

Research Funding and Training Policy (2021)

Health Research Institute
National Institute of Health
Pakistan



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Background

In December 2020, the PHRC was restructured, reorganized and renamed as Health Research Institute (HRI) as one of the seven institutes of National Institute of Health through presidential ordinance. Through this ordinance, the Institute was given full administrative and financial autonomy to execute its functions.

To achieve its mandate, HRI (Ex PHRC) funds projects submitted on subjects related to human health and disease aiming to generate local knowledge and evidence on health issues to guide health policymakers. Previously three types of grants were being given including Routine grants (Rs. 0.3 million), High Priority Area grants (Rs. 0.5 million) and Multicenter grants (No of Center x 0.5 million). However, the Board of Governorsof Health Research Institute, NIH has revised its funding schemes and approved new grants types including Small grants, National Health Challenge grants with increased funding limit of up to 03million and 10 million rupees respectively.

The HRI (Ex PHRC) researchers also acquire funding from local as well international donors to carry out research on human health. HRI (Ex PHRC) also collaborates with local as well as international funding agencies like World Health Organization (WHO), Centre for Disease Control (CDC) and others for funding of research proposals and other scientific activities.Though, Ex PHRC had successfully completed different donor funded projects but there is need to have clear policy guidelines to facilitate the process of submission and executions of such projects

Similarly, for the capacity building of the HRI researchers, trainings are very important. For this purpose HRI (Ex PHRC) send its researchers to local as well as international training and sometime the researchers themselves identify the opportunities. However there is no standard policy document to ensure regular trainings and providing equal opportunities to all.

Keeping in view above, this document is being outlined to provide a detailed policy guide line to facilitate HRI researchers as well as those who want to get funding from HRI.

HRI Funding Policy

Introduction:

HRI will allocate the majority of funds to the researchers initiated independent projects through an annual funding round, meanwhile as and when required call for proposal on some particular area will also be issued. A range of funding will also be available for support of career development of emerging health researchers and research students.

HRI will fund projects which may achieve one or more following key objectives

1. Research proposals which have clear linkage between the knowledge generated and improving the health and wellbeing of people of Pakistan
2. Research proposals with a defined link between the knowledge generated and a specific disease state, condition or impairment which may be communicable or non-communicable.
3. Biomedical research to understand an infectious agent or the pathology of a specific disease entity or organ system
4. Research that can contribute to a primary outcome of improved health service the scope includes the full range of health care delivery such as prevention, intervention, detection, diagnosis, prognosis, treatment, care and support at primary, secondary or tertiary health care systems.

TYPES OF GRANTS:

HRI will provide two types of research grants in the field of health and bio-medical research including Small grants and National healthchallenge grants.In addition, BoG and TAC can recommend any other type of grant as and when required.

Small grants:

These grants will address specific and crucial health research issues that may arise at any time either at regional, provincial or national level.

Funding limit: Up to 03 million Pak Rupees

Duration: Up to 18 months

Eligibility criteria:

1. Lectures/demonstrators/instructors/equivalent of HEC recognized universities/PMDC recognized medical colleges/CPSP registered Teaching hospitals having five years demonstrated experience of research.
2. Scientists/researchers (of R&D organizations) or equivalent [i. Masters/MS/M.Phil MPH/MCPS or equivalent ii. 05 years post-qualification,relevant research experience].
3. Principal Investigator (PI) must have a contract of employment with their organization for the total duration of the grant prior to application.

National Health Challenge Grants:

These grants will address specific and crucial health research issues that may ariseat any time at national level.

Funding limit:Up to 10 million Pak Rupees

Duration: Up to 24 months

Eligibility criteria

1. Assistant Professor/Associate Professor/Professor/equivalent of HEC recognized universities/PMDC recognized medical colleges/CPSPregistered Teaching hospitals, having five years demonstrated experience of research
2. Senior Scientists/researchers (of R&D organizations) or equivalent [i. MS/M.Phil/FCPS/MD/PhD or equivalent, ii. Ten years post-qualification, relevant research experience].

3. Principal Investigator (PI) must have a contract of employment with their organization for the total duration of the grant prior to application.
 - PI on study leave during the grant period will not be entitled for grant.
 - PI must not have a history of un-successful, un-adjusted and un-accounted for previous HEC and HRI funded projects.
 - However, in spite if any of above situation arises then suitable PI and Co-PI will be timely nominated by head of institution and approved by Chairman TAC.

MECHANISM OF FUNDING:

Project Submission:

1. HRI will advertise its call for funding more than once in a financial year, whenever required.
2. Applicants shall fill the proposal form on prescribed format available at HRI website (<https://hri.nih.org.pk/>) and submit one soft copy and one hard copy to HRI Head office.
3. The complete proposal shall be duly signed by PI and Head of the Institution.
4. Detailed CVs of the research team need to be submitted along with proposal
5. A brief of facilities available at each organization for execution of the project shall also be submitted.
6. Applicant shall strictly follow the instruction and guidelines defined for pre-proposal and complete proposal submission forms and shall make sure that applications are complete in all aspects.

