

SULTNATE OF OMAN
THE RESEARCH COUNCIL
PROGRAMS AND RESEARCH



مجلس البحث العلمي
The Research Council

BLOCK FUNDING PROGRAM GUIDELINES

Novemeber 2018

| | | |
|---------|--|----|
| 1 | General | 5 |
| 1.2 | Abbreviations | 5 |
| 1.3 | Definitions | 6 |
| 2 | Overview Of The Block Funding Program | 8 |
| 2.1 | Block Funding Program Objectives | 8 |
| 3 | Roles and Responsibilities | 8 |
| 3.1 | The Research Council | 8 |
| 3.1.1 | Secretary General | 8 |
| 3.1.2 | Assistant Secretary General for Programs and Research (ASGPR) | 9 |
| 3.1.3 | Internal Auditing Department | 9 |
| 3.2 | research institution | 9 |
| 3.2.1 | Institutional Internal Evaluation Committee (IIEC) | 9 |
| 3.2.2 | Institutional Research Focal Point (IRFP) | 9 |
| 3.2.3 | Principal Investigator (PI) | 10 |
| 3.2.4 | Peer Reviewers | 10 |
| 4 | Eligibility Criteria | 10 |
| 4.1 | Eligibility criteria for Submission | 10 |
| 4.2 | Eligibility Criteria for Grant Holders | 10 |
| 4.2.1 | Research grant (RG) | 10 |
| 4.2.2 | Graduate Research Grant (GRG) | 11 |
| 4.2.2.1 | Rules for employee | 11 |
| 4.2.2.2 | Rules for Post graduate students | 11 |
| 4.2.3 | Under Graduate Research Grant (URG) | 11 |
| 5 | Eligibility Criteria for Host Institution | 12 |
| 6 | Submission | 12 |
| 6.1 | Acknowledgment of Submission | 12 |
| 6.2 | Conflict of Interest | 12 |
| 6.3 | Evaluation of Submissions | 13 |
| 6.4 | Excellence Criteria (Peer review) for research grant (RG) only | 13 |
| 6.5 | Expected Impact for BFP | 14 |
| 6.6 | Institution-Defined Criteria | 14 |
| 6.7 | Ranking of Proposals | 14 |
| 7 | Funding Decision and Feedback | 15 |
| 8 | Agreement and Reporting | 15 |
| 8.1 | Grant Agreement | 15 |
| 8.2 | Reports | 15 |
| 8.2.1 | Progress Reports | 15 |

| | |
|---|----|
| 8.2.2 Final Report | 16 |
| 8.2.3 A Comprehensive Report | 17 |
| 8.3 Acknowledgment | 17 |
| 8.4 Financial Management | 17 |
| Table 1: Classification of Funding Grants | 18 |
| Table 2: Financial Caps of RG Program | 18 |
| 8.4.1 Research Assistants OR Post-Doctorate or Research Fellows | 18 |
| 8.4.2 Equipment and Facilities | 19 |
| 8.4.2.1 Equipment | 19 |
| 8.4.2.2 Equipment Ownership and Transfer | 19 |
| 8.4.3 Materials and Supplies | 19 |
| 8.4.4 Travel | 19 |
| 8.4.5 Dissemination and Publications | 20 |
| 8.4.6 Administrative Costs | 20 |
| 8.5 Payment Process | 20 |
| 8.6 Budget Adjustments | 20 |
| 8.7 Project Management | 20 |
| 8.7.1 Replacing Project Team Members or Research Institution | 20 |
| 8.7.2 Changing the Project Plan | 21 |
| 8.7.3 Extension | 21 |
| 8.7.4 Termination and suspension | 21 |
| 8.8 Ethics, Confidentiality and Disclosure | 21 |
| 8.8.1 Ethical Review | 22 |
| 8.9 Intellectual Property Rights and Policy | 22 |
| 8.10 Inspection | 22 |
| 8.11 Liability | 23 |
| 9 Compli nance | 23 |

List of Tables:

| | |
|---|----|
| Table 1 Classification of Funding Grants..... | 18 |
| Table 2 Financial Caps of RG Program..... | 18 |

1 GENERAL

1.2 ABBREVIATIONS

The below abbreviations are listed on alphabetical order.

| | |
|--------|---|
| ASGPR | Assistant Secretary General for Programs and Research |
| BFP | Block Funding Program |
| Co-PI | Co-Principal Investigator |
| GRG | Graduate Research Grant |
| IAD | Internal Auditing Department |
| IIEC | Institutional Internal Evaluation Committee |
| IP | Intellectual Property |
| IPR | Intellectual Property Rights |
| IRFP | Institutional Research Focal Point |
| KPIs | Key Performance Indicators |
| OMSB | Oman Medical Specialty Board (OMSB) |
| PI/PIs | Principal Investigator/ Principal Investigators |
| RA | Research Assistant |
| RAM | Research Area Manager |
| RG | Research Grants |
| RI | Research Institution |
| RIMS | Research Information Management System |
| SG | Secretary General |
| TGC | TRC Grants Committee |
| TRC | The Research Council |
| URG | Undergraduate Research Grant |

