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**THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT APPLIED RESEARCH FUND (WDARF) GRANT CALL - 2023**

**ADMINISTRATIVE GUIDELINES**

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# Introduction

* 1. The Institute for Adult Learning (IAL), an Autonomous Institute of the Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS), administers the Workforce Development Applied Research Fund (WDARF) on behalf of SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG).
  2. SSG drives and coordinates the implementation of the national SkillsFuture movement, promotes a culture of lifelong learning and a quality ecosystem of Training and Adult Education (TAE) in Singapore. Through a holistic system of national SkillsFuture initiatives, SSG enables Singaporeans to take charge of their learning journey in their pursuit of skills mastery. SSG also works with key stakeholders to ensure that students and adults have access to high quality and industry-relevant training that meets the demands of different sectors of the economy for a skilled and productive workforce.
  3. The IAL inspires thought leadership and develops evidence-informed Continuing Education and Training (CET) and best practices through our practice-based research. With IAL’s programmes, initiatives, and consulting services, IAL advocates new paradigms in learning by sustaining capability building and offering business solutions to enhance workforce capabilities and also advocates and enables learning innovation to bring adult learning to greater heights in this technological age.
  4. The Workforce Development Applied Research Fund (“**WDARF**”), a national-level research fund set up by the SkillsFuture Singapore Agency, aims to foster high quality and rigorous applied research in workforce development and lifelong learning to support the SkillsFuture Singapore Agency’s key thrusts and national-level policies. It encourages inter-disciplinary research and seeks to strengthen research capabilities, through leveraging both local and international expertise.
  5. The WDARF Grant Call is administered by IAL on behalf of SSG. The WDARF Grant funds research proposals on a competitive basis across eligible Singapore-based institutions. These are defined as follows:

1. Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs) such as the Universities, Polytechnics and ITE who have their campuses in Singapore; and
2. Local organisations with research unit such as:
   1. Research Institutes
   2. Social/industry groups
   3. Continuing Education and Training (CET) Providers
   4. Government organisations
   5. To be considered for funding through the WDARF, proposed research should fulfil the below criteria:
3. Applied Research:

WDARF only supports proposals that focus on applied research. Applied research refers to original investigation undertaken to acquire new knowledge with the primary aim of solving an existing problem or improving a current practice. Proposals with targeted research findings and insights that can be scaled and translated into policy and practice in the area of skills development and adult learning in Singapore will be considered.

1. Address the Challenge Statements and/or align to the Research Themes. Emerging topics related to CET, adult learning and workforce development may be considered.

Research Themes

Theme A: Developing Effective Adult Learning Pedagogies & Skills Development Strategies

Theme B: Facilitating Learning & Career Choices among Adult Learners

Theme C: Enhancing Employment Outcomes through Adult Learning & Skills Development

For more details on the Research Themes, please refer to the WDARF Research Focus.

Challenge Statements:

Challenge Statement #1: Overcoming barriers to participation.

How can we better understand barriers and motivations faced by specific learner groups, i.e. mature workers, non-degree holders, low-wage workers, persons with disabilities in participating in CET? Are there more learner groups facing significant barriers to participation in lifelong learning? How can we better support and encourage/nudge these groups to advance their skills/training development journey through signposting, incentives and government programmes, and/or enhanced education and career guidance or any other proposed means? What are some inventive ways we can adopt to overcome any barriers to participation in lifelong learning?

Challenge Statement #2: Don’t PET the CET.

What are the differences in learning and training approaches between that for working adults and pre-employment training? What principles of learning and training apply well to working adults but not pre-employment students? Conversely, what pedagogical/andragogical principles can apply well to both demographics? What relevant pedagogical/andragogical approaches are we able to create which focus on honing the learning of working adults?

Challenge Statement #3: Digitalising adult learning.

How do we define and measure “good” use of the digital medium for adult learning? What modes – synchronous/asynchronous; hybrid/single-mode; gamified etc. – are most effective under what circumstances? How may we best harness the digital means to strengthen adult learning?

Challenge Statement #4: Every workplace a learning workplace.

