advantage. Such collaborations should therefore be verifiable and must overlap with the planned execution phase of the SBO project. The collaborations should be substantiated in the letter of intent from the member of the advisory committee concerned.

Such collaborations do not give the registered users concerned automatic access rights to the SBO-project results. The research centers retain ownership of the results obtained and, in case of transfer of IPR, current standards for market-compliant remuneration apply.

4.3. Contribution to the project execution as subcontractor

Finally, participation of societal stakeholders in the execution of the SBO project is also possible through subcontracting. Subcontracting may be relevant when a particular organisation possesses necessary expertise that is not available within the research centre. Such subcontracting is, however, limited to situations where services are provided to support the project execution, without utilisation opportunities for this particular organisation.