



THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY

Policy No. ORGS/09-2020	
POLICY AND GUIDELINES FOR URC INTRAMURAL FUNDING ¹	
<i>Revision approved on</i>	April 9, 2020
<i>Approving Authority</i>	University Research Council
<i>Contact Office</i>	Office of Research and 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.

URC has set up a system of intramural funds that are awarded to eligible groups, individual faculty and graduate students to enable them to pursue research in the priority areas identified by the University and also in any other field that is considered appropriate by the URC. The University has identified several themes that are broadly relevant to the needs of low and middle income countries. These themes 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 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 investigators 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 evaluates 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 and 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;
- 2.3 To build research capacity of AKU faculty members and students.

¹ First developed in 1998 as “URC Guidelines”; updated on September March 8, 2018 and renamed as “Policy and Guidelines for URC Intramural Funding”

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 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.*
- 3.1.3 Graduate students can also apply for URC funding to off-set costs for research activity (e.g. data collection). (For further details see section 4.2.2);
- 3.1.4 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;
- 3.1.5 URC will not fund any application to setup any registries or tissue bank.

4.0 TYPES AND CATEGORIES OF SUPPORT

Applications will be accepted under two categories:

- 4.1 Leaping Leopard Programme (LLP) and
- 4.2 Research Support Programme (RSP).

4.1 Leaping Leopard Programme (LLP):

- 4.1.1 LLP will include application that are geared towards obtaining extramural grants;
- 4.1.2 Approximately 80% of the total yearly URC budget will be allocated for this category;
- 4.1.3 PIs will have to explain in their applications how their research will help them in obtaining an extramural grant;
- 4.1.4 PIs will also be required to suggest names of the funding agencies that they are planning to apply in future;
- 4.1.5 Departmental Research Committee (DRC) will peer review each application before it is submitted to URC;
- 4.1.6 Department head will provide letter of support that the work is important and aligned with departmental goals;

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*)

- 4.1.7 In the support letter the department head will also provide assurance on efficient execution and timely delivery of grant outputs including progress and final reports;
- 4.1.8 Projects in this category may receive funding up to a maximum of **US\$ 25000**.

4.2 Research Support Programme (RSP):

RSP programme will accept application related to

Capacity building and Graduate students' research projects.

Approximately 20% of the total yearly URC budget will be allocated for this category.

4.2.1 Capacity Building Grants (CGB):

- Grants for the training of personnel for specific needs related to research projects will be considered;
- Applications may be made on the CBG Application Form. Such applications must be accompanied by a detailed description of the training, and its relationship to existing or future research projects;
- Development of research management skills among researchers by providing opportunities through direct exposure or allowing access to offshore training programme;
- Training of individuals with aptitude on research management by specifically designed programmes for this purpose;
- 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;
- Development of capacity in 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.
- Conference and workshop related expenses may also be supported provided that the project has a research/ capacity building component. The department submitting such applications will have to bear half of the cost of the project;
- 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.
- Projects in this category may receive funding up to a maximum of **US\$ 25,000**.

4.2.2 Graduate Students' Research Projects:

- Requests for students' research related costs should be made on Graduate Student Grant Form;
- Graduate students should be enrolled in an AKU programme;

- At AKU institutions where PhD programme is not offered, applications by faculty members enrolled in external universities will be considered;
- Funding would be available only for research-related expenditure;
- Applications in this category should be submitted by students' supervisors as PI;
- All graduate students are strongly advised to look for alternate sources of funding for their research projects;
- 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;

- Residents' projects in this category may receive funding up to **US\$ 2,000**;
- Masters students' projects in this category may receive funding up to **US\$ 3,000**;
- PhD students' projects in this category may receive funding up to **US\$ 10,000**.

Special requests can be made to the GRC for funding beyond these limits if there is a compelling case and strong justification.

5.0 Review of Applications

- 5.1 GRC will contact each entity head of the University to obtain lists of reviewers to review research proposals for URC. A 6-monthly report will be given to the entity heads so that the contribution of these reviewers can be duly recognized at the time of annual appraisal;
- 5.2 GRC will be empowered to sought services of external reviewers in case reviewers are not available in a particular research area at AKU;
- 5.3 Applications will be reviewed double-blind, so that PIs and the reviewers are anonymous to each other;
- 5.6 All applications will preferably be reviewed by at least two reviewers; GRC will formulate its own TORs.
- 5.7 External reviewers may be requested to evaluate the applications if appropriate expertise is not available at the University;
- 5.8 Reviewers will provide a summary of the proposal specifying the strengths and weaknesses and will rate them based on the scale below (10 being highest):

a) Feasible	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
b) Interesting	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
c) Novel	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
d) Ethical	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
e) Potential:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

(Potential for extramural funding, how clear and likely to get funding on scientific merit)
- 5.9 The reviewers will also provide confidential comments for GRC Committee;
- 5.10 GRC will evaluate the submitted applications based on the markings and the comments provided by the reviewers in the periodic GRC meetings;

- 5.11 The reviewers' reports will be shared with the GRC and members will use them to prioritize the proposals for better, efficient and informed decision making;
- 5.12 GRC in their meetings will rate the applications as 'approved', 'approved with minor changes' or 'not approved';
- 5.13 Responses to applications approved with minor changes (defined as clarifications, minor adjustments of study procedures, budget, etc.) will be processed by a senior individual with finance/budget expertise at ORGS (Office of Research and Graduate Studies) and GRC Secretariat in consultation with the Chair of URC;
- 5.14 A feedback system will be created for the applicants to evaluate the review process and the reviewers' comments;
- 5.15 GRC must also comment on the following factors related to the Principal Investigators including research history competence, experience, knowledge of project subject;
- 5.16 Expedited Review maybe available in case of applications that are time-sensitive. The application will not await the full meeting 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.

6 FREQUENCY OF URC FUNDING CALLS

The URC extends invitation for research grant proposals three times a year.

6.1 Deadline dates for submitting applications

1st Cycle:	December 31	Every year
2nd Cycle:	April 30	“
3rd Cycle:	August 31	“

In case the deadline date falls on a holiday, applications will be accepted till the following working day.

7 GUIDELINES

7.1 Application guidelines

The following should be included with each application:

- i) URC application form, including 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.
- ii) Budget sheet
- iii) Budget Justification, itemized
- iv) Intramural checklist

7.2 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.

7.3 State the history of funded research and publication during the past 5 years.

7.4 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.

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

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

7.7 Budget guidelines

7.7.1 Request the minimum amount of funds that will allow you to conduct the research. United States Dollar (USD) should be used on the Budget Form. 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.

7.7.2 Allowable expenses vary depending on the project. Salary for the PI is not an allowable expense.

7.7.3 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 a small proportion of the overall funds 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.

7.8 Reporting guidelines: These will include;

7.8.1 Progress reports

- Midterm reports (template attached)

7.8.2 Closeout

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

End of document

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