



THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY

<i>Policy No. ORGS/009-2018</i>	
POLICY AND GUIDELINES FOR URC INTRAMURAL FUNDING ¹	
<i>Revision approved on</i>	March 8, 2018
<i>Approving Authority</i>	University Research Council
<i>Contact Office</i>	Office of Research & Graduate Studies

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Board of Trustees in 1999 appointed a University Research Council (URC) and approved the commencement of funding research grants.

The URC has set up a system of intramural funds that are awarded to eligible groups and individual faculty or graduate 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 URC. Several themes have been identified that are broadly relevant to the needs of low and middle income countries and include infection, immunity and inflammation; neurosciences; human development; non-communicable diseases; stem cell; maternal and child health; education, communication and Muslim culture. While emphasis is given to the theme related research, the University also supports other quality research projects.

URC funds should be used as a springboard to help faculty get external funding and not used as a main source of funding. It is anticipated that such support would enable the investigator(s) to compete effectively for external grants. This funding also fosters development of capacity for research.

The Grants Review Committee (GRC) is the administrative body which evaluate proposals received for funding from the University-wide unrestricted endowment for research and other internal sources that may be allocated.

2.0 OBJECTIVES OF INTRAMURAL GRANTS

- 2.1 To award funds to eligible groups, individual faculty or students to enable them to pursue research, particularly in the priority areas identified by the University;
- 2.2 To support these investigators so that they may effectively compete for extramural grants;

¹ First developed in 1998 as “URC Guidelines”; Last updated on September 12, 2013; Renamed and updated as “Policy and Guidelines for URC Intramural Funding” on March 8, 2018.

2.3 To build research capacity of AKU faculty members and students.

3.0 POLICY

3.1 Eligibility for URC Grant

- 3.1.1 Full-time and flexi full-time² faculty of the Aga Khan University across all campuses are eligible to apply for URC intramural grants;
- 3.1.2 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 significantly enhance the scope of the existing study;
- 3.1.3 A PI can re-apply for URC grant funding provided progress report was submitted and ONE YEAR has passed since the completion of the previously 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 submission of final report and other scholarly outputs;

Note: This clause does not apply in cases where the PI is submitting application as student's supervisor. A supervisor can submit at the most two applications on behalf of a student or a resident.

- 3.1.4 Graduate students can also apply for URC funding to off-set costs for research activity (e.g. data collection). (For further details see section 4.5);
- 3.1.5 Involvement of faculty in projects as “investigator” or “co-investigators” should be clearly time-defined, in terms of percentage of time that each co-investigator will spend on the project;
- 3.1.6 URC will not fund any application(s) to set up individual registries and tissue banks.

3.2 Review of Applications

- 3.2.1 Applications will be reviewed double-blind, so that PI(s) and the reviewer(s) do not know the name of the other;
- 3.2.2 All applications will be reviewed preferably by two reviewers. In case two reviewers are not available at AKU, a GRC member with the relevant expertise may review the application; in case a particular area of research expertise is not available within AKU, service of external reviewers will be sought;
- 3.2.3 Applications that are rated “unsatisfactory” in their review from both reviewers i.e. a score of less than ‘2’ will not be discussed in the GRC meeting. Designated staff from the Office of Research and Graduate Studies (ORGS) and Chair GRC will pre-screen these grant applications;

² Flexi full-time faculty (previously called *Geographic Full-Time Faculty*) are similar to full-time faculty but work on reduced number of hours ranging between 50-90% of regular working hours. They are entitled to limited benefits on a pro-rated basis. Similar to full-time faculty, they will not practice or earn income from related professional service outside the University. (Ref: *Faculty Appointment & Promotion Guidelines 2015 - Medical Colleges, Pakistan and East Africa*)

- 3.2.4 Responses to applications accepted with minor changes (defined as clarifications, minor adjustments of study procedures, budget, etc.) will be processed by ORGS, in consultation with the Chair of URC;
- 3.2.5 Expedited Review maybe available in case of applications that are time-sensitive. The application will not await the full cycle of GRC review and in such case the Chair GRC will get the application reviewed by expert(s) and take a decision in consultation with Chair URC. The GRC will be kept informed.

