



Local Challenge Fund

Call for Proposals Guidance

Deadline for Project Outline Submission: 1st September, 2020 (11:59 PM)

Deadline for Full Proposal Submission: 14th February 2021 (11:59 PM)

I. General Information

A. Project Description:

The Local Challenge Fund (LCF) is a key element of the Higher Education Development in Pakistan Project supported by the World Bank and implemented by the Higher Education Commission (HEC). The LCF is anticipated to support research projects that address locally relevant socio-economic issues (and may also address topics associated with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)), and will provide funds to selected institutions based upon a competitive, peer-reviewed evaluation of proposals.

The anticipated portfolio of LCF projects will support higher education institutions across Pakistan to undertake research focused on local community – society, governmental, and/or industry - needs. LCF projects are expected to strengthen the research capacity and to contribute to the research mission of the host institution. Successful proposals will describe a research project designed in conjunction with the appropriate local stakeholders. The dissemination plan must ensure that research outcomes are shared both in appropriate peer-reviewed journals and with the local community involved in the project design. Proposals should include research activities and postgraduate education, and emphasize the broader societal impacts – with a particular focus on local community concerns - that may be anticipated from the project.

LCF projects should be collaborative in scope, with teams composed of academic researchers with the appropriate expertise to address the research challenge, as well as local stakeholders who contribute to the project design and potential implementation of results. Principal Investigators should be faculty members at higher education institutions in Pakistan, but should also build a research team capable of completing the proposed research agenda over the project lifetime. This research team can include faculty members from the PI's home institution, any other academic institutions in Pakistan, and/or international academic institutions. In addition, local stakeholders – from civil society, government and/or private enterprise (including, but not limited to, local,

national, regional or multinational Enterprises; Ministries, local public departments and other public authorities; chambers of commerce; trade groups and professional associations; community groups; hospitals; policymakers) are anticipated be part of the project team with roles that are clearly articulated in the proposal. To take full advantage of the national research capacity, PIs are encouraged to build teams including junior and senior academic staff, as well as both male and female researchers.

The portfolio of awards supported through the Local Challenge Fund will address a broad range of local issues. It is anticipated that awards will be distributed at academic institutions across Pakistan, and that a significant proportion of the PIs will be female.

LCF awards will be selected competitively using a merit-based, independent, transparent evaluation and selection process based upon international standards. The process is described in the Sections below, as well as in the full Evaluation and Selection protocol available on the HEC website.

Following the launch of the Call for Proposals, HEC will organize a series of workshops and webinars across Pakistan to provide a forum to identify and discuss specific local challenges. Recordings of these sessions will be available on the HEC website, along with a list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) regarding the LCF program.

B. Applicant Eligibility

Lead Principal Investigators (PIs) must:

- Be a university faculty member (PhD or FCPS/MCPS/FRCS) based at a Pakistan HEI that is not included in the research-intensive institution as specified for GCF-2020 call

The Project Team:

- Should include at least one co-PI from a Pakistan HEI that is from a research-intensive institution as specified for GCF-2020 call
- May include consortia of faculty members from multiple university departments and/or multiple universities
- May include: private sector participants, particularly when they bring prior IP or capability to the consortium and/or significant deployment, implementation, or scale up capability

Higher Education Institutions may submit a maximum of 3 exceptional Project Outline proposals under this Call for Proposals. It is the responsibility of the VC/Rector to identify those proposals to be submitted by each HEI, and if appropriate to undertake in internal screening prior to the Project Outline Submission date.

The detailed eligibility criteria of Institutions are available in the link given below;

- [Web Link - Eligibility Criteria for HEC Competitive Research Grants](#)

C. Anticipated Funding Amount:

It is expected that budgets for LCF awards will not exceed Rs. 65 Million (USD 400 000), with a maximum project duration of 2 years. In exceptional cases, budgets may go up to Rs 113 Million (USD 700,000). Budget requests should be consistent with the proposed research and education activities. Principal Investigators are encouraged to seek co- and complementary financing from other sources, including local governments and industry who will benefit from the research activities.