TERMS & CONDITIONS

General

1. Principal Investigator will have to submit an Agreement duly signed by the Head of the Institution along with PI and Drawing and Disbursing Officer (DDO) within a period of 02-03 weeks after receipt of award letter. Failure to submit the same within stipulated time period may automatically withdraw the offer without further notice.

2. Funds will be released subject to submission of Ethical Clearance from Institutional Review Board.
3. The project funds shall be maintained in institutional bank account instead of personal accounts and all payments shall be made by following Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (PPRA) rules.
4. PI along with head of institution will be responsible to provide the expenditure statement along with bills/vouchers cleared by their account/audit department duly signed by the PI and DDO. However it should be ensured that all expenditures should be made as per approved budget heads.
5. In case re-appropriation of budget is required, request should be sent to HRI prior to expenditure.
6. Amount will be released in three installments. 1st installment will be 50% of the approved cost. Second installment will be 30% of the remaining cost however 2nd installment will be released subject to approval of interim technical report along with expenditure of minimal 80% of released amount as evident by the expenditure statement. In case less than 80% amount of first installment is spent second installment will not be released, until minimal 80% of the released amount is spent. Last installment will be released after the approval of final report along with approval expenditure statement of total released amount by HRI.
7. The head of institution and PI will be responsible for timely submission of reports (Interim technical reports as well final report on HRI format). The reports should be submitted within due dates which will be reviewed and approved by HRI.
8. The final technical and financial reports must be submitted before the completion date of the project.
9. The monitoring and evaluation of the project will be conducted as approved in the project
10. PI will also be responsible to submit policy brief and impact report of the research being carried out

Specific

1. A researcher/scientist cannot get funding as principal investigator for second project from HRI until the successful completion of the previous project funded by HRI

2. In case the PI intends to go abroad or leave the institution, he/she should have to inform HRI before departure, and Co-I (from the same institute) with main role may become PI and will be responsible to execute the remaining project activity, in such circumstances, the payment of honorarium will be made to new PI.
3. In case Co-I/ Co-Is are from different institutions or if there is no Co-I in the project then head of the institution (to which funds are released) shall be responsible to execute the remaining project activity and the payment of honorarium will be made to the head of the institution.
4. On completion of project, PI and Co-Is will be responsible to publish research papers in National OR International journals and they will be bound to submit electronic reprints or copies of publication to HRI for record.
5. Two years after the completion of the project the principal investigator is bound to submit the data sets with code book to HRI for secondary analysis.
6. The extension of the project duration (If required by the PI) may be approved by the ED/CEO upon receiving proper justification and request from the Principal Investigator (PI).

Miss-procurement

- i. All procurements shall be done as per PPRA rules only and any violation of PPRA rules shall be considered miss-procurement.
- ii. In case of miss-procurement, PPRA mechanism of action shall be followed.
- iii. PI must redo all the procurement process and re-procure as per PPRA rules.
- iv. Punitive actions will be taken as per PPRA rules.

Foreign travelling

- Foreign trips / trainings are strictly prohibited in HRI funded projects.

Lab investigations/Services outside Pakistan

- Any lab investigation/services etc. that are required to be solicited outside Pakistan should be done by competitive bidding process as detailed in PPRA

Regional Centers of HRI

- Regional Centers of HRI shall facilitate & guide PIs in financial and technical matters where and when solicited.

Ethical Clearance from NBC

- Ethical clearance from NBC-R will be required for multicenter/multi-provincial/ and national level research projects. Single-center research studies does not require NBC-R approval however, a member from NBC-R shall be co-opted in TAC for providing ethical insight.

Termination of funding

For any approved project if contingent bill, undertaking, declaration and other documents (if required) are not submitted by PI within 08 weeks, the offer of grant will stand cancelled

REVIEW PROCESS

Peer review is the foundation of any grant process and it ensures that grant applications are evaluated in fair, equitable and timely manner without any bias. The HRI will ensure to maintain confidentiality throughout the peer review process and will develop following three step review process

1. Initial Screening by HRI
2. External peer review
3. Review by Technical advisory Committee (TAC)

Initial Screening by HRI:

The Research Development & Coordination Section of HRI will review the research proposals with respect to the coherence with the thematic areas of the call along with completeness of application forms. Preliminary evaluation proforma will be filled for each of the proposal. If the project is recommended, it will be processed to stage II i.e. the peer review.

External Peer Review:

For external peer review, a panel of subject matter experts will be formulated for each of the thematic areas of both small and national health challenge grants. Experts will be health research experts of all major thematic areas of the advertised RFPs. Based on the preliminary review, the HRI will select a potential expert from Expert Panel list based on subject relevance and having no conflict of interest with the proposal.

Expert panel:-An expert panel list of the health research expert will be made for a period of two years as per following mechanism.

1. The HRI will invite CVs of the experts actively involved in health research by writing letters to head of universities and research institutes. A pre-designed CV format will also be shared along with minimal eligibility criteria for a candidate of expert panel of HRI. Reviewers are expected to have established expertise based on peer recognition and publication record, a strong track record in the research area and appropriate experience to review the proposal.
2. HRI will scrutinize and shortlist only those CVs that meet the minimal eligibility criteria.
3. Specialty wise segregation and listing of received CVs will be done.
4. Final shortlisted CVs will be presented to ED HRI for review and approval.
5. The approved expert panel will be notified.

Proposal Assessment criteria: Each reviewer has to review project on project evaluation proforma focusing on three core criteria: Firstly, to assess the importance of research questions or gaps in the knowledge. Secondly to look at the scientific potential of the work, ethical issues, methodology, composition of research team. Thirdly it will also be evaluated whether the scientific potential of the project justify the funds demanded. Based on the answers to these questions, the reviewers will score research project and give their comments. Projects scoring less than 50% aggregate score or rejected by any of the reviewer will not be further processed for review by TAC. As a token of appreciation an honorarium of Rs 5000 will be paid to the reviewer for peer review of a project.

Peer review timelines: Each reviewer will be requested to send their comments within 02 weeks. Peer review process of all submitted projects will be completed within 16 weeks after closing of the proposal submission deadline. The comments (if any) of the reviewers will be shared with PI and only those projects which are recommended by the reviewer after revision will be presented to Technical Advisory Committee for final decision.

Review by Technical Advisory Committee (TAC):-

All projects along with external reviewer comments will be sent to members of TAC for detailed review at least 02 weeks before TAC meeting. Each member will give a score from 1 to 10 to

every proposal. This wider scoring range will allow the TAC members to provide their own views on each project. In TAC meeting all proposals will be presented according to their median scores. Looking at the technical aspects and quality of the proposal, TAC can take any of the three decisions i.e. recommended, not recommended or recommended after suggested modifications. HRI will be bound to communicate TAC decision to the applicant within 03 weeks.

INTERNATIONAL GRANTS & CONSULTANCIES:

Opportunities and Eligibility:-

All researchers of HRI shall be eligible to apply for International grants either competitive or cooperative agreements. The grants should be related to the mandate of HRI and proposal should address the health issues.

The HRI researchers are encouraged to hunt the international funding opportunities and there will be no bar in approaching a funding agency or donor

Submission: -

After the submission of the proposal and grants, the researchers shall inform the immediate head i.e. for head office, the RDC section Incharge and for centers, the Center In charge of the respective center

During the Project, PI will be responsible to make sure that 10% of the total budget shall be allocated under overhead charges for institution, for project up to 10 million whereas, 15% should be allocated for project more than 10 million. If there are no overhead charges in the project PI shall manage the same from head of miscellaneous expenditures. PI may claim the honoraria as per terms and conditions of the funding agency.

PI will be bound to inform head office after approval of the project and also submit the final report after completion of the project. A copy for the information and record will be sent to the RDC section which will be responsible to maintain a ledger for all submissions.

Execution: -

If the project is approved, the PI will be responsible for proper and successful execution of the project. The PI will share his/her plan of all activities with respective head i.e. RDC Incharge (for Head Office) or Centre Incharge (for centers).

Finances: -

A separate account shall be opened on title of the project and PI shall be responsible to do all the transactions with the approval of RDC Incharge (for head office) or Centre Incharges (for centers).

PI shall be the co-signatory along with DDO of the respective centers or Head office. Utilization of budget shall be as per approved budget. Procurement shall be made as per agreement to meet the timelines and ensure timely completion of the project. For travelling for data collection (if required), TA/DA shall be admissible as per agreement with the funding agency.

However, if any change in budget is required at a later stage PI shall take approval from the funding agency. PPRA rules shall not be admissible as public money is not involved.

PI shall be responsible to maintain a record of all procurements and original bills/vouchers and will also be responsible for submission of audit report or expense report as per the requirement of the funding agency.

However, at the end of the project, PI will submit a complete expenses report duly verified by the DDO to RDC section for keeping the records.

Dissemination:-

Dissemination of final report of the project shall be done by PI as per requirement of the funding agency within the approved budget head for report dissemination.

TRAINING & CAPACITY BUILDING OF HRI RESEARCHERS:

Opportunities and Eligibility: -All researchers of HRI shall be eligible to apply for any training and capacity building including submission of abstract, attending a workshop,

conference or symposium within the country or abroad in their area of research. All HRI researchers will be encouraged to haunt the opportunities.

However, before apply any training or capacity building plans, the prior approval of the respective head i.e. for head office, the RDC section Incharge and for centers, the Center In charge of the respective center will be compulsory.

The RDC section shall make a yearly plan of training of all researchers and shall also find opportunities of national and international trainings. Similarly, if there shall any opportunity received to RDC from donors or local agencies, the RDC will circulate to all center for nomination and will select the participant with respect to area of interest. However, if there is shortage of time, the RDC head shall nominate any researcher with approval of Executive Director.

Attending and Participation:-For attending and participating in training or others where no cost is required, the Centre Incharge or RDC Incharge shall approve the request. However, the Centre Incharge shall be responsible to send all details to RDC which shall keep a ledger for record.

In case of financial requirement, the Centre Incharge shall timely forward the requests to RDC section which will evaluate and get approval from the Executive Director. Keeping in view the budget, the Executive Director shall make sure that each researcher shall have participated in training or other capacity building activities in a given calendar year.