What companies succeed in building a learning workplace for themselves? How can the rest be helped? What modes of workplace learning (e.g. OJT, WSP) work best under what circumstances?  How may we best enhance workplace learning opportunities – formal, informal and non-formal – to make workforce learning a norm for all?

1. Original Research

Proposed research should stand up to scrutiny for its originality, addressing gaps which have not been covered in existing WDARF-approved projects, in addition to remaining distinct from relevant up-to-date published research literature.

The list and write-ups of existing WDARF-approved projects are available in IAL website.

* 1. The research proposals will be reviewed by a technical expert review panel and approved by SSG Research Committee.

# Key Timeline of the Grant Call

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Grant Call Open | 22 June 2023 |
| Deadline for Submission of EOI | 25 July 2023 |
| Decision on EOI Outcome | Mid August 2023 |
| Submission of Full Proposal  (For shortlisted EOIs only) | End September 2023 |
| Announcement of Grant Call Results | Q2 of 2024 |

# Application

Submission of Expression of Interest (EOI)

* 1. Interested applicants must submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) using the prescribed WDARF EOI Form through their Host Institutions’ Office of Research (or equivalent) and endorsed by the Director, Office of Research (or equivalent) by the deadline mentioned above. Incomplete or late submissions will be rejected.
  2. EOIs will be reviewed by SSG. Shortlisted applicants will be informed to submit full proposals.

Submission of Full Proposal

* 1. A full proposal is to be submitted using the prescribed WDARF Application Form (Form A2). All applications must be verified by the Host Institutions’ Office of Research (or equivalent) and endorsed by the Director, Office of Research (or equivalent) before it can be considered for evaluation.
  2. Host Institutions (with the exception of the IHLs) are to complete the ‘Application for Eligibility for Workforce Development Applied Research Fund’ (Form A1).
  3. All applications shall be duly completed. Proposals will be rejected for incomplete submissions (e.g. missing documents, missing signatures, sections left blank and so on) and failure to adhere to templates provided (e.g. proposal template, timeline and so on). Applicants are strongly encouraged to collaborate closely with potential users of the research to foster the effective translation of research into policy or practice, and to provide details on these collaborations in the submitted proposals.

* 1. Applicants shall ensure that all information provided in the proposal is accurate and not misleading at the point of submission.
  2. All applications and accompanying documents must be submitted through the Host Institutions’ Office of Research (or equivalent) to SSG through IAL. Host Institutions shall send all finalised documents (in both word and pdf version) to [research@ial.edu.sg](mailto:research@ial.edu.sg) by the deadline mentioned above.
  3. SSG reserves the right to reject late or incomplete submissions of proposals.

Application Forms

* 1. The following are forms required for submission of EOI and full proposals.

| **Name of Form** | **Form** | **Applicant to Note** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Expression of Interest (EOI) |  | To be submitted by 25 July 2023 |
| Application for Eligibility for Workforce Development Applied Research Fund (Form A1) |  | To be submitted for shortlisted EOIs that are invited to submit full proposal.  Not applicable for IHLs. |
| Summary listing of all research proposals |  | To be submitted for shortlisted EOIs that are invited to submit full proposal. |
| All endorsed research proposal applications (Form A2). |  | To be submitted for shortlisted EOIs that are invited to submit full proposal.  For resubmitted proposals, reviewers’ comments must be addressed accordingly. |

# Eligibility

* 1. The research must be conducted in Singapore, and on issues relating to Singapore. Comparative studies with other countries are acceptable if deemed to be appropriate to the research study. Research proposals can cut across the different research themes.
  2. The WDARF Grant Call is open to all local Host Institutions. Foreign institutions and researchers may partner a Host Institution for the grant call. Foreign researchers may participate as Principal Investigator, Co- Principal Investigator or Collaborator.
  3. SSG reserves the right to disqualify, discontinue funding or reject any project team in the event of the withdrawal or change of PI and co-PIs.
  4. The WDARF Grant allows for joint submission from eligible institutions. However, the disbursement of the grant will be made only to the primary Host Institution.
  5. The Principal Investigator may submit more than one (1) proposal but funding a Principal Investigator for more than one (1) proposal at a time will only occur in exceptional circumstances. Principal Investigators with existing approved projects may submit proposals.
  6. Research proposals already funded by other funding bodies will not be considered under the WDARF Grant. Similar version or part(s) of the research proposal shall not be submitted to other agencies for funding prior to the end of the current grant call process.
  7. The Principal Investigator is to get feedback on proposal from one internal and one external colleague on improving research design. Inputs from industry colleagues will also be welcomed, in order to ensure industry relevance.