1.3 DEFINITIONS

The below definitions are listed based on their alphabetical order.

| | |
|--|--|
| Block Funding Agreement | An agreement, between TRC and the RI, stipulating the terms and conditions of funding support granted by TRC for a particular research block program e.g. RG, GRG or URG. |
| Block Funding Cycle | Starts with opening the cycle for proposals and applications including granting the financial awards, until the projects are fully completed and closed. |
| Block Funding Program (BFP) | This program covers 3 categories of grants, namely Research Grant (RG), Graduate Research Grant (GRG) and Undergraduate Research Grants (URG). |
| Co-Investigator (Co-I) | Researcher with a PhD qualification or equivalent who is employed (affiliated to) by a national Research Institution and will be involved with the Principal Investigator in the scientific development or implementation of the Project. |
| Conflict of Interest | Any situation in which a person's professional or personal involvements may influence the objective exercise of his/her duties. This may involve personal or professional relationships between any one of the investigators, TRC staff and/ or peer reviewers such as being a close relative, present or past co-worker, co-author, collaborator, subordinate, supervisor...etc. This may equally include long-standing scientific or personal relations between investigators and reviewers. |
| Consultant | An expert in a specific field involved in the research project to provide, scientific advice, improved implementation of research, and/or technology transfer; |
| Co-Principal Investigator (Co-PI) | A researcher under the RG program who is delegated to lead the research project during the absence of the PI. The Co-PI is required to be a holder of a PhD or equivalent and to be an employed by the RI and should be from the same RI of the PI |
| Graduate Research Grant (GRG) | This grant supports researchers who hold either a bachelor or a master degree. |
| Institutional Internal Evaluation Committee (IIEC) | A Committee appointed by the RI to evaluate and rank the submitted research proposals and to monitor and evaluate the subsequent progress and completion of the research projects that have been funded by TRC. |
| Institutional Research Focal Point (IRFP) | A staff responsible for liaising with TRC on the submission of block research proposals and the subsequent follow-up of research projects. The IRFP is appointed by the RI. |
| Post-doctoral/Research Fellow | A professional holding a PhD degree or equivalent and involved in a research project as a full time researcher. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Principal Investigator/s (PI/PIs) | The researcher responsible for leading the Research Project. The PI is required to hold a PhD or an equivalent degree and to be an employee at the RI. |
| Project Team Members | All investigators and such other personnel assigned to the research project. |
| Research Assistant (RA) | Local or non-local contract personnel hired on a term basis to be directly involved in the Research Project |
| Research Grant (RG) | Financial support for an investigator-driven Research Project. The PI of such projects must hold a PhD or an equivalent degree. |
| Research Information Management System (RIMS) | Online portal used to manage all pre- and post-award of Block Funding Research Project activities and other research programs. These include submissions by PIs, evaluations by reviewers, financial management, progress, and final reporting. |
| Research Institution (RI) | A research (academic/non-academic) institution employing an Investigator and having the infrastructure and capacity to carry out part or the entirety of the Research Project, as defined in Block Funding Agreement. |
| Research Project | A set of research activities approved for funding according to Block Funding Program Agreement's terms and conditions. |
| Research Proposal | An official form under RG/ GRG/ URG, requesting financial support for a proposed research project. |
| TRC Grant Committee (TGC) | A committee within TRC to determine the level of funding and the overhead for each institute. |
| Undergraduates Research Grant (URG) | This grant targets undergraduate students who are currently enrolled in a degree program. Their supervisors should hold as a minimum qualification of a master degree. |

2 OVERVIEW OF THE BLOCK FUNDING PROGRAM

The Block Funding Program (BFP) is a national research program adopted by The Research Council (TRC) in the Sultanate of Oman. This program allocates small-to-medium size research grants to support short-term and mid-term research projects in areas defined by researchers from academic and research institutions in Oman and serve the national research priority areas as well as TRC priority themes. The main goal of this program is to sustain and develop further excellent in research and to create a competitive economy through advanced and evidence –based research. To achieve this goal, TRC identifies three categories of grants namely,

- Research Grant (RG)
- Graduates Research Grant (GRG)
- Undergraduates Research Grant (URG)

TRC will open the call per year and the submission of proposals will be opened throughout the year and TRC shall receive the application of the ranked proposals at the end of April through RIMS. The calculation of funds for each institutions will take place in July and August. Grants will be awarded in September and upon final approval, the full budget of each block fund i.e. RG, GRG or URG will be released to the Research Institutions.