D. Due Dates

- **Project Outlines must be submitted to HEC by 1st September, 2020 (11:59 PM)**
- **Invited Full Proposals must be submitted to HEC by 14th February, 2021 (11:59 PM)**

II. Proposal Preparation Instructions

A. Basic Guidance

All researchers interested in submitting a proposal for the LCF must first submit a Project Outline to the Higher Education Commission. Those Project Outlines that pass an initial screening will be invited to submit a Full Proposal to the Higher Education Commission.

Project Outlines, and Full Proposals, must be submitted via the HEC online portal by the higher education institution at which the Principal Investigator is a faculty member.

B. Proposal Formatting

- All Project Outlines should use the .docx Project Outline Template Document as the basis for the submission. The section guidance (in light grey) should be deleted prior to submission.
- All invited Full Proposals should use the .docx Full Proposal Template Document as the basis for the submission. The section guidance (in light grey) should be deleted prior to proposal submission.
- Proposals must be submitted in English.
- Full Proposals should include a Table of Contents.
- All sections of the template – either the Project Outline or the Full Proposal - must be completed prior to submission. The list of required sections – and the guidance for the content within each section – is provided in Section III below of this Call for Proposals.
- The page limit for each section must not be exceeded.
- All pages of the proposal should have a page number.
- Proposals should be submitted in 11 point, Calibri font.
- Tables should be completed in the format and length indicated in the relevant Template document (.docx).
- Proposal sections should not include URLs for additional information. Information or documentation beyond that included in the written proposal will not be used in the evaluation process.

- Proposals should follow accepted academic practice in citing references throughout the proposal. References should be numbered sequentially, and listed separately as a required attachment to the proposal. References should be reported in a standard form, and include: the names of all authors; the article and journal title; book title; volume and page numbers; and year of publication. If available, a Digital Object Identifier (DOI) may be provided.

III. Required Proposal Sections

The required sections for the Project Outline submission and the Full Proposal submission are described below. All submissions should address the identified topics for each section. Do not exceed the maximum page limit for each section.

IIIa. Project Outline Submissions

All Principal Investigators interested in submitting a Full Proposals for consideration in the Local Challenge Fund Call for Proposals must complete and submit a Project Outline. The purpose of the Project Outline is to ensure that submitted proposals are (i) eligible for the competition, and (ii) respond to the LCF requirements as described in the Call for Proposals. Principal Investigators must complete each section of the proposal as described in the attached link to the Project Outline Template .docx Document. The section guidance (in light grey) should be deleted prior to proposal submission.

- [Web Link for Outline Proposal Application Form](#)

As noted in Section I, collaborative teams – both in project design and planned research activities - are anticipated in LCF proposals. It is expected that the Principal Investigator will have had extensive communication with all anticipated partners – especially those local stakeholders - prior to the submission of the Project Outline, and will have obtained confirmation of participation in the project if it is selected for funding.

IIIb. Full Proposal Submissions

Full Proposals will only be accepted from those Principal Investigators who are invited to submit a Full Proposal following the evaluation of a submitted Project Outline. Principal Investigators must complete each section of the proposal as described in the attached link to the Full Proposal Template .docx Document. The section guidance (in light grey) should be deleted prior to proposal submission.

- [Web Link for Full Proposal Application Form](#)

IV. Evaluation and Selection Process

The selection of Local Challenge Fund awards will be made through an open, rigorous, transparent, competitive and merit-based process consistent with international standards for funding academic research projects. All Full Proposals submitted in response to this Call for

Proposals will be evaluated by independent experts.

The Evaluation process consists of two sequential steps: screening of Project Outlines; and Desk/Panel Evaluation of the all proposals invited to submit written Full Proposals

IVa. Project Outline Review

For the Project Outline Review, an administrative review will be undertaken by the Higher Education Commission to ensure that the Principal Investigator and the lead institution submitting each Project Outline is eligible to submit a full proposal.

