



Higher Education
Commission of Pakistan

Protocol for the Evaluation

Innovative and Collaborative Research Grant (ICRG)

under

Pak-UK Education Gateway

Proposal Submission
and
Selection of ICRG

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1. OBJECTIVE OF THE PROTOCOL

The Protocol for The Evaluation of Proposal Submissions and The Selection of Innovative and Collaborative Research Grants (ICRG) serve as guidelines for evaluation of proposals submitted in response to the Call for Proposals for Innovative and Collaborative Research Grants component under Pak–UK Education Gateway. In addition, the protocol provides guidance and an assistive framework for selection of funded grant projects based upon the results of the evaluation process.

Proposals may be submitted jointly by qualified higher education institutions in Pakistan and United Kingdom as described in the Call for Proposals. Finance for the project is provided by the Higher Education Commission and British Council on match grant basis.

The Higher Education Commission and British Council will select independent expert evaluators charged with objectively assessing proposals submitted in response to the ICRG Call for Proposals.

The Protocol will be used by the independent expert evaluators tasked with assessing the merits of the submitted proposals and by the Higher Education Commission and British Council, selecting the projects to be supported following the independent evaluation process. In addition, the protocol will be available to institutions preparing proposals.

2. EVALUATION OVERVIEW

The Evaluation Process for the ICRG will be conducted in two separate, but sequential phases.

- a) The first phase of the Evaluation Process is a screening of project outlines by the Higher Education Commission and British Council. The purpose of the screening is to ensure that submitted proposals: (i) are eligible for the competition; and (ii) respond to the Call for Proposals. Those proposals that do not meet the above criteria will be

declined. Those proposals that meet the above criteria will be encouraged to submit full project proposals for consideration in the Evaluation Process.

b) The second phase of the Evaluation Process may be termed a Desk Review. Each proposal submitted in response to the Call for Proposals will have a technical assessment by 3-4 independent expert evaluators, at least one member preferably from relevant industry with the disciplinary expertise necessary to consider the proposed project. The technical assessment may be conducted by remote evaluators and/or a panel convened to evaluate a group of ICRG proposals.

Following the individual review of each proposal, a multidisciplinary Panel of experts will be convened to synthesize the evaluation reports from the Reviewers and to make recommendations to the Higher Education Commission and British Council for the selection of a cohesive portfolio of ICRG grants that reflect the goals of the ICRG Program.

PROJECT OUTLINE REVIEW

In response to the Call for Proposals, interested research teams, comprising of University based faculty in Pakistan and UK must submit a joint expression of interest to HEC/ British Council through a brief Project Outline. The purpose of the Project Outline is two-fold:

- To ensure that those who submit Full Proposals are eligible to submit proposals, and that the proposed idea of the project is within the scope of the ICRG Call for Proposals
- To enable the Higher Education Commission and British Council to prepare for the Desk Evaluation Process based upon the range of proposals submitted in each priority area.

The first part of the Project Outline review will be administrative. The HEC and BC through the ICRG Programme Team will ensure that the lead institution and PI submitting each proposal is eligible to submit a proposal.

Second, the Programme Team will identify two independent external evaluators to determine whether the proposed research idea aligns with one of the priority areas identified in the Call for Proposals. The evaluators will provide brief written commentary describing the reasons for their decision.

If the Project Outline is deemed appropriate in both elements, the ICRG Programme Team will assign the pre-proposal to one of the priority areas for future Desk Review.

Following the Project Outline Review, the ICRG Programme Team will provide the following feedback to each Principal Investigator and host institution in Pakistan and UK:

- For those that are deemed ineligible for further consideration, a letter will be sent identifying the reasons why no Full Proposal will be accepted.
- For those that are deemed eligible for submitting a Full Proposal, a letter will encourage a Full Proposal, and specify the priority area under which it will be considered.

DESK REVIEW

Full Proposals must be submitted in response to the Call for Proposals by the successful applicants as a result of outline review process. For Desk review the full proposals received as a result of outline review process will be grouped by the thematic areas and assigned to a panel for evaluation. The Desk Review by the independent expert evaluators will be guided by an Evaluation Rubric made available concurrently to the Call for Proposals. Therefore, institutions will be able to tailor proposals to the evaluation criteria.

The ICRG Programme Team will assign each proposal to one of the several Panels that in total encompass the priority areas identified in the Call for Proposals. Separate teams of independent expert evaluators – composed of approximately 4-8 members (including international members) will be convened in each of these Panels. Each Panel may include a sufficient number of sectoral industrial evaluators.

The Evaluation Panels will meet at the Higher Education Commission over the course of a week to conduct the Desk Review of all submitted proposals. Panel members will evaluate each submitted proposal. In addition, one or two additional independent expert evaluators will provide an evaluation of each proposal remotely (e.g. without physically traveling to the Panel meeting at HEC).

The independent expert evaluators must (independently, and without consultation with any other member of the Desk Review team) evaluate each proposal assigned to them according to the criteria specified in the Evaluation Rubric. For the Desk Review, the evaluators must rely upon the information contained in the written ICRG proposal. In addition to a numerical score, evaluators must provide written justification for the score in each element of the Evaluation Rubric. The ICRG Programme Team may ask any evaluator to provide further written justification at any point in the Desk Review process.