2.1 BLOCK FUNDING PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the BFP are to:

1. Encourage research initiatives undertaken by qualified individual or group of investigators in areas specific to their interest and relevant to their expertise, which serve the national needs.
2. Foster high-quality research and develop research capability through responsive-mode grants.
3. Support the creation of teams and networks of researchers and research support personnel.
4. Support research institutions to build research administration capabilities and manage research grants through providing financial support.

3 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

This section defines the roles and responsibilities of each entity, staff member and applicant in the BFP process.

3.1 THE RESEARCH COUNCIL

3.1.1 SECRETARY GENERAL

Secretary General (SG) is responsible for the approval of the agreement and its updates and/or amendments. On case-by-case bases, SG approves or rejects RI's requests, for the issues that these guidelines may have not covered. He is responsible for the approval of any

change orders against signed agreements and/or RI requests beyond stipulated **Block funding GUIDELINES**.

3.1.2 ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL FOR PROGRAMS AND RESEARCH (ASGPR)

1. Select the members of the Grant committee at TRC
2. Chair the Grant committee meeting to determine the level of funding and the overhead for each institute

3.1.3 INTERNAL AUDITING DEPARTMENT

1. The Internal Auditing Department (IAD) audits Block Funding Program's payments before releasing funds to the Research Institutions.
2. IAD has the right, at any time, to review and audit the RIs' management of the awarded grants.

3.2 RESEARCH INSTITUTION

3.2.1 INSTITUTIONAL INTERNAL EVALUATION COMMITTEE (IIEC)

1. Decide which proposal need to be send for peer reviewers.
2. Obtain the evaluation of proposals from at least three acceptable non-conflicting external reviewers (40%)
3. Evaluate the proposals that have been reviewed by external reviewers in term of the following criteria:
 - a. Expected Impact (40%).
 - b. Institution-Defined Criteria (20%).
4. The Chairperson of the internal committee will make the summary of the member's comments with their scores and upload it onto RIMS.
5. The Chairperson of the internal committee is responsible for ranking the proposals from high to low in terms of the overall score in RIMS.
6. Evaluate and make decisions on the progress and final reports of approved projects.
7. Authorised to terminate a project based on PI/IRFP request or the progress of the project and notify TRC through RIMS.

3.2.2 INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH FOCAL POINT (IRFP)

1. Receive and scan the proposal to check if PI has completed the research proposal forum properly.
2. Send all complaint proposals to the Institutional Internal Evaluation Committee.
3. Clear Program application documents for submission to TRC through RIMS after ensuring consistency with Block funding Program policies and regulations.
4. Approve the applications for submitted programs.
5. Follow up the operational, financial and administrative processes of approved projects under Block Funding Program.
6. Keep RI staff up-to-date of any announcements and adjustments in Block funding Program rules and procedures.
7. Ensure research institutional staff's involvement and active participation in TRC's events, such as the Annual Research Forum.

3.2.3 PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (PI)

PI is responsible for drafting, submitting and amending his/her research proposal. This equally includes the management and leadership of his/her Research Project to accomplish the approved objectives. All proposals submitted by PIs shall be forwarded by RIMS to IRFP for endorsement before RI starts the evaluation process.

3.2.4 PEER REVIEWERS

As internationally or local renowned specialists in specific research domains, peer reviewers act as referees to provide individual scientific assessments on the “**Excellence**” of research proposals submissions. Peer reviewers work remotely and deliver their individual reviews by electronic means. These reviews are carried out prior to the IIEC meetings.

4 ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

4.1 ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR SUBMISSION

TRC welcomes research proposals from all researchers in any research fields. TRC however applies minimum requirements as application eligibility criteria.

1. The Researcher is allowed to submit only one proposal per call per program. PI/ Team leader may, however, be included as a team member in another project (under same Program), in addition to the one he/she leads.
2. The Researcher has to be hosted by an Oman-based Research Institution at the time of research proposal submission.
3. Participation in any program does not restrict the ability to apply to different research programs supported by TRC.
4. The researcher has no records of non-compliance to the Omani laws and/or TRC guidelines.
5. RIs will be competing for funds allocated for a specific program. Thus, if RI decides to submit an application for one program only (e.g. GRG), then it will be competing with other RIs for the fund allocated only for that specific program (in this case, GRG).

