



## National Research Program for Universities

### Call for Proposals Guidance

**Deadline for Full Proposals Submission: Friday, April 30, 2021 (11:59 PM)**

#### I. General Information

##### A. Project Description:

NRPU is a flagship Research Program of HEC for funding research grants on competitive merit for high-quality and promising scientific research projects that demonstrate strategic relevance and cast impact to the local industry and society. The program is open for contributions related to both basic and applied research. NRPU aims to stimulate scientific excellence and the advancement of knowledge by allowing researchers the freedom to formulate by themselves the research concept and method.

The NRPU grant awards will be made to the host higher education institution of the lead academic – faculty – associated with the project, and administered through the appropriate ORIC on campus. Principal Investigator should be a faculty member at higher education institution in Pakistan and encouraged to submit proposals that are collaborative in scope, with teams including junior and senior academic staff, both male and female researchers and appropriate sectoral/ industrial collaborators. PIs are also encouraged to include students as part of the project team who have worked on the academic research underpinning the NRPU proposal.

NRPU awards will be selected competitively using a merit-based, independent and 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.

##### B. Applicant Eligibility

Principal Investigator (PI) must:

- Be a faculty member (PhD or FCPS/MCPS/FRCS) working on regular/ contract basis (contract duration must not be less than project duration) in the Higher Education Institutions (public or private) of Pakistan
- Can hold only one NRPU grant at a time

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

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

### C. Anticipated Funding Amount:

Budgets for NRPU awards will range upto Rs. 20 Million, with a maximum project duration of 3 years. Co-financing – including in kind and cash contributions– by industry partners will be considered a merit and an indicator of industry support. 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 **Friday, April 30, 2021 (11:59 PM)**

## II. Proposal Preparation Instructions

### A. 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.

## **B. 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](#)

## **III. Proposal Submission Procedure**

All NRPU proposals must be submitted by the Principal Investigator and the Head of ORICs/ Head of Research, at the respective Higher Education Institution at which the PI is a faculty member, will endorse the submitted project through the HEC online portal.

## **IV. Evaluation and Selection Process**

The selection of National Research Program for Universities 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 National Research Program for Universities](#)

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

### **a. 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 proposal. 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 NRPU 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.

#### **b. Proposal Desk/Panel Evaluation**

For the Desk/Panel Evaluation, Proposals will be grouped by disciplinary 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 review panel 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 NRPU program goals 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. 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 at least 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 rubrics 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 disciplinary Panel will consolidate the Panel results and make recommendations for NRPU awards to the HEC. The recommendations will be reasonably balanced across disciplinary areas.

Proposals recommended for award should meet the following criteria: 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 NRPU 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 NRPU Program Manager - will enter into negotiations with the PI and the host institution on the following topics.

The final budget for each selected NRPU 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. **Program Website**

Full details of the National Research Program for Universities will be available on the Higher Education Commission website available at:

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

Questions regarding the National Research Program for Universities may be directed to:

[Info-r&d@hec.gov.pk](mailto:Info-r&d@hec.gov.pk)