

Guidelines and Application Forms for Research Grants

INTRODUCTION

Aga Khan University has developed a significant capacity for multidisciplinary research and graduate studies. The Board of Trustees has appointed a University Research Council (URC) and approved the commencement of the PhD Programme in Health Sciences from October 1999. Several themes have been identified for research. The themes are relevant to the needs of developing countries, and include infectious disease, risk factors for coronary artery disease, nutrition, cancer and genetics.

The URC has been appointed to oversee the support, management and efficient utilisation of resources for the promotion of multi-disciplinary research activities. It will give particular emphasis to projects and activities related to the themes identified as priority areas. Further information is available from the Research Office. While emphasis is given to the theme related research, the University also supports other quality research projects.

An unrestricted endowment for University-wide research has been initiated by the Chancellor, His Highness the Aga Khan, with a gracious donation of US\$5 million. Over the next ten years it is expected that the endowment will grow significantly and provide about \$2M annually. In addition, provision has been made for seed grant in FHS and IED. Investigators are also encouraged to compete for grants from external agencies. For information on external sources of funding, and a database of external granting agencies, the Research Office can be contacted.

The URC consists of senior management together with representatives of various constituencies of the University. It is supported by a Grants Review Committee (GRC) which will evaluate proposals for funding from the University-wide unrestricted endowment for research and other internal sources that may be allocated. The URC will also be supported by an International Advisory Committee for Research (IACR), the Ethical Review Committee (ERC) for studies involving human subjects, and the Ethics Committee for Research on Animals (ECRA).

The URC is pleased to extend invitations for research grant proposals. Copies of appropriate application forms can be obtained from the Research Office network also at www.aku.edu.

Deadline dates

First Cycle:	December 31	Every year
Second Cycle:	June 30	Every year

In case the deadline date falls on a holiday, applications will be accepted on the following working day. Completed applications should be submitted to the Research Office along with 2 hard copies. Forms are also available from the Research Office website <http://www.aku.edu/res-office/res-fop.shtml>

OBJECTIVES

Funds will be awarded to eligible groups and individual faculty or students to enable them to pursue research, especially in the priority areas identified by the University, but also in any other field that is considered appropriate by the University Research Council. It is anticipated that such support would enable the investigator(s) subsequently to compete effectively for external grants. This research funding will also foster development of the capacity for research. **URC funds should be used as a springboard to help faculty get external funding and not used as a main source of funding.**

ELIGIBILITY

1. **Only full-time faculty and PhD students of AKU** who would be working under the supervision of faculty are eligible to apply as principal investigator (PI).
2. If a PI has an active grant (seed money or external), he/she may apply for an additional grant provided it has the potential to enhance significantly the scope of the existing study.
3. **PhD students can apply for URC funding** but the terminology will be changed from ‘Principal Investigator’ to that of a ‘**PhD Student Applicant**’. However, for release of research funds, signatures of the supervisor, co-supervisor would be necessary in order to maintain an audit, as is already the practice.
4. **Undergraduate students cannot apply for URC funding.** However, if they wish to be involved in a project that allows them to learn various techniques of investigations, they will be designated as ‘Trainee Investigators’
5. **A PI can re-apply for URC grant funding provided ONE YEAR has passed since the completion of the previously approved URC funded project.** However, the track record of the PI would be a consideration when applying for a new URC grant and the completed project would have been evaluated for quality of research in terms of publications and presentations generated.
6. **Non Full Time Faculty cannot apply as Principal Investigator** but may apply as Co-investigators.
7. **Hospital staff can apply for URC grant** funding particularly for projects of a cross-institutional nature.
8. **Faculty of AKU in East-Africa and ISMC are also eligible for URC grants** and same terms and conditions will apply.
9. **Involvement of faculty in projects as “co-investigators”** should be clearly time defined, in terms of percentage of time that each co-investigator will spend on the project.
10. **Applications that get poor review** from both the reviewers i.e. a score of less than two will not be discussed in the main GRC meeting and Research Office will pre-screen these grants.
11. **Re-submissions that require major changes** (defined as major adjustments of study objectives, methodology, budget etc) will be considered in the next main grant review cycle. However, re-submissions with requests for minor changes (defined as clarifications, minor adjustments of study procedures, budget etc) will be dealt with by the Research Office alone, in conjunction with the Dean/ Chair of URC.

Small travel grants should be applied through sources other than URC, for example, the Dean’s fund, FDA, departmental funds etc.

TYPES AND CATEGORIES OF SUPPORT

The URC will consider the following categories of support:

1. Short term projects proposed by individual faculty.
2. Theme-related projects initiated by multi-disciplinary faculty teams.
3. Equipment required for specific projects.
4. Development of personnel for research at the University.
5. Cost related to participation of graduate students in research.
6. Dissemination of the reports of research, including publication.

Category 1 - Short term projects

- Requests for support needed to complete a particularly significant project so that external awards may be sought (bridge fund).
- Short-term support for a pilot project.