4.2 ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR GRANT HOLDERS

4.2.1 RESEARCH GRANT (RG)

A PI shall meet the following minimum requirements to be eligible for RG submission. These, however, are subject to modification in light of experience:

1. PIs have to hold a minimum qualification of a PhD degree, or equivalent, in any academic field.

4.2.2 GRADUATE RESEARCH GRANT (GRG)

4.2.2.1 RULES FOR EMPLOYEE

1. The PI should be a full time employee in an institution affiliated with TRC. A minimum qualification of a Bachelor degree is required.
2. A Bachelor degree applicant requires at least 3 years work experience and a supervisor for the project. The minimum qualification of the supervisor is a Master Degree.
3. The supervisor does not have to be from the same institution as the Principal Investigator.
4. Supervision and work experience are not mandatory for Master Degree holder applicant. Though, a Co- Principal Investigator is required.

4.2.2.2 RULES FOR POST GRADUATE STUDENTS

1. The PI can be a full time or part-time Omani postgraduate student. The applicant has to be registered at academic institution affiliated with TRC.
2. The application requires an approval of the supervisor.
3. The PI should not be registered as a postgraduate student in any project/ grant funded by TRC.
4. OMSB residents are required to be actively registered at one of the OMSB programs.
5. The resident requires a supervisor with a consultant post or higher.
6. The funded research project should be accomplished before the end of postgraduate study.

4.2.3 UNDER GRADUATE RESEARCH GRANT (URG)

1. Omani degree-seeking undergraduates studying in Oman. International students studying in higher institutions in Oman can also apply as part of a research team composed of at least 50% Omani undergraduate students.
2. Full-time or part-time undergraduate students can apply for a grant.
3. The GPA of all team members should not be less than 2.30 or equivalent.
4. All team members should have completed at least first year courses (or equivalent of one year of credits hours).

5 ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR HOST INSTITUTION

The host institution can be any public or private legal entity located in the Sultanate of Oman. This includes:

- Academic institutions.
- Non-academic institutions.
- Research-performing companies.

The followings are minimum eligibility requirements to host BFP project:

1. The hosting institution must have the infrastructure and the capacity to carry out research projects;
2. The hosting Institution has no records of non-compliance to the Omani laws and/or TRC guidelines;
3. The hosting institution commits to the following conditions:
 - a. The PI / team leader can apply for funding independently but through IRFP;
 - b. The PI / team leader must manage the research project and its funding and make appropriate resource allocation decisions;
 - c. The PI / team leader shall publish independently and invite, as co-authors, only those who have contributed substantially to the reported work;
 - d. The PI / team leader shall supervise research team members, including research students or others if eligible
 - e. The PI / team leader must have access to reasonable space and facilities for conducting the research work.

6 SUBMISSION

6.1 ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF SUBMISSION

Once the proposal is cleared from the IRFP, TRC will be electronically notified of the proposal submission through RIMS. Beside the acknowledgment, this message will contain a proposal code for future follow up. TRC will not modify or edit any submitted proposals. The proposals will be received as they are submitted by IRFP. The research team are, therefore, encouraged to carefully review their proposal prior to submission, as the proposal quality would affect evaluation. Subsequent to submission and whenever necessary, TRC may contact the RI to clarify questions of eligibility or to verify administrative or liability of data contained in the proposal.

6.2 CONFLICT OF INTEREST

TRC is committed to supporting research without bias and/or conflicts of interest. The conflict of interest may arise if one or more of the cases below applies to a peer reviewer or Institutional internal evaluation member:

1. Involvement in a submitted proposal and/or in its preparation;
2. Standing to benefit directly from a proposal if accepted;

3. Having a family or business relationship with any person representing an applicant's RI in a proposal;
4. Being a director, trustee or partner of PI ;
5. Prior employment by one of the PIs in a proposal within the previous six months
6. Being in any other situation that could cast doubt on the member's ability to evaluate the proposal impartially, or that could reasonably appear to do so in the eyes of an external third party.

IRFP must take the necessary steps in order to ensure that the reviewers (peers reviewers and Institutional internal evaluation members) are not faced with a conflict of interest in relation to the proposals they are requested to evaluate.

6.3 EVALUATION OF SUBMISSIONS

Institutions use two sets of criteria to evaluate BFP submissions. "**Excellence**" of submissions is evaluated by specialized peer reviewers while "**Expected Impact**" is evaluated by internal evaluation members. The followings have to be noted:

1. Proposals must adequately address all criteria elements in order to avoid disqualification from being considered for programs.
2. All eligible proposals must be ranked based on the evaluation criteria before they are finally selected for funding support.
3. In case a proposal is rejected, the feedback generated in the review process will be communicated to the PI / team leader for an opportunity to improve their research proposals and get a better chance of approval in the subsequent funding round.
4. After receiving the approved application from IRFP, TRC cannot accept any corrections or re-submissions. At any time, it is possible to log on to RIMS to check the status of the proposal.
5. There is no guarantee for a qualified proposal to receive funding support. TRC has a limited budget for BFP.