Following the submission of all of the assigned Evaluation Rubrics for each proposal in a Panel, the members of each of the Evaluation Panels will discuss all of the proposals in their Panel. This discussion is to ensure that each proposal is treated fairly in the Desk Review evaluation process. The thematic Panel will identify the best proposals that will be considered by a multidisciplinary Panel tasked with making recommendations on ICRG awards to HEC and BC.

A joint multidisciplinary Panel identified by HEC and BC – composed of two members of each of the thematic Panels – will discuss all of the proposals forwarded by the various thematic Panels. The multidisciplinary Panel will meet to consolidate the work of each thematic Panel and

will make recommendations to the HEC and BC on which proposals that should be selected for ICRG funding.

The multidisciplinary Panel should seek to recommend a portfolio of ICRG grants that:

- Addresses the priority areas identified in the Call for Proposals
- Based upon the written proposal, supports projects with a high likelihood of success in alignment with ICRG objectives
- Addresses industrial concerns through a new product, an addition to an existing product, or a solution to an industrial problem
- Supports the best overall proposals that respond to project goals
- Reflects the diversity of disciplines that can address the priority areas
- Results in a portfolio of proposals that reflects the diversity of priority areas
- Results in a portfolio of proposals that reflects junior and senior principal investigators/team leaders

In conjunction with a list of recommendations for the Higher Education Commission and British Council, the multidisciplinary Panel should provide a written narrative describing the reasoning for its decisions.

3. SELECTION OF INDEPENDENT EXPERT EVALUATORS

The credibility of the independent expert evaluators is essential to the credibility of the evaluation process and the ICRG competition.

The core expectations and requirements for the independent expert evaluators are:

- Subject matter experts in one or more disciplines associated with the priority areas and the proposals submitted in response to the ICRG Call for Proposals
- Capable of effectively evaluating ICRG proposals related to their area of expertise
- Capable of evaluating research and technology transfer projects
- Independent of any institution submitting ICRG proposal

In addition to the core requirements, the team of evaluators will include:

- Experts in the management of large scale research consortia
- Experts with knowledge of the Pakistan academic system
- Experts with deep experience in the global academic system
- Experts with knowledge of the Pakistan's industrial system with additional insights about international trends
- Members of the Pakistan diaspora
- Experts with an industrial background in sectors identified in the Call for Proposals

The Higher Education Commission and British Council will identify and invite the independent expert evaluators to participate in one or more phases of the ICRG evaluation process. The evaluators will be recruited from institutions both in Pakistan and from around the world. While the HEC and BC will select the evaluators, recommendations will be solicited from global research funding agencies and development partners around the world.

The identities of the evaluators for each proposal will not be disclosed.

AVOIDANCE OF ANY REAL OR PERCEIVED CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The Higher Education Commission and British Council are committed to avoid any Conflict of Interest in the Evaluation and Selection of ICRG grantees.

Prior to participating in the Desk Review of any proposal, all independent expert evaluators must sign a Conflict of Interest declaration regarding any proposal they are evaluating.

The evaluators are prohibited from receiving any gifts or favors from the institution or any partners. Similarly, the institution and any partners may in no way offer gifts or favors. The evaluators are required to immediately report any offers of gifts and favors to the Higher Education Commission or British Council.

4. FINAL SELECTION

After the multidisciplinary Panel has submitted its final evaluation report to the ICRG Programme Team, the Project Delivery Board/Steering Committee comprising of members recommended by Higher Education Commission and British Council will meet to discuss the Panel findings and recommendations. In its final selection, the Committee may deviate from the recommendations of the Desk review Panel, without, however, changing any evaluation marks of the individual proposals. It may do so based upon an objective and clearly stated rationale to ensure a reasonable geographical, priority and principal investigator representation in the final selection. In its Selection, the Steering Committee must ensure that the portfolio of ICRG grantees address the major priority areas described in the Call for Proposals and it will formulate its position regarding the evaluation outcomes in writing in the minutes of the final selection meeting.

The report of the multidisciplinary Panel, and the Minutes of the Project Delivery Board/ Steering Committee meeting regarding the outcomes of the evaluation together form the evaluation results. All institutions that submitted proposals in response to the ICRG Call for Proposals will receive copies of all Evaluation Rubrics associated with the proposal.

5. GRIEVANCE COMMITTEE

In exceptional circumstances, institutions submitting the Proposals may raise an objection or grievance regarding the ICRG Evaluation and selection process. The objection or grievance must be raised with the ICRG Programme Team in HEC or BC within 7 working days of the selection results being announced. If the Programme Team decides to further the grievance, it will be forwarded to a joint Grievance Committee of HEC and British Council. The Committee may seek necessary clarification from the review panel chairs, independent expert evaluators, ICRG Programme Team or other relevant entities to decide whether grievance or appeal should be accommodated and any proposed modified evaluation/ selection decision.