Host Institutions

* 1. By endorsing the grant application(s), the Host Institution is confident that the proposed research team has the necessary competencies and track record to bring about the successful completion of the proposed project.
  2. For each awarded research project, the Host institutions would be required to enter into a grant agreement/contract with SSG for the duration of the research project.
  3. The grant terms and conditions are stipulated in the Grant Agreement template.



Research Team

* 1. The Principal Investigator must fulfil the following requirements at the point of application:

1. Holds a primary full-time appointment (defined as a minimum commitment of at least 9 months per year) or an affiliation with an institution (may be local or foreign);
2. Holds an EdD or PhD qualification;
3. Has at least five (5) years of research experience, and has assumed the responsibility of a Principal Investigator or Co-Principal Investigator for at least one (1) research project;
4. Has managed project grants of the magnitude requested in the application; and
5. Has a track record of leadership ability in leading research projects and providing mentorship to research team, as well as having productive research outcomes.
   1. The research team may comprise international researchers but must include at least one Singaporean or Singapore Permanent Resident within the team. The researchers or research partnerships would be expected to have a mix of skills including:
6. A strong understanding and appreciation of the broad policy context in the area of skills and workforce development and lifelong learning, and its linkages to the SkillsFuture programmes and policies;
7. Research and analytical expertise in one or more social, economic or behavioural science disciplines, and the use of multi-disciplinary approaches where appropriate.

# Research Timeframe

* 1. Project duration shall be capped at 24 months and adhere to the approved timeline committed in the proposal.
  2. Projects longer than 24 months may be funded on a case-by-case basis and are subject to approval.
  3. Projects are required to start within 2 months after signing of the Grant Agreement.

# Funding Support

* 1. Research projects must be costed appropriately and reasonably according to the methodology proposed and overall size of the project. Applicant shall exercise due diligence to ensure that the budget is value for money. Upon in-principle approval of the research proposal, the research team and SSG will embark on a meeting to assess and phase the budget before finalising the budget to be supported.
  2. The fundable components are:
     1. Research Manpower

1. Manpower expenses for personnel engaged for the research project, and can include personnel to conduct research, research management and research administration. Supported costs include the full remuneration package per Host Institution’s Human Resource policy and shall be pro-rated based on the personnel’s direct involvement in the project.
2. Funding of research staff under the WDARF must comply with the prevailing and consistently applied Human Resource guidelines of the employing Host Institution.
3. The salary cost of Principal Investigator, Co-Principal Investigator and Collaborator are not funded if they are employed by the Host Institutions. However, if these resources are from partner institutions and there are direct costs to the Host Institutions to engage and collaborate with them, the relevant costs are funded. 
   * 1. Other Operating Expenses
   1. Survey administration and logistics costs (e.g. data collection related costs, printing of survey forms, incentives to garner responses);
   2. Purchase of survey or administrative datasets;
   3. Printing of research reports and materials;
   4. Engagement fee of experts such as consultants
   5. Travel and Accommodation (e.g. travel cost for experts)

Refer to Annex A on the list of fundable / non-fundable components. The list of fundable / non-fundable components is not exhaustive. For clarifications on fundable / non-fundable items, please contact [research@ial.edu.sg](mailto:research@ial.edu.sg).

* 1. All items claimed must comply with the Host Institution’s internal procurement process, guidelines and policies.
  2. Indirect costs in research are those costs that are incurred for common or joint objectives and therefore cannot be identified readily and specifically with a particular sponsored project, but contribute to the ability of the Host Institution to support research projects, such as providing research space and administering the activities. SSG will support indirect research costs (IRC) at a flat rate of **30%** of the total qualifying direct costs of each approved project. Principal Investigator will need to budget for the IRC within the overall project cost. SSG reserves the right to adjust this rate.

