



CPEC- Collaborative Research Grant

Call for Proposals Guidance

Deadline for Full Proposals Submission: Wednesday, March 31, 2021 (11:59 PM)

I. General Information

A. Project Description:

The CPEC- Collaborative Research Grant (CPEC-CRG) is one of the key component of recently launched HEC initiative namely “**Academic Collaboration under CPEC Consortium of Universities**”. The overall objective of the said project is to understand and respond to the historic global geo-strategic and geo-economic transition and its impact on the region in general and Pakistan in particular, keeping in the view the broad Chinese Belt and Road Initiative and its Pakistan-specific component – CPEC. The national response to the strategic opportunity arising out of the emerging global dynamics is the CPEC Long Term Plan (LTP).

The CPEC- CRG is anticipated to support promising research partnerships between Pakistan and China, aiming at finding solutions to CPEC-related problems through joint research by the universities of Pakistan and China, drawing upon research potential of academia on both sides. Keeping in view the scope and foreseeable impact of CPEC, this initiative will go a long way in supporting collaborative research proposals, addressing problems and issues pertaining to Pakistan’s socio-economic development in general and CPEC in particular.

CPEC- CRG research projects must be collaborative in scope, with teams composed of academic researchers from Pakistan and China with the appropriate expertise to address the research challenge, as well as industrial and sectoral collaborators within Pakistan and/or China. Principal Investigator should be faculty members at higher education institutions in Pakistan. To take full advantage of the national research capacity, proposals are encouraged from teams including junior and senior academic staff, as well as both male and female researchers. PIs are also encouraged to include students who have worked on the academic research underpinning the CPEC- CRG proposal as part of the team.

CPEC- CRG awards will be selected competitively using a merit-based, independent, transparent evaluation and selection process based upon international standards. In addition, HEC will organize a series of workshops and webinars, as well as develop a list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) regarding the CPEC- CRG program.

The CPEC-Collaborative Research Grant is focused on supporting research in the following priority thematic areas of national interest, utilizing full potential of Chinese experiences and lessons learnt in these areas:

- **Sustainable Agriculture**, including but not limited to challenges such as Agricultural Productivity and Resilience; exploitation of Agricultural Value-chains; and Sustainable Food Eco-systems for rural and urban consumers and producers.
- **Health and Wellbeing**, including but not limited to Nutrition, Maternal and Child Health (MNCH), health-related information and communication technologies, Public Health Surveillance and Epidemiology, Non-Communicable Diseases, Bio-informatics & Big-data Analytics
- **Clean Water and Sanitation**, including but not limited to, food, energy, water nexus, and focusing on challenges such as large-scale, low cost, and scalable waste water treatment systems; significant reduction in irrigation related water losses; and innovative socio-technical approaches to water conservation.
- **Poverty Alleviation**, including, but not limited to, skills and labor market interventions, and focusing on challenges such as exploitation of 3G/4G networks particularly for less literate and largely illiterate populations; addressing and mitigation of large climate change impacts on marginal communities; the use of technology in bringing transparency and responsiveness to citizen services.
- **Science & Technology for Sustainable Development**, including but not limited to, export competitiveness, and focusing on challenges such as exploitation of economic and technological impacts of mobile broadband and development, deployment, and exploitation of 5G networks; 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR) within the Pakistani context; transformational innovation and enhancement of global competitiveness of Pakistani export value-chains; indigenous development of high-end textile value chains; industrial performance and productivity, competitiveness, and re-location (particularly in the context of CPEC); and the interplay between population and economic development.
- **Sustainable Cities and Communities**, including but not limited to, sustainable urban design, low-cost housing, mobility, and transport and focusing on challenges such as planning for and preservation of urban space and life; economic, sociological, and cultural triggers for the planning and creation of second tier (and new) cities and towns; provision of quality of urban life such as transportation and congestion, waste collection and disposal, water and sanitation, healthcare and education, and law and order.
- **Cultural Harmony between Pakistan and China**, which may include identity politics, gender, population, and work ethic focusing on challenges such as preservation of our intellectual heritage and material culture, barriers to gender participation in the workforce and in national development; future of work and family; and cultural and sociological impact of CPEC.
- **Sustainable Energy**, including but not limited to Energy efficiency, Battery and Storage Technologies, efficient and smart grids focusing on challenges such as smart and sustainable energy solutions for urban, rural, and remote areas.
- **Sustainable Infrastructure**, including but not limited to low cost electric mobility solutions; sustainable platforms for urban, rural, and intercity mobility including roads, railway, and port infrastructure; innovation mechanisms for reduction in transmission and grid losses in legacy power transmission infrastructures.

B. Applicant Eligibility

Principal Investigator (PI) must:

- Be a faculty member (PhD or FCPS/MCPS/FRCS) working on regular/ contract basis (contract duration equivalent to project duration) in the Higher Education Institutions (public or private) of Pakistan that are members of CPEC Consortium of Universities, as per list provided on HEC Website in below mentioned link:

[Web Link – List of Members of CPEC Consortium of Universities](#)

Project Team:

- Must include at least one academic partner as Co-PI from Chinese HEIs that are listed as Members of CPEC Consortium of Universities
- May include at least one academic partner as Co-PI from Pakistani HEIs that are not included in the list of Members of CPEC Consortium of Universities
- 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
- International collaborators from countries other than China are also encouraged particularly when they bring a unique added value to the project team

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:

Budgets for CPEC- CRG awards will range upto Rs. 50 Million, with a maximum project duration of 3 years. In exceptional cases, budgets may go up to Rs. 100 Million. Principal Investigators are encouraged to seek co- and complementary financing from the project collaborators from China. The awards will be made to the host higher education institution of the lead Principal Investigator in Pakistan.