4.0 TYPES AND CATEGORIES OF SUPPORT

4.1 Short term projects proposed by individual faculty including:

- 4.1.1 Bridge fund request for support needed to complete a particularly significant project so that external awards may be sought or completed.
- 4.1.2 Short-term support for a pilot project;
- 4.1.3 Projects in this category may receive funding up to a maximum of **US\$ 15,000**.

Note: Bridge funding will receive low priority as compared to AKU research in thematic areas because intramural funds are to support research at AKU while bridge funding is a grant to support research from other sponsors.

4.2 Theme-related projects initiated by multi-disciplinary faculty teams:

- 4.2.1 Priority will be given to multi-disciplinary and collaborative applications;
- 4.2.2 Projects in this category may receive funding up to a maximum of **US\$ 30,000**.

4.3 Resource development/equipment request for specific project:

- 4.3.1 To develop creative material or tool for the researchers which enable them to carry out further research in a specific area;
- 4.3.2 To subscribe for or purchase of special journals, literature, internet based research resources/tools which cannot normally be financed from departmental funds;
- 4.3.3 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;
- 4.3.4 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;
- 4.3.5 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 <https://www.aku.edu/research/urc/grc/Pages/home.aspx>;
- 4.3.6 Total or partial support in this category maybe provided up to a maximum of **US\$ 25,000**.

4.4 **Development of personnel for research at AKU and capacity building grants:**

- 4.4.1 Grants for the training of personnel for specific needs related to research projects will also be considered;
- 4.4.2 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;
- 4.4.3 Support for this purpose will be available for brief training periods, not exceeding 4 weeks, either in Pakistan or abroad;
- 4.4.4 Development of research management skills among researchers by providing opportunities through direct exposure or allowing access to offshore training programmes;
- 4.4.5 Training of individuals with aptitude on research management by specifically designed programmes for this purpose;
- 4.4.6 Development of 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;
- 4.4.7 To development of capacity in individual units for the purpose of providing specific service or assistance in research;
- 4.4.8 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.
- 4.4.9 Capacity-building projects could be multidimensional and may involve training those who participate in all aspects of the research field. Preferably projects in this field would cut across the different academic units such as EAI, FHS, GSMC, IED, IHD, and ISMC.
- 4.4.10 Projects in this category may receive funding up to a maximum of **US\$ 8,000**.

4.5 **Participation of graduate students in research:**

- 4.5.1 Requests for students' research related costs should be made on Form S-10;
- 4.5.2 Graduate students should be enrolled in an AKU programme;
- 4.5.3 Applications in this category should be submitted by students' supervisors as PI.
- 4.5.4 Students in the PGME programme (e.g. residents) are also eligible for funding.
Note: Residents are strongly encouraged to seek funds from their departments and seed money if applicable.
- 4.5.5 Funding would be available for research-related expenditure;
- 4.5.6 Projects in this category may receive funding up to a maximum of **US\$ 4,000**.

4.6 **Dissemination of the reports of research, including publication:**

- 4.6.5 URC may consider application to support cost of publication of research papers as well as costs related to the dissemination of research reports;

- 4.6.6 Individuals seeking such support should submit a written application describing the nature of work, name of publishing journal or agency and total associated cost;
- 4.6.7 Publication costs for journal articles should be supported by the relevant grants, deans or department funds. Only in highly deserving cases should URC funding be awarded in this category.
- 4.6.8 Projects in this category may receive funding up to a maximum of **US\$ 2,000**.

4.7 Partnership building grants

- 4.7.5 To stimulate new or further strengthen international co-operation between AKU researchers and institutes from developed and developing countries;
- 4.7.6 To provide access to knowledge and skills; innovative and proven methodologies; networking and enhancement of resources.
- 4.7.7 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.
- 4.7.8 Projects in this category may receive funding up to a maximum of **US\$ 8,000**.

5.0 FREQUENCY OF URC FUNDING CALLS

The URC extends invitation for research grant proposals four times a year. Appropriate application forms can be obtained from <https://www.aku.edu/research/urc/grc/Pages/home.aspx>.

5.1 Deadline dates for submitting applications

1st Cycle:	December 31	Every year
2nd Cycle:	March 31	“
3rd Cycle:	June 30	“
4th Cycle:	September 30	“

In case the deadline date falls on a holiday, applications will be accepted till the following working day. Completed application should be emailed to urc.grants@aku.edu

6.0 GUIDELINES

6.1 Application guidelines

The following should be included with each application:

- i) Application form (Use URC Grant application [Form RGA 10](#) - Do not substitute).
- ii) Budget sheet (Use budget [Form RGA 10-B](#) - Do not substitute).
- iii) Budget Justification, itemized
- iv) 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.
- v) Intramural checklist

6.2 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 11 point”, preferably single line spacing. Incomplete application will not be reviewed.

6.3 State the history of funded research and publication during the past 5 years (Use [URC Funding History Form](#) - Do not substitute).

- 6.3.1 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.
- 6.3.2 For multi-disciplinary, multi-investigator projects: The roles of investigator or group should be stated.

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

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

6.6 Budget guidelines

- 6.6.1 Request the minimum amount of funds that will allow you to conduct the research. Local currency should be used 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.
- 6.6.2 Allowable expenses vary depending on the project. Salary for the PI is not an allowable expense.
- 6.6.3 The following is a **general guideline**:
 - a. *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.
- b. *Stipends*: Research fellows or graduate students who are involved in approved research and registered at AKU may be eligible to receive a stipend.
 - c. *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.
 - d. *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.
 - e. *Equipment*: Although the URC discourages funding equipment in its grants, applicants may include up to US\$8000 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. As this is a University funded item the equipment must be utilized with utmost care and returned after the expiry of the grant in good working condition except for normal wear and tear compatible to careful use. The URC will allow other eligible grantees to use the same equipment hence it reserves the right to provide used equipment to the grantees as long as it can satisfy the needs of project.
 - f. *Dissemination cost*: Written application should include support cost of publication of research papers as well as cost related to the dissemination of research reports.
 - g. The budget should preferably be developed with the assistance of relevant personnel in the Finance Office.

6.7 Reporting guidelines: These will include;

6.7.1 Progress reports

- Midterm reports (template attached)

6.7.2 Closeout

- Closeout report (template attached)
- Budget report (template attached)

6.8 Reviewers' guidelines:

6.8.1 Terms of reference for the reviewers:

Reviewers of the intramural grant proposals should aim to:

- a) Review the grant proposals according to the criteria provided below;
- b) Clearly identify strengths and weaknesses;
- c) Provide clear recommendations and suggestions as appropriate;

- d) Provide constructive critique;
- e) Rank the proposal as outstanding, good, fair or unsatisfactory;
- f) Give justification for overall mark;
- g) Within three weeks of accepting the review submit a review report on the enclosed Review Form

6.8.2 The **reviewers' report** will be shared anonymously with the Grants Review Committee and members will use them to prioritize the proposals and take decisions about funding.

6.8.3 Reviewers' report will also be shared anonymously with the applicants so that they can address the weaknesses or gaps identified by the reviewers and also take into account the recommendations and suggestions received.

6.8.4 **Review Criteria** for URC intramural grant application:

The following criteria will be used to evaluate all intramural research grant applications:

- a) Quality of the proposal as evident from clarity of objectives and rationale, well-justified research methods including sampling techniques and analysis;
- b) Intrinsic value and significance of the research;
- c) Relevance of the study to the context;
- d) Potential to impact on the society and community;
- e) A well-defined budget in accordance with the URC guidelines.

6.8.5 **Marking criteria:**

- a) Outstanding (**4**);
- b) Good (**3**);
- c) Fair (**2**);
- d) Unsatisfactory (**1**).

Proposals obtaining an average score of 4, 3 or 2 can be recommended or recommended with minor modifications. Proposals receiving an average score of less than 2 will not be considered for funding and will not be discussed in GRC meeting.

6.8.6 **Reviewers** must also comment on the following factors related to the Principal Investigators:

- a) Research history competence;
- b) Experience;
- c) Knowledge of project subject.