

Protocol for Evaluation
National Research Program for Universities
(NRPU)

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1. OBJECTIVES OF THE PROTOCOL

The Protocol for the Evaluation of National Research Program for Universities (NRPU) Proposal Submissions and The Selection of NRPU Grants provide guidelines for the evaluation of proposals submitted in response to the Call for Proposals for National Research Program for Universities provides guidance 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 the Pakistan as described in the Call for Proposals.

The Higher Education Commission will select independent expert evaluators charged with objectively assessing proposals submitted in response to the NRPU Call for Proposals. All proposals must address the Call for Proposals through a combination of research, postgraduate training and partnerships with academic and sectoral stakeholders, industrial/business partners, as well as appropriate international academic collaborators (if any) .

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 NRPU grantees. The NRPU 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 NRPU will be conducted in a single phase termed as Desk Review comprising of the following steps:

a) The first step of Evaluation Process is a screening of proposals by 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 considered for further evaluation.

b) Those proposals that meet the above criteria will have a technical assessment by 3-4 independent expert evaluators with the disciplinary expertise to consider the proposed research program.

c) Reviewers will make recommendations to the Higher Education Commission for the selection of NRPU grants.

DESK REVIEW

The first part of the desk review will be administrative. The Higher Education Commission will ensure that the institution submitting each proposal is eligible to submit a proposal.

Those proposals that do not meet the above criteria will be declined and NRPU team will provide feedback to each Principal Investigator and host institution identifying the reasons why the proposal has not been considered for further 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.

Each proposal will be assigned to one of several Panels. Separate teams of independent expert evaluators – composed of approximately 4-8 members each will be convened in each of these Panels. Sectoral industrial representation will also be ensured in selection of evaluation/ panels (if required).

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. 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 NRPU proposal. In addition to a numerical score, evaluators must provide written justification for the score in each element of the Evaluation Rubric. The Program Manager may ask any evaluator to provide further written justification at any point in the Desk Review process.

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

- 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;
- Supports the best overall proposals that respond to project goals
- Value addition to existing product, new pilot product or an Effective solution to an industrial problem

- 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
- The proposal must achieve a scoring threshold as determined by the evaluators in the Desk Review Panel to ensure quality

In conjunction with a list of recommendations for the Higher Education Commission, the Desk Review 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 NRPU competition.

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

- Subject matter experts in one or more disciplines for the proposals submitted in response to the NRPU Call for Proposals
- Capable of effectively evaluating NRPU proposals related to their area of expertise
- Capable of evaluating research programs and projects, and postgraduate training programs
- Independent of any institution submitting a NRPU proposal

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

- Experts with knowledge of the Pakistan academic system
- Experts with deep experience in the global academic system
- Members of the Pakistan diaspora
- Sectoral / industrial experts (if required)

The Higher Education Commission is tasked with identifying and inviting the independent expert evaluators to participate in one or more phases of the 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 Desk Review and High Level Expert Panel 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 NRPU 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 Desk Review Panel has submitted its final evaluation report to HEC, 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 Desk Review panel, without, however, changing any evaluation marks of the individual proposals. 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 Desk Review 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 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 NRPU Evaluation and Selection process. The objection or grievance must first be raised with the HEC Program Manager for the NRPU project. If the head of section decides to further the grievance, he/she must bring it to the Higher Education Commission within two weeks 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 Program Manager 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.