6.4 EXCELLENCE CRITERIA (PEER REVIEW) FOR RESEARCH GRANT (RG) ONLY

Peer reviewing is required by a minimum of three qualified and non-conflicting external (residing outside Oman) and/ or internal (working in Oman, but, in another institute) reviewers. The scores provided by each peer reviewer (40% of the total scores) are confidential and reviewed only by IRFP and institutional internal evaluation committee. The following criteria represent the assessment basis for "**Excellence**" of submissions:

1. Proposal's novelty and originality.
2. Comprehensiveness of the literature review highlighting the current knowledge and providing justification for the proposal.
3. Clarity in describing the problems being addressed and the approaches proposed;
4. Significance of anticipated measurable outcome of the proposal.
5. Research methodology and feasibility of achieving goals and objectives, with a clear definition of data collection techniques and the style of conducting the work.

Qualifications, background knowledge, skills, and track record of the PI and other team members relevant to the proposed topic.

6.5 EXPECTED IMPACT FOR BFP

IIEC members shall use the following criteria to evaluate the “**Expected Impact**” of BFP submissions, which is 40% of the total scores:

1. Number of research assistants (undergraduate , postgraduate, technician and Post doctorate fellows) for the proposed scope of the research project;
2. The scope of each proposal in terms of whether its falls within priority areas or not.
3. Applicability and relevance to Oman’s socioeconomic development and related public policies;
4. Involvement of young Omani researchers and support staff undergraduate, postgraduate, technician and Post doctorate fellows)in the research project;
5. Collaboration with other local / international Institutions (academic, public or private sectors) involving financial or in-kind contributions with providing official supporting documents.
6. Number of ‘peer reviewed’ or ‘refereed’ publications that are going to result from the submitted proposals.
7. Expected number of Intellectual Properties (IPs) to be created/ obtained

6.6 INSTITUTION-DEFINED CRITERIA

The institutional internal evaluation committee are highly encouraged to propose additional evaluation criteria (20% out of the total scores) that fulfil their own institutional research needs and circumstances.

6.7 RANKING OF PROPOSALS

The Committee then decides on relative weighting between “**Excellences**”, “**Expected Impact**” and “institution–defined criteria “scores. The IIEC ranks proposals according to the combined score.

7 FUNDING DECISION AND FEEDBACK

TRC Grant Committee (TGC) reviews the ranked proposals submitted by the RI in light of their ranks and KPIs and the available budget. The Committee makes decisions on funding proposals starting from the highest ranked in each institution until the budget allocated for the block funding is exhausted.

All applicants notwithstanding whether their proposals have been approved or not, are notified through RIMS. This includes whether the proposal has been deemed to meet the quality threshold and provides the final total score and corresponding comments given by IIEC and, where applicable, the comments given by the individual reviewers. Note that the comments by the peer reviewers may not necessarily be convergent – divergence in opinion about the merit of a proposal constitute an integral aspect of the "Scientific Method". Furthermore, the IIEC may overrule the position that could be inferred from the comments of the peer reviewers,

The evaluation report of TRC comprises of three components:

1. Decision of TRC Grant Committee (TGC)
2. Peer reviewers comments.
3. The comments of the Institutional Internal Evaluation Committee(IIEC).

8 AGREEMENT AND REPORTING

8.1 GRANT AGREEMENT

A research "Grant Agreement" is the legal document, which stipulates the rights and obligations of the parties and specifies, amongst other things.

1. The hosting institution shall agree to ensure the minimum requirements for the project implementation. These include the hosting institution's commitment to manage the research funding within the regulation of the Institution and requirements of TRC and for the entire duration of the project.
2. To represent a legally binding document, one "Grant Agreement" will be signed by the hosting institution and TRC including three programs if applicable.
3. TRC expects RIs to sign internal agreements with their PIs for each funded project.

8.2 REPORTS

PIs must communicate and send the reports through RIMS to IRFP as described in the "Grant Agreement".

8.2.1 PROGRESS REPORT

Progress reports are reviewed by IRFP. The followings guidelines are applicable to progress reporting requirements:

1. Starting from the project commencement date, a progress report is to be submitted at the end of first year if the project period is more than one year. For the projects with a