Subsequent to the administrative review, two independent external evaluators will determine whether the proposed research concept aligns with the Local Challenge Fund program goals as described above in Section I, whether a full proposal would be competitive in the LCF program, and whether proposal implementation would lead to a substantive contribution to addressing the Local Challenge.

If the Project Outline is deemed appropriate in both elements, the Principal Investigator will be encouraged to submit a Full Proposal. For those Project Outlines that are deemed ineligible for the LCF, the Principal Investigator will receive a letter identifying the reasons why no Full Proposal will be accepted.

The expert evaluators will assess each proposal according to a scoring rubric, and will provide written comments on the proposal.

- [Web link for the Scoring Rubric for Outline Evaluation](#)

IVb. Full Proposal Desk Evaluation

For the Desk/Panel Evaluation, Full Proposals will be grouped by thematic area and assigned to a Panel for evaluation. Each Panel will be composed of a team of experts – including national and international research leaders and subject matter experts – who will evaluate the written proposals. Each Full Proposal will be independently evaluated by at least two members of the Panel, and additional reviews may be obtained by appropriate subject matter experts.

The expert evaluators will assess each proposal according to a scoring rubric, and will provide written comments on the proposal.

- [Web link for the Scoring Rubric for Desk Evaluation](#)

All members of the Panel will discuss each Full Proposal assigned to the Panel.

Following the Desk/Panel Evaluation of Full Proposals, a multidisciplinary committee of composed of the chairs of each thematic Panel will consolidate the thematic Panel results and make recommendations for LCF awards to the HEC. The recommendations will be reasonably balanced across disciplinary areas.

Proposals recommended for award should meet the following criteria: the proposal must address a local challenge as described in the Call for Proposals; based upon the written proposal, there is a strong likelihood of successful implementation of the proposed project; the project team and the institutional leadership should be capable of implementing the project; and the proposal must achieve a scoring threshold as determined by the evaluators in the Desk/Panel Evaluation to ensure quality.

At the conclusion of the Selection process, the evaluations of each proposal submitted will be shared with the proposing institution. Both the scoring rubric(s) and the written comments will be made available. For the Desk Evaluations, the identities of the expert evaluators will be redacted.

Grievance procedure: In exceptional circumstances, institutions submitting a LCF Full Proposal that was not selected for funding may submit a written Notice of Grievance to the Ethical Appeal Review Board at the Higher Education Commission within 7 working days of selection results being announced. A Notice of Grievance is permitted only when the institution believes that the proposal was not evaluated fairly or in a reasonable manner.

V. Negotiation and Implementation

Following the Evaluation and Selection process, the Higher Education Commission – through the LCF Program Manager - will enter into negotiations with the PI and the host institution on the following topics.

The final budget for each selected LCF budget will be negotiated following the evaluation and selection process. The budget will depend upon: the proposed research and education activities; the size of the research team; the costs associated with the proposed work plan; the resources required; the capacity of the research team to achieve the results; and the feedback to the PI provided through the Evaluation and Selection process. The negotiation on anticipated results will occur concurrently with the budget negotiation.

Prior to the formal signing of contracts and launch of the selected projects, several critical elements must be completed: (1) a revision and strengthening of the proposal in response to the comments and feedback provided in the evaluation process; (2) a fiduciary assessment and procurement plan; and (3) an environmental and social safeguards screening and management plan. In addition, a detailed implementation plan for the project must be prepared and approved.

VI. Project Websites

Full details of the Local Challenge Fund will be available on the Higher Education Commission website available at:

<http://www.hec.gov.pk>

Updated project information will be available at the project website provided below.

<https://www.hec.gov.pk/english/services/faculty/LCF/Pages/default.aspx>

Questions regarding the Local Challenge Fund may be directed to: Info-r&d@hec.gov.pk or onlinehelp.hec.gov.pk