# Evaluation Criteria

* 1. Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

| Key Criteria | Sub-Categories | Description of Sub-Categories |
| --- | --- | --- |
| (a) Relevance | (i) Clarity of research problem | Research problem is clearly stated, and research questions are relevant to the problem defined. |
| (ii) Relevance to research themes | Research question(s) addresses the WDARF Broad Research themes, lines of inquiry and challenge statements. |
| (iii) Policy and practice relevance | Addresses clear priority area(s) of policy / practice interest to SSG in Singapore’s context. |
| (b) Impact | (i) Potential for policy and practice applications | Has strong potential for application to (e.g. enhancement / formulation of) policy and practice in the area of skills development and adult learning in and possibly beyond Singapore. Has articulated the pathways to impact and plans for involving and disseminating research insights to potential users, including those outside the academic community. |
| (ii) Contribution to scholarly research | Makes a notable contribution to current understandings in skills development and adult learning, in addition to offering avenues for impactful application. |
| (c) Technical Merits | (i) Relevance of conceptual/ theoretical framework to research problem | There is a logical relationship between the problem and the conceptual/ theoretical framework (supported by adequate review of literature). |
| (ii) Conceptual/ theoretical framework is supported by adequate review of research literature |
| (iii) Clarity of research methods | The methodological approach is appropriate to address the research questions/objectives and is clear and adequate in terms of design, and analytical framework. |
| (iv) Adequacy of research methods |
| (d) Project Team and Execution | (i) Track record of investigators | Resource is adequate to meet the timeline and researchers have the relevant expertise. |
| (ii) Reasonable manpower support. |
| (iii) Realistic Timeline | Reasonable and achievable from the research standpoint. |
| (iv) Realistic Budget | The budget is itemized with realistic estimates and is value for money. |
| (v) Inter-institutional / disciplinary collaboration | The project integrates representatives from different institutions and across multiple relevant disciplines. |

* 1. The proposals will be evaluated by an expert review panel appointed by SSG. The panel may be informed and supplemented by peer reviews by experts in the specific fields, to make informed evaluation.
  2. The proposals and inputs from the expert review panel, as well as inputs from potential users of the research, will be submitted to SSG Research Committee for selection and approval.

# Approval

* 1. Principal Investigators will be notified of the results through their Office of Research. The SSG Research Committee reserves the right to reject any or all proposals submitted without being obliged to give any reason thereof. Appeals will not be entertained.

# Disbursement of Funds

* 1. Only items that are supported for funding will be funded by WDARF. The items that are supported for funding are presented in section 6.
  2. WDARF grant is provided on a reimbursement basis. Host institution shall pay for the incurred expenditure for the project first, and subsequently claim for reimbursement from SSG.
  3. Host Institutions shall use WDARF’s prescribed grant request form to claim for reimbursement. The claims submitted by the Host Institution must be supported by originals or certified true copies of receipts, payment vouchers or invoices by the Chief Finance Officer /Director and External Auditors of the Host Institution.
  4. Claims may be submitted on a half-yearly basis (at the beginning of January and July) for expenses incurred for the past six (6) months, on the prescribed form together with supporting payment documents.

# Grant Variation

* 1. Principal Investigators should submit all grant variations through the Host Institution’s Office of Research (ORE), using the appropriate forms:

| S/N | Type of Variation | Form |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1 | Amendments to Project | Form A5 |
| 2 | Fund Virements |

* 1. Principal Investigators should refer to “Guidance for Processing Variation Requests” (Annex B) in their preparation of the variation requests to ensure that all supporting documents have been duly completed.
  2. OREs should evaluate the Principal Investigators’ requests and make decisions on all requests that fall within the Host Institution’s approving authority. For requests that require SSG’s approval, OREs should first evaluate the requests based on the considerations, norms and checks listed in Annex B and make recommendations for SSG’s consideration.
  3. For all variation requests, SSG’s decision is final and appeals will not be entertained. **Retrospective variation requests are not allowed.**
  4. SSG reserves the right to reject any claims that have resulted from the project changes without prior approval from SSG (in specific circumstances as stated in Annex B).
  5. Request for any variation should be made before the last three (3) months of the original end date of the project. Retrospective variation requests will not be allowed, unless there is compelling justification for submission of a late virement request.