- duration of one year only, PI should submit a final report at the end of the project through RIMS,
2. Progress reports must be prepared using the published progress report format issued by TRC, as specified in the RIMS.
 3. PIs are required to prepare and submit Progress report through RIMS.
 4. This report should highlight:
 - a. Progress made in achieving the objectives and plans specified in the approved research proposal.
 - b. List of actual outcomes
 - c. Results obtained.
 - d. Problems or difficulties encountered.
 - e. Expenditures including financial expenditure reporting, detailing outlays by budget category and describing any significant pre-authorized deviations from anticipated expenditures.
 - f. Any departures from the original objectives of the approved proposal and proposed changes for the next reporting period.
 - g. A list of all staff involved in the project, with their categories and institutional affiliations.
 - h. Publications, as attachments, if any.
 - i. PIs may enter contributions from other parties involved in the project.
 5. Information on these reports is used to determine whether the project has achieved satisfactory outcomes for this reporting period and for post-grant reporting.
 6. The reports are evaluated by IIEC. PIs are notified through IRFP in RIMS for the acceptance of the report.
 7. IRFP must submit a comprehensive annual technical report via RIMS to TRC highlighting the level of achievements against the agreed upon Output Performance Indicators and purchased equipment. The report should also include justifications on the lack of achievements, where applicable.
 8. Delays in submitting the reports will result in a reduction in the level of funding for the next cycle.
 9. PIs must update their financial expenditures on a regular basis. Furthermore, TRC may conduct periodic audits to ensure its resources are used as per the "Grant Agreement". In conjunction with progress reporting requirements.
 10. PIs are required to submit progress reports to institution focal point. These reports inform IRFP on the progress and achievements of the project. Specific outputs from the project should be included (e.g. publications). Technical progress reports to be submitted at the end of each research year of the project.

8.2.2 FINAL REPORT

The final scientific report must be sent along with the final statement of expenditure to IRFP. The report contents include two sections. The first is in the form of a thesis and provides technical details undertaken in the research. This shall be made available to the public for future use. In case the PI/team leader wishes to withhold some information from public access,

he/she needs to inform IRFP in writing highlighting the reasons behind such request. The second section contains the followings:

1. Progress made in achieving the objectives and plans specified in the approved research proposal.
2. Project actual outcomes and impact.
3. Project Contribution to Capacity Building
 - a. Development of human capital.
 - b. Development of research infrastructures, including equipment.
4. Project outreach activities.
5. Problems or difficulties encountered.
6. Expenditures including financial expenditure reporting, detailing outlays by budget category.
7. Any deviations from the original objectives of the approved proposal.

8.2.3 A COMPREHENSIVE REPORT

The RI must submit a comprehensive annual technical report including financial report via RIMS for all projects per program to TRC highlighting the level of achievements against the agreed upon output performance indicators and purchased equipment. The report should also include justifications on the lack of achievements, where applicable. This report will determine the level of funding for each institution per call.

8.3 ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Whenever achievements resulting from TRC funded research are published (such as in journals, conferences, patents, presentations...etc.) the RIs must acknowledge TRC's financial support. This may imply a written acknowledgment and/or the use of TRC's logo.

The recommended form of acknowledgment is:

"The research leading to these results has received funding from the Research Council (TRC) of the Sultanate of Oman under the Block Funding Program. TRC Block Funding Agreement No [xxxxxx]".

8.4 FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

BFP is open to research areas with a potential significant impact on knowledge.

1. Block funding program can cover 100% of the total eligible costs of the research project.
2. The institutions will receive an overhead costs as an additional fund which is a percentage of the total approved budget of block funding per call to facilitate their research.

3. Block funding is going to cover the following three research programs

| Name | Target Group Description (Qualification) | Caps | |
|--|--|--------------------|-----------------|
| | | Financial (OMR) | Time (Years) |
| Research Grant (RG) | Well-Established & Mature Researchers (PhD or Equivalent) | 20,000 | 1 - 2 |
| Graduates Research Grant (GRG) | Graduates (Bachelor or Master Holders) | 3,000 | 1 - 2 |
| Undergraduates Research Grant (URG) | Currently Studying Undergraduate Students | 1,500 | 1 |

Table 1_Classification of Funding Grants

1. The cap for URG is set at OMR 1,500/ project, and there are no caps for categories.
2. The cap for GRG is set at OMR 3,000/ project, and there are no caps for categories.
3. The cap for RG is set at OMR 20,000 per project. In addition, there are several caps for its subcategories as described in Table 2

| Category | Subcategory | Cap | | Additional Rules |
|--------------------|---|---------|-----------------|--|
| | | Amount | Unit | |
| RAs | Undergraduate | 3 | OMR/ Hour | Based on institution rules and regulation |
| | Technician | 4 | | |
| | Postgraduate | 5 | | |
| Post-doc | | 7 | | ▪ Omani |
| Scholarships | Ineligible | | | |
| Consultants | | | | |
| Dissemination | | 500 | OMR/ Project | |
| Administration | | 500 | | |
| Travel | <ul style="list-style-type: none">Local travelconference | 2,000 | | Only for Presenting Papers/ Talks/ Posters |
| Equipment | | No Caps | | |
| Materials & Supply | | No Caps | | |

Table 2: Financial Caps of RG Program

8.4.1 RESEARCH ASSISTANTS OR POST-DOCTORATE OR RESEARCH FELLOWS

The hiring of local or non-local contract personnel on a term basis shall be made through a contract agreement. The project may need to involve a post-doctorate or research fellow to assist in some activities. In the case of hiring a post-doctorate, he/she must be an Omani. A scholarships and consultant are not applicable in BFP.

8.4.2 EQUIPMENT AND FACILITIES

8.4.2.1 EQUIPMENT

There will be no cap to purchase equipment within allocated fund for the projects. Instrumentation and equipment items to be acquired must be precisely described in the research proposal to provide details of how the equipment will serve various aspects of the project. Such description must emphasize the intrinsic merit of the activity and the importance of the equipment to it. The full specifications of equipment items must be updated in TRC equipment database.

8.4.2.2 EQUIPMENT OWNERSHIP AND TRANSFER

Ownership of facilities and equipment provided under BFP shall vest in the RI, however If TRC deems it necessary, it has the right to retain the ownership of the equipment. The costs of managing the equipment or facility should be covered by RI.

1. RI should be responsible for maintaining the equipment during the project and thereafter.
2. TRC must be informed if, during the life of the Project, the need for the equipment diminishes substantially or it is not used for the purpose for which it was purchased. In such an event, TRC reserves the right to determine the disposal of such equipment and to claim the proceeds of any sale.
3. Any transfer of the ownership of the equipment during or beyond the period of any Project subject to TRC's prior approval. After the completion of the Project, the Research Institution will be authorized to use the equipment without reference to TRC, but the Research Institution shall, nevertheless, maintain such equipment for research purposes as long as it is practicable.
4. If there is a possibility of further utilization of the equipment, the research institution is expected to make it available for other users through the national equipment database or any other means devised by TRC.
5. RIs must display in a visible manner TRC's logo on all equipment that is purchased through the Block Funding Program.

8.4.3 MATERIALS AND SUPPLIES

There will be no cap to purchase materials within allocated fund for the projects. Materials and supplies are defined as recurrent items purchased and used specifically for the project such as consumable materials, and disposable instruments.

8.4.4 TRAVEL

Researchers may apply for funds in the project budget to local travel and conference related to their Research Project, Applicable guidelines, regulations and policies of the RIs concerning travel is fully applicable. Further, a budget cap for the travel is OMR. 2000 per project only applicable for RG.

8.4.5 DISSEMINATION AND PUBLICATIONS

Allocations for dissemination and publications include the costs of printing study reports and getting research results published. These also include the costs of purchasing of books and reference materials and the costs of online subscriptions to electronic databases. Further, a budget cap for the dissemination and publication is OMR.500 per project only applicable for RG.

8.4.6 ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS

These allocations include items that do not come under any of the above cost categories. Such allocations have a budget cap of OMR. 500 per project only applicable for RG.

8.5 PAYMENT PROCESS

Block Funding Program is administered by the RI. Annually, TRC will allocate a certain percentage from its total available 'research budget' for each program (RG, GRG and URG). The funds are paid as a bulk regardless of the project duration and to be used for only TRC approved projects. The bulk payment is paid within 45 days from receipt of RI claim. TRC will not provide any additional funds beyond the agreed upon amount in the signed contract. Prior to project close out and/or termination; account settlement is made and any unused funds must be returned to TRC at end of the funding cycle.

8.6 BUDGET ADJUSTMENTS

TRC provides flexibility for PI/team leader to transfer and allocate funds across expenditure categories within the research project without exceeding the agreed caps.

1. PI/team leader may undertake budget movement across expenditure categories (except for local travel, administration costs, disseminations) within the same year or within the project period.
2. Movement of funds between projects per program per call is allowed without exceeding the cap of the project (e.g. RG cap is OMR 20,000 per project).

8.7 PROJECT MANAGEMENT

8.7.1 REPLACING PROJECT TEAM MEMBERS OR RESEARCH INSTITUTION

Acknowledging the arising of unforeseen circumstances such as retirement, resignation or death, TRC allows for replacing the research team and applies the following guidelines in this respect:

1. Replacement of team members is under responsibility of RI and must meet the eligibility criteria for the position
2. PI and Co-PI must be from the same institution.
3. Replacement of the current PI or any other research team members must be done via RIMS through the IRFP of the RI, accompanied by the curriculum vitae (CV) of the proposed member.

4. In case of the PI's departure or inability, it is the RI's responsibility to make sure that the Co-PI leads the project. In the case where both the PI and the Co-PI depart or unable to lead the project, it is the sole responsibility of the RI to find a replacement.
5. Changing research institution is not allowed

8.7.2 CHANGING THE PROJECT PLAN

The PI/team leader is expected to carry out the project as described in the research "Grant Agreement". However, it is possible to adjust the scientific strategy and allocate or re-allocate expenditure (e.g. regarding staff, equipment, and consumables), provided the research performed is still in line with the original scientific objectives. In case of significant changes, the Principal Investigator shall notify IRFP.

8.7.3 EXTENSION

RI may extend the project duration and notify TRC through RIMS. However, the extensions shall not entail the utilization of unused funds of the extended project. These funds must be returned to TRC at the end of the funding cycle. In addition, the extensions will negatively impact the level of the funds allocated to the RI in next calls.

8.7.4 TERMINATION AND SUSPENSION

RI may terminate any project and notify TRC through RIMS. If the project is terminated; the Research Institution shall take all necessary steps and shall keep all necessary documents for future TRC auditing. In case of termination, the unused budget may be used for another project under the same program or returned back to TRC at the end of funding cycle.

TRC may immediately terminate this Agreement by written Notice to the RI if:

1. The Research institution is in breach of any of its obligations arising from this Agreement and fails to remedy such breach (if remediable) within thirty (30) days of receipt of written notice from TRC requiring such remedy; or
2. The Research institution becomes insolvent or bankrupt, or is in the process of a winding up or other process of dissolution, except a voluntary dissolution for the purpose of reorganization; or
3. Upon termination, TRC shall have no further liability to the Research institution arising from this agreement and, in particular, shall have no liability to make any further payment to the Research institution for any work performed by the Research institution after the date of termination stated in the termination notice.

8.8 ETHICS, CONFIDENTIALITY AND DISCLOSURE

Throughout the entire process from the proposal stage to project closure, all necessary steps must be taken so that policies pertaining to ethics, intellectual property, security and copyright are respected. The following guidelines address these considerations.

8.8.1 ETHICAL REVIEW

The evaluation procedure of any proposal includes a check of ethical issues raised by the evaluation processes. The objective of this ethical review is to make sure that TRC does not support research, which would be contrary to fundamental ethical principles.

Whenever indicated, RIs should seek ethical approval prior to submitting the final Block Funding application to TRC

8.9 INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS AND POLICY

1. TRC and, in collaboration with, RIs are both committed to the proper observance of patent, copyright, trademark, trade secret and any other Intellectual Property laws or any other laws relating to proprietary information. Thus, these two entities should ensure the rights of creators and users; and provide the users with reasonable access to research outcomes.
2. The RI shall ensure that the Project Team adhere to the laws and treaties relating to Intellectual Property and the use, publication, performance, reverse engineering, copying and dissemination of Intellectual Property and related materials and things.
3. The RI, PI/team leader and all other Researchers involved in the Project, shall make every effort to ensure that any potentially valuable results obtained in the course of the Research are protected and exploited for national benefit, and that there is a suitable return to the Research Institution and the Researchers from any such exploitation.
4. Unless stated otherwise, the ownership of Intellectual Property Rights, and the responsibility for its exploitation, rests with the RI. However, TRC, as the funding agency, reserves the right to take ownership of Intellectual Property in certain cases mandated by national interest.
5. No Intellectual Property arising from Projects funded by TRC shall be transferred outside Oman without obtaining a prior written approval from TRC. The research institution must ensure that all those associated with the Research are aware of, and accept, the arrangements for exploitation.
6. Subject to background and foreground information, any collaborative arrangements concerning IP exploitation should be documented formally in an agreement, which covers the contributions and rights of the Institutions and individuals. Such agreements must be in place before the Project begins. The terms of such collaboration agreements must not conflict with TRC's terms and conditions of the Project.
7. TRC reserves the right to publish or disseminate any reports or outcomes resulting from the funded research projects. However, the RI has the right to submit an official request to delay publicizing the submitted report. The delay request must be justifiable and should not exceed three years beyond the completion of the research project.

8.10 INSPECTION

1. RIs shall grant TRC full access, including possible site visits, to inspect the records and monitor the financial procedures of its funded Projects. TRC also reserves the right to appoint another body or individual(s) to conduct such inspections.
2. RIs shall, if required by TRC, provide a statement of the accounts of the Projects. A third-party auditor, who is a member of a recognized professional body, must certify

that the expenditures in the statement have incurred in accordance with the Research Agreement.

8.11 LIABILITY

The RI shall bear full responsibility to take ultimate care of research work, and shall be liable for the RI's gross negligence or damage to the work, materials or equipment, used for purposes related to the Project. The RI is responsible for the violation of any third parties' rights incurred in projects funded by TRC. TRC will be indemnified from any such claims.

9 COMPLIANCE

The Research Institution and the Principal Investigator shall comply with any and all applicable Government and Municipal laws, rules and regulations applicable to the performance of their obligations under any block Funding Agreement. They shall, at all times, comply with this guideline. In case of any breach or non-compliance, IRFP shall request the PI for corrective actions within a given appropriate timeframe.