The PI may cover cost of Chinese research partners and other international collaborator(s) under the Short Term Consultant budget head. All the budget requests should be consistent with HEC financial rules for Competitive Research Grants available in the link given below;

- [Web Link – Financial Rules Governing Competitive Research Grants](#)

D. Due Date:

- Full Proposals must be submitted to HEC by **Wednesday, March 31,2021 (11:59PM)**

II. Proposal Preparation Instructions

A. Basic Guidance

All CPEC- CRG proposals must be submitted through the HEC online portal by the higher education institution at which the Principal Investigator is a faculty member.

B. Proposal Formatting

- All Proposals should use the .docx 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.
- Proposals should include a Table of Contents.
- All sections of the template 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 Proposal Template Document.
- 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 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.

A. Full Proposal Submissions

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 CPEC- Collaborative Research Grant awards will be made through an open, rigorous, transparent, competitive and merit-based process consistent with international standards for funding academic research projects. All Proposals submitted in response to this Call for Proposals will be evaluated by HEC Scientific Review Panels with the help of external reviewers, having relevant subject expertise. The process is described in the Sections below, as well as in the full Evaluation and Selection protocol available on the HEC website in the link given below;

- [Web Link for Evaluation and Selection Protocol for CPEC- Collaborative Research Grant](#)

The Evaluation process consists of two sequential steps: administrative screening; and Desk/Panel Evaluation of all eligible Proposals.

IVa. Proposal Screening

For the administrative screening, the Higher Education Commission will ensure that the Principal Investigator and the lead institution submitting each Proposal is eligible to submit, the project aligns with one of the priority thematic areas, and that the necessary Chinese & Pakistani collaborators are identified.

In addition, HEC considers the following factors to screen out proposals, leading to rejection:

- i. All the information required on the application form are not provided
- ii. Required documents are not attached
- iii. The application is not prepared in accordance with the instructions given in the Call for proposal.
- iv. Application is not received by the given deadline as per call for proposal
- v. The PI has failed in timely completion/ closure of previously awarded Research grants by the HEC
- vi. The PI and/or Institution has been blacklisted or barred to apply for a certain period of time by HEC

If the Proposal is deemed appropriate in those elements described above, the Proposal will be forwarded for further evaluation as described below. For those Proposals that are deemed ineligible for the CPEC- CRG Program, the Principal Investigator and the submitting Institution will receive a letter identifying the reasons why the Proposal will not be considered for further evaluation.

IVb. Proposal Desk/Panel Evaluation

For the Desk/Panel Evaluation, Proposals will be grouped by thematic area and assigned to the respective Panel for evaluation. Each Panel will be composed of a team of experts – including national and international research leaders, sectoral industrial representatives and subject matter experts – who may also engage external reviewers to evaluate the written proposals. There will be two rounds of evaluation process a) Shortlisting of Proposals; b) Detailed Review of shortlisted Proposals

In the first round, the proposals will be shortlisted by the respective thematic panels to screen out potential proposals for further detailed review. The review panels will conduct short review of the assigned proposals to determine whether the proposed research concept aligns with the CPEC- CRG program goals and thematic areas as described above in Section I and whether the proposal implementation would lead to a substantive contribution to addressing the socio-economic development issues of Pakistan, particularly in the context of CPEC. Proposals that are found less competitive to be considered for detailed review, will be rejected and the panel will provide written comments/ justification for rejection of the proposals. The Principal Investigator and the submitting institution will receive a letter identifying the reasons why the proposals will not be considered for detailed evaluation.

In second round detailed review of only shortlisted proposals will be conducted. Shortlisted proposals will be assigned to two reviewers having relevant subject expertise for independent evaluation of the proposal. The panel may obtain additional reviews where required. The expert evaluators will assess each proposal according to a scoring rubric as provided in the given link and will provide written comments on the proposal to justify the scores.

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

Following the independent review, all members of the Panel will discuss each Full Proposal assigned to the Panel. This discussion is to ensure that each proposal is treated fairly in the Desk Review evaluation process. Based on individual reviews, the panel will score the proposals and provide written comments, identifying the best proposals that will be considered by a multidisciplinary Panel tasked with making final recommendations on the awards.

A multidisciplinary committee, composed of the chairs of each thematic Panel will consolidate the thematic Panel results and make recommendations for CPEC- CRG 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 include an academic collaborator from China; 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. The identities of the expert evaluators will be redacted.

Grievance procedure: In exceptional circumstances, institutions submitting CPEC- CRG Full

Proposal that was not selected for funding may submit a written Notice of Grievance to 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 CPEC- CRG Program Manager - will enter into negotiations with the PI and the host institution on the following topics.

The final budget for each selected CPEC- CRG budget will be negotiated following the evaluation and selection process. The budget will depend upon: the proposed research and development activities; the size of the research team; the costs associated with the proposed workplan; 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 a detailed implementation plan for the project must be prepared and approved.

VI. Project Websites

Full details of the CPEC- Collaborative Research Grant 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.

<http://www.hec.gov.pk/CPEC-CRG>

Questions regarding the CPEC- Collaborative Research Grant may be directed to:

Info-r&d@hec.gov.pk