Projects in this category may receive funding up to US \$ 15,000

Category 2 - Multi-Disciplinary projects

Preference will be given to multi-disciplinary and collaborative applications.

The URC will fund several such projects per year. Funding for such projects will be considered in December and June every year.

Projects in this category may receive maximum funding of US \$ 50,000

Graduate Student Research Fund

The University has established a separate 'Graduate Student Research Fund' which is set aside from the existing URC funds. Initially, it will be of amount US\$30,000 per cycle, which will be available for students of masters' programmes and clinical residents and fellows, by open competition, with a maximum of US\$3,000 funding allowed per grant application.

Two cycles will be called per year with **deadlines of April and October**. However, before applying for this Fund, students should check if they are not covered by the provision of some specific grants through their respective departments/ programmes.

Projects in this category may receive maximum funding of US\$ 3,000

Format of application Categories 1 and 2

The following should be included with each application:

1. Application form (Use URC Grant application [Form RGA 10](#). Do not substitute).
2. Budget sheet (Use budget [Form RGA 10-B](#). Do not substitute).
3. Budget Justification, itemized (1 page). [See guidelines below](#).
4. Summary statement of proposed research, describing (a) its significance in your field, (b) how the results could enhance the potential for obtaining external grants, or provide the basis for larger grant applications.
5. Project description, background and plan of research.
 - i. The research plan should be organized into the following sections:
 - a) Objectives and hypothesis: This should be in outline form, with the objectives stated for the period of this project only.
 - b) Background and Rationale: This should be a brief, critical review of the context of the proposal, evaluating current knowledge in the field. The bibliography should cite only the most relevant references. A multi-disciplinary committee, including people from outside your field of expertise should be able to understand why this research is important.
 - c) Methods: Provide sufficient detail for the committee to assess your understanding of the experimental design, specific procedures, justification of sample size and methods of data analysis.
 - ii. Concise proposals with clearly defined goals and plans that are feasible within the time period of the award tend to receive the most favourable reviews. However, for bridge-funds should summarize the objectives and outcomes of the research conducted to date and the purpose to be served by bridge-funding.

Note: Proposals should be in typescript “Times New Roman 12 pt”, preferably single line spacing. Incomplete applications will not be reviewed.

6. State the history of funded research and publication during the past 5 years (Use [URC Funding History Form](#). Do not substitute).
7. The PI, Co-PIs and collaborators must submit a short CV (1 page each) and a list of relevant publications (1 page). Co-PIs and collaborators should include a signed letter stating willingness to co-operate and the extent of their involvement.

For multi-disciplinary, multi-investigator projects: The roles of investigator or group should be stated.

9. Appendices: These should include information critical for evaluating the proposal. They should be numbered consecutively.

Category 3 - Format of application for capital equipment

Requests for new equipment required to support a research project or programme may be made independently. Such requests should not be conditionally or unconditionally linked to any other proposal submitted to URC in the same cycle. However, requests for replacement or upgrading of equipment to be utilized in a URC funded project can be submitted to the review committee. Support for equipment is considered only in the context of the needs of a proposed research project, where equipment needs are clearly indicated by the proposed methodology. All requests for equipment should be submitted on [Form E-10](#), available from the Research Office.

Total or partial support of up to a maximum of US\$30,000 may be awarded for the purchase of equipment.

Category 4 - Training and development grants

Grants for the training of personnel for specific needs related to research projects will also be considered. Applications may be made on [Form T-10](#). Such applications must be accompanied by a detailed description of the training, and its relationship to existing or future research projects.

Support for this purpose will be available for brief training periods, not exceeding 4 weeks, either in Pakistan or abroad.

A maximum of US\$ 6000 may be provided for such activity.

Category 5 - Cost related to participation of graduate student in research

Requests for student's research related costs should be made on [Form S-10](#). Graduate students registered at AKU are eligible for such awards. Applications in this category can be submitted by students in consultation with their supervisors, for research projects or any research-related training for students enrolled in graduate programmes of AKU.

Category 6 - Dissemination of research reports and publication costs

URC may consider application to support cost of publication of research papers as well as costs related to the dissemination of research reports. Individuals seeking such support should submit a written application describing the nature of work, name of publishing journal or agency and total associated cost.

Capacity Building Grants

Introduction

In addition to the existing categories of URC grants available to researchers, the URC has introduced a new category of grant for capacity building. Capacity-building projects could be multidimensional and may involve training those who participate in all aspects of the research field. The URC had desired that a list of projects (by types) to be considered under this category be compiled in consultation with AKU-FHS and AKU-IED¹. Accordingly, this paper proposes that the following types of grants to be made available from 2003 onwards:

1. Partnership Building Grants

Objectives

- To stimulate new or further strengthen international co-operation between AKU researchers and institutes from developed and developing countries.
- To provide access to knowledge and skills; innovative and proven methodologies; networking and enhancement of resources.

Grants will be available for the establishment of new contacts directed at long-term collaboration between AKU, AKDN and other national and international institutions where objectives would be to collaborate and exchange expertise in research and development of research programme proposals to be submitted for financing to external agencies.

2. Development of Human Resources

Objectives

- To develop research skills in individuals by organizing short training that enables them to perform effectively.
- To provide opportunities at home and abroad for developing expertise in specific techniques, including epidemiological and laboratory based, which would significantly support educational, biosocial and health research.
- To develop grant-writing skills by organising workshops on the same. Grant-writing workshops can expand research activity at AKU by helping to lift standards of internal peer review, and stimulate attention to the requirements of granting agencies, thereby increasing the chances of success.

Research proposals, which are aimed to develop individuals or groups (students, staff or faculty), with specific research skills needed to undertake programme projects may be considered under this category. Training programmes could be directed to raise the level of understanding of qualitative and quantitative research. Individuals within university or in a community who could play a facilitatory role in conducting research in the community may also be developed.

3. Research Administration and Organizational Development

Objectives

- To develop research management skills among researchers by providing opportunities through direct exposure or allowing access to offshore training programmes.
- To train individuals with aptitude on research management by specifically designed programmes for this purpose.
- To develop research managers in the managerial dimension of research, including skills in such areas as risk analysis, priority setting, planning, budgeting, human relations, teambuilding, and developing incentives and rewards.
- To develop individual units for the purpose of providing specific service or assistance in research.

Proposals in this sub-category could include well-defined programmes to develop individuals who could meaningfully contribute in research planning covering all aspects (proposal development and execution) and monitoring and evaluation. Organizational development may require creation of new units within or outside AKU with sufficient ability to survive once the grant support is exhausted.

4. Development of Resources (research material)

Objectives

- To create repository of material to be utilized by the researchers at AKU to study specific disease or situation in a community.
- To develop creative material or tool for the researchers which enable them to carryout further research in a specific area.
- To subscribe for / purchase of special journals, literature, internet based research resources/tools which cannot normally be financed from departmental funds.

Proposals that aim to develop repositories of resource material such as cancer data bank, microbial culture collection could be considered. Programmes aimed to develop specific tools in research such as software and other training material could also be included.

BUDGET GUIDELINES

Request the minimum amount of funds that will allow you to conduct the research. Enter only whole dollars or rupees on the Budget Form (Form RGA-10B, to be developed with the help of Budget & Finance). For the budget justification page, itemize the budget request and justify each item clearly. Please provide an explanation if you have other internal or external funding.

Allowable expenses vary depending on the project. [Salary for the PI is not an allowable expense.](#)

The following is a general guideline:

1. *Consumables and supplies*: Support is provided for consumables and supplies related to equipment, office stationery, data processing; animal costs and animal maintenance; unavoidable cost involving human subjects; and unusual computer time requirements.
2. *Stipends*: Research fellows or graduate students who are involved in approved research and registered at AKU may be eligible to receive a stipend.
3. *Postdoctoral fellows, Research Assistants and Technicians*: Salaries may be requested to support postdoctoral fellows, research assistants in all disciplines and technicians in Basic and Clinical Sciences. A request for fringe benefits may be included, where applicable.
4. *Travel*: Travel will be considered when it is essential to achieve project goals. The nature of the travel must be clearly explained in the proposal. In extraordinary circumstances, other travel may be supported.
5. *Equipment*: Applicants may include up to US\$8,000 in the budget for equipment. This must be justified on the basis of a specific need defined in the research proposal. All consumables/supplies required to run the equipment for experimental purposes must be included under the list of consumables for the research project. The total cost of equipment should include handling charges freight and accessories.
6. *Dissemination cost*: Written application should include support cost of publication of research papers as well as cost related to the dissemination of research reports.

REVIEW OF GRANT APPLICATION

All grant applications will be reviewed in two stages. In stage I, review will occur in the relevant subcommittee of the Grants Review Committee (GRC) (e.g. a basic science project will be reviewed in the basic science sub-committee; an education related project in the subcommittee for education). These reviews will then be forwarded to the full GRC for the second stage of the review process. Proposals submitted to URC will be reviewed by the GRC with external reviewers as required. Proposals will be sent for external review if deemed necessary by the GRC.

The chance of a PI being funded for more than one project, proposed simultaneously, is small.

A PI may apply during the same competition period for one single investigator grant and one multi-disciplinary grant. If both applications are successful, the applicant must accept the multi-disciplinary grant and decline the single investigator grant.

Review Criteria for Research Grant Proposal to URC

When preparing an application, please consider the following criteria that will be used to evaluate all University research fund proposals.

1. Factors related to the proposal
 - i. Clear statement of the procedures to be used to achieve the objectives
 - ii. Intrinsic value of research
 - iii. Utility, relevance and potential of research
 - iv. Potential for future support
 - v. Budget, well thought out; clearly defined

2. Factors related to the Investigator
 - i. Research history competence
 - ii. Experience
 - iii. Knowledge of project subject