



The Evaluation Protocol of Local Challenge Fund

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1. OBJECTIVE OF THE PROTOCOL

The Protocol for The Evaluation of Local Challenge Fund (LCF) Proposal Submissions and The Selection of LCF Grants serve as guidelines for evaluating of proposals submitted in response to the Call for Proposals for Local Challenge Fund element of the Higher Education Development in Pakistan project. In addition, the Protocol provides guidance and an assistive framework to the Higher Education Commission for selection of funded grant projects based upon the results of the evaluation process.

Proposals may be submitted by qualified higher education institutions in Pakistan as described in the Call for Proposals. Finance for the project is provided by the World Bank.

The Higher Education Commission will select independent expert evaluators charged with objectively assessing proposals submitted in response to the LCF Call for Proposals. All proposals must address the Call for Proposals through a combination of research, postgraduate training and partnerships with academic, local and sectoral stakeholders, as well as, when appropriate, international academic collaborators.

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 tasked with selecting the projects to be supported following the independent evaluation process. In addition, the protocol will be available to institutions preparing proposals.

The Protocol provides guidelines for the independent expert evaluators on assessment criteria for the submitted proposals, as well as the procedures to be followed in the evaluation process. The Protocol also describes the procedures that the Higher Education Commission will employ for the Selection of LCF grantees. The World Bank's Higher Education Development in Pakistan Project Appraisal Document (PAD) contains the rationale for the project and a summary of the project description. The LCF Call for Proposals Guidance contains information for those institutions submitting proposals, and the Proposal Template Document describes each of the required sections in a proposal. The independent expert evaluators and the Higher Education Commission may refer to any of these documents at any point in the evaluation and selection process.

2. EVALUATION OVERVIEW

The Evaluation Process for the LCF 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. 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 with the disciplinary expertise to consider the proposed research program. 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 for the selection of a cohesive portfolio of LCF grants that reflect the goals of the LCF Project element.

PROJECT OUTLINE REVIEW

In response to the Call for Proposals, interested research teams must submit an expression of interest 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 LCF Call for Proposals
- To enable the Higher Education Commission to prepare for the Desk Evaluation Process based upon the range of proposals submitted in each priority thematic area.

The first part of the Project Outline review will be administrative. The Higher Education Commission LCF Program Team will ensure that the lead institution submitting each proposal is eligible to submit a proposal.

Second, the LCF Program Team will identify two independent external evaluators to determine whether the proposed research idea aligns with one of the priority thematic areas identified in the Operations Manual and 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 LCF Program Team will assign the pre-proposal to one of the thematic areas for future Desk Review.

Following the Project Outline Review, the LCF Program Team will provide the following feedback to each Principal Investigator and host institution:

- 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 thematic 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. 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 LCF Program Team will assign each proposal to one of several Panels that in total encompass the thematic areas identified in the Call for Proposals. Separate teams of independent expert evaluators – composed of approximately 4-8 members each will be convened in each of these Panels.

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. Two 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 the 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 LCF proposal. In addition to a numerical score, evaluators must provide written justification for the score in each element of the Evaluation Rubric. The LCF Program 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 LCF awards to HEC.

The multidisciplinary Panel – 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 on which proposals should be selected for LCF funding.

The Evaluation Panel should seek to recommend a portfolio of LCF grants that:

- Addresses the major thematic areas identified in the Call for Proposals
- Based upon the written proposal, has a strong likelihood of successful implementation of the proposed project. The project team and the institutional leadership should be capable of implementing the project;
- Supports the best overall proposals that respond to project goals

- Reflects the diversity of disciplines that can address the thematic areas
- Results in a portfolio of proposals that reflects the diversity of thematic areas
- Results in a portfolio of proposals that reflects junior and senior principal investigators/team leaders
- Results in a portfolio of proposals that supports the Project goals of female principal investigators

In conjunction with a list of recommendations for the Higher Education Commission, 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 LCF competition.

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

- Subject matter experts in one or more disciplines associated with the thematic areas and the proposals submitted in response to the LCF Call for Proposals
- Capable of effectively evaluating LCF proposals related to their area of expertise
- Capable of evaluating research programs and projects, and postgraduate training programs
- Independent of any institution submitting a LCF 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
- Members of the Pakistan diaspora
- Sectoral experts

The Higher Education Commission is tasked with identifying and inviting the independent expert evaluators to participate in one or more phases of the LCF evaluation process. The evaluators will be recruited from institutions both in Pakistan and from around the world. While the HEC 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 is committed to avoid any Conflict of Interest in the Evaluation and Selection of LCF 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. Similarly, the institutional team is required to report any requests for gift or favors to the Higher Education Commission.

4. FINAL SELECTION

After the multidisciplinary Panel has submitted its final evaluation report to the LCF Program Team, the Project Steering Committee in the Higher Education Commission will meet to discuss the Panel findings and recommendations. In its final selection, the Higher Education Commission may deviate from the recommendations of the 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, thematic and principal investigator representation in the final selection. In its Selection, the Higher Education Commission must follow the project goals as described in the World Bank PAD, ensuring that the portfolio of LCF grantees address the major thematic areas described in the Call for Proposals and the Project Operations Manual. The Higher Education Commission 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 Higher Education Commission meeting regarding the outcomes of the evaluation together form the evaluation results. All institutions that submitted proposals in response to the LCF Call for Proposals will receive copies of all Evaluation Rubrics associated with the proposal.

5. GRIEVANCE COMMITTEE

In extremely rare occasions, institutions may raise an objection or grievance regarding the LCF Evaluation and Selection process. The objection or grievance must be raised with the HEC LCF Program Team for the LCF project within seven (07) working days of the selection results being announced.

The Higher Education Commission will set up a small (3-member) Grievance Committee to which institutions can submit grievances. The Grievance Committee will seek clarifications from the institution/principal investigator concerned, from the independent expert evaluators, from the LCF Program Team and other relevant entities, and provide a recommendation to the Higher

Education Commission Project Coordinator on whether the grievance or appeal should be accommodated and any proposed modified evaluation/selection decision.