Research and Development Office
Ministry of Education

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Research & Development Office

Social Science Research Initiative

FAQs- Version 6

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Eligibility & Requirements

Who is eligible to receive this grant?

PI must be established members (Assistant Professor or above) of a KSA public university (Saudi and non-Saudi) or those from a KSA private or independent university (Saudi only). For Co-PIs, RDO encourages domestic collaboration within Saudi researchers and international collaboration with researchers in other countries. Researchers from private, government and not-for-profit entities can also serve as part of the collaboration. In the case of potential collaborative funding agreements with foreign partners or with domestic non-academic entities, the combined costs for them **must not exceed 30%** of the total grant amount. It is up to the collaborating team to determine how many PIs and Co-PIs should be involved in the research.

For more information please read the guidelines document.

Who can be part of the research team?

It is up to the PI to determine how many Co-PIs and researchers (including graduate students) should be involved in the research. Researchers from private, government and not-for-profit entities can also serve as Co-PIs as a part of the collaboration. PIs and Co-PIs must have successfully completed PhDs.

We expect PhD students and occasionally Masters students to be part of the team.

What are the minimum required outcomes from any proposal?

The RDO expects significant outcomes from all research. You will need to state your expected outcomes in the proposal and then report back to us when they happen. Successful bidders will be provided templates for reporting.

What is an acceptable level for the similarity index?

As a general rule, similarity index should not exceed 25% for every proposal.

Can a researcher be involved in multiple proposals?

Yes, researchers can be involved in up to two proposals as a PI or Co-PI.

Overall, individual PIs and Co-PIs can be included in no more than two proposals. **A PI can only be a PI on one proposal** but they can also be a Co-PI on **one** other grant application. **A researcher can be a Co-PI on up to two proposals** given that the same individual **doesn't apply as PI** on any other proposals.

Can researchers from a non-Saudi university participate?

The application needs to be led by a PI from a KSA university, so to be involved you would need to establish a direct relationship and write the proposal together.

For more information please read the guidelines document.

Can a PI apply for the two different types of grant?

No, a researcher can **only apply for one grant as PI**. This can be for either type of grant. However, that same individual can also be a Co-PI on one other grant application, which can also be for either type of grant.

Can I apply for the research grants as PI or Co-PI if I am an Assistant Professor but don't hold a PhD?

PI and Co-PI must have successfully completed PhDs and/or are currently employed as an assistant professor or higher.

Must the local KSA University also submit a Letter of Support (LoS)?

No. Letter of Support is **mandatory** if an international collaborator is going to work with the PI. Letter of Support is also encouraged if the research will be conducted in a specific area which falls under the jurisdiction of a government entity and will require that entity to give support (e.g., research on the gender inclusion of KSA police and its implications for the incarceration rates for specific crimes). In the latter case, LoS will increase your chances.

Are there any typical statements for the Letter of Support for international collaborator?

There are no typical statements for the letter of support but the letter should follow the following instructions:

- Letter of support should be provided by senior management within the international institution (e.g. Vice rector, Provost or Vice President, Dean, Department Chair, Research Center Director, etc.)
- The letter should be addressed to the research and development office (RDO)
- Makes a clear commitment by the foreign university that research facilities described in the proposal will be made fully available
- Makes a clear commitment by the foreign university that resources credited to the University of ABC, including salary buy-out, have been identified in budgets and will be fully available for the project
- Makes a clear commitment to ensure suitable governance of the project.

An example of the letter of support is available **Here**.

Will the RDO help in providing support or data needed to execute a project?

No, it is the responsibility of the researchers to identify necessary data and plan any data collection efforts. The RDO will serve to distribute funding, and evaluate project progress on a yearly basis based on a set of project status forms to be made available for successful proposals.

What are the evaluation criteria for the grant?

Submitted proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- **Relevance**: Relevance to the identified key research themes;
- **Potential Impact**: Potential benefits of the research for Saudi Arabia;
- **Technical Merit**: Scientific and intellectual rigor, potential to create new and important knowledge, and appropriateness of the research design;
- **Capability-Building**: Potential to catalyze the development of domestic social science research capabilities;
- **Quality of Research Team**: Capabilities and track record of the proposed research team;
- **Execution**: Coherence in the proposed execution plans, feasibility of carrying out the research (e.g., data accessibility) within the given timeframe, and the cost effectiveness.

What is the submission language for the application, proposal and the final research?

The submission language of application and research proposal will be in in English, but some parts will need to fill up in both English and Arabic such as the title of the project, Principal Investigator's name, summary of the research, etc. While the final research outputs can be in bilingual or English or Arabic, which need to be determined by researchers themselves and stated in their applications and subject to approval by peer review committees.

What sort of topics/themes are included under each category?

Topics should be clearly aligned to identified key themes and drawn from Vision 2030, and there are some examples.

The Social Science initiative contains several research areas; is there a specific specialty?

The RDO has identified five core areas, for more information please refer the guideline documents.

Can the research team collaborate with a researcher who has the Ph.D. degree but not affiliated to any university? In other word, can the team make contract with the researcher for the duration of the project and paid them from the budget?

In order to collaborate with a researcher, the research should be from university, private, government and not-for-profit entities. Where the researcher will serve as Co-PIs In the case.

Can a retired established member of a KSA public university, who has a valid contract with a public university apply as PI?