# Performance Management

* 1. Half-Yearly Progress Report

1. Principal Investigators are to submit soft copies of the half-yearly progress reports for each project via their respective Office of Research (or equivalent) per the schedule stated in the contract. The progress report shall be submitted on or before the last working day of the months of April and October. The progress report shall include milestones achieved, interim findings and projected cashflow.
2. These reports may be reviewed by an appointed panel or WDARF Secretariat to assess the progress of the project, and the Principal Investigators may be invited to make a presentation of their research progress / findings to SSG’s appointed panel or WDARF Secretariat. Principal Investigators may be required to give additional information about the progress of their project if the information submitted is deemed inadequate.
3. Principal Investigators who fail to submit their progress report may be denied any grant disbursement until such progress report is submitted.
4. A template of the progress report will be provided after awarding the research proposals.
   1. Final Research Report
5. Principal Investigator is to submit soft copies of the final report within one (1) month from the project completion date (the writing of the final report shall be within the approved project timeline). The final report shall contain, among other things, a complete list of the Assets. The outcomes in the final report may be reviewed against the objectives of the project. The Principal Investigator may be contacted for further information if the final report is deemed inadequate or unsatisfactory and shall provide further information.
6. Final reports will undergo a review by peers and will be approved for closure by the SSG Research Committee.
7. Principal Investigator may be invited to make a presentation on the completed project to SSG / SSG appointed panel to ensure that the project has been completed satisfactorily, and that potential users of the research have been involved in the research.
8. It is recommended for Principal Investigator to also share soft copies of the publications and conference papers produced as part of the research project.
9. Principal Investigator is to submit the project’s final datasets of anonymised data to the Grantor no later than twelve (12) months after the end of the project. Grantor may use the data for analysis and publish derived statistics; research purposes; sharing with its research collaborators or parties commissioned by the Grantor; and any other purpose that is not prohibited by applicable law (as long as such use is in compliance with applicable law).
   1. Assessment of Research Impact
10. Principal Investigator is to provide an assessment of the research impact (as outlined in section 6b of the WDARF application form A2) within six (6) months after acceptance of the final report. This assessment should include a description of how the research outcomes have been communicated to interested parties, including potential users that were identified in the research proposal, as well as address comments from SSG arising from the final report, if any. If necessary, PI may be required to incorporate inputs from relevant stakeholders before submission of research impact report.

# Closure of Project Accounts

* 1. All projects are expected to be completed within the stipulated term as per the Grant Agreement.
  2. Host Institutions and Principal Investigators are to close the research project account **within six (6) months** from the date of project completion. SSG will not reimburse any expenditure incurred after the project completion date. Claims for allowable expenses should be prorated based on the relevant project periods only, and be submitted within six (6) months following project completion. Upon payment of such expenses, Host Institutions and Principal Investigators are to close the research project account immediately.
  3. Host Institution shall close the account for the WDARF Grant projects individually and return any unspent funds to SSG, if any, upon completion of the projects as and when it occurs.
  4. Host Institution must ensure that Principal Investigators are not to issue any new purchase orders after the project completion date, including retrospective orders.

Post-Project Audit Report (includes Final Statement of Account)

* 1. The Host Institution shall submit a Post-Project Audit Report within **six (6) months** of the completion of the project. The audit report shall include a final statement of account. Failure to do so may result in rejection of further claims.
  2. The Post-Project Audit Report shall confirm that the Host Institution’s requisitions are made in accordance with the Terms and Conditions of a Competitive Grant, and Guidelines.

# Compliance of Administrative Guidelines

* 1. In the event of non-compliance of this administrative guideline, SSG reserves the right to:

1. withhold or withdraw the funding;
2. disqualify the Principal Investigators from subsequent WDARF competitive funding; and/or
3. take any action SSG deems appropriate.

# Miscellaneous

* 1. SSG reserves the right to