Yes as long as the contract mentions that he/she is on an academic rank of an assistant professor or higher.

Is it possible to add an international Co-Pi?

The RDO encourages active collaboration between Saudi researchers and those in other countries. For more information, please refer to the guideline documents.

What is the maximum number of Co-PIs permitted in a proposed research project?

There is no specific number for Co-PIs as research projects vary in their requirements. It depends on the nature of the research, its complexity and the need for different experience; however, the proposed number of Co-Pi should generally not exceed four, and all Co-PIs should have the relevant experiences needed to execute the project. In case the research project needs more than four due to the nature of the research, the applicant must provide **a strong justification outlining the specific need**, **and the RDO will consult with peer-reviewers in order to approve the request.**

What is the maximum number of international consultants permitted in the research project?

There is no specific number for international consultants as research projects vary in their requirements. It depends on the nature of the research, its complexity and the need for different experiences; however, the proposed number of international consultants should generally not exceed two, and all international consultants should have the relevant experiences needed to execute the project. In case the research project needs more than two due to the nature of the research, the applicant must provide **a strong justification outlining the specific need**, **and the RDO will consult with peer-reviewers in order to approve the request.**

Funding

How should the budget in the spend plan be distributed?

Every proposal must justify the distribution of the budget based on the proposal needs. In the case of potential collaborative funding agreements with foreign partners or with domestic non-academic entities, the combined costs for them **must not exceed 30%** of the total grant amount. We expect the proposals to justify clearly the proposed breakdown and the needed resources.

For more information please read the guidelines document.

Can the grant pay for researchers, including graduate students, in KSA and overseas?

Yes, you can use the grant to pay for the research team that is needed, but this must be justified in the proposal. The fund can cover the human resources needed to work on the project as long as it obeys the general rules laid out in the guidelines. Each PI is responsible for allocating part of the budget as an allowance for the research team and justify that and whether the allowances will be paid hourly, daily or monthly and for how long. Graduate students and researchers are important. The evaluation will look into that as part of our review process.

For more information please read the guidelines document.

Will coverage of conference attendance expenses and publication fees be allowed in the spending plan?

Yes, every PI should clearly justify their needs and include that in the spending plan.

Does the amount of funding provided by the RDO inclusive of VAT?

The amount of money that will be allocated for the fund is exclusive of VAT. The percentage of the VAT will be deducted from the fund amount when the researcher receives the grant.

When will successful proposals be notified of the award and when will funds be provided?

Once the initial proposal (initial expression of interest) deadline has passed, we will undertake first an administrative eligibility check and a thorough, independent, peer-review evaluation process in order to identify the shortlisted applications. Shortlisted applicants will be given additional time to develop and submit their final proposals. We will notify successful bidders as soon as final screening and decision-making are completed.

The first instalment will be delivered to successful bidders after award. The grant will be delivered to the PI who will be responsible for managing its distribution.

We aim to complete the review process quickly so that research can be initiated as soon as possible.

Are the tickets given to international consultants from the university, or from the fund amount allocated by the RDO?

Please refer to the Spend Plan Guidelines for related information regarding funding of international consultants.

Application Form & Submission Process

What is the application submission process?

A two-staged application process is applied where candidates are shortlisted based on initial expressions of interest and given additional time to submit final proposals. Information on the initial expressions of interest and the proposal is provided in the Social Science Research Initiative Application Guideline.

Researchers are expected to digest the Application Guideline and FAQs first. Application form will be available in the coming weeks along with further instructions on submission.

It is the responsibility of PIs to ensure the proposal and all related documentation is submitted to the RDO on time.

When are proposals due?

Please read the guidelines document.

How will final proposals be submitted?

Shortlisted projects received email includes the process of how to submit the final proposal.

Is it possible to add more PIs and Co-PIs to the proposal after approval?

It is the responsibility of the KSA PI to ensure that the research team is properly selected based on the research needs. The PI must make sure the proposal and all related documentation is submitted to the RDO on time. Any changes to numbers of Co-PIs after the approval will need to be approved by RDO.

What information should be covered in the 'Grant Governance' section of the proposal?

The 'Grant Governance' section should outline the overarching governance structure to be used throughout the grant lifecycle. This should include how the project will be managed by the Saudi lead university in terms of local management responsibility and accountability (whether at University Vice Rector, Dean or Departmental Head

level) to ensure project progress, milestones are met, funds are allocated and spent appropriately, and outcomes maximized. This may be based on individual management responsibility or Project/Steering Committee levels (involving representatives from lead and partner institutions and possible users of research).

*We are not prescribing the governance structure, but proposals need to set out the oversight arrangements.

The Expression of Interest feedback mentions: "The title should be related to social science" but the system does not allow me to amend the title? What do I do?

A new box will be added titled "Revised title of project ", where the updated proposal title can be amended according to the feedback obtained by the Principal Investigator from the Expression of Interest.

Is it possible to change or add members of the team other than what was sent in the Expression of interest?

The proposed PI information cannot be change; however, for other members applicants may change or add to the information provided in the original Expression of Interest. Applicants can express this change in their proposal however applicants must ensure that they justify how the change in team member benefits the Research Team more than the original Research Team expressed in the Expression of Interest. The change in team member cannot affect or change the proposed research scope on a path different than what was proposed in the Expression of Interest. **The change will be reviewed and unless strong justifications are expressed for the change**, it will not be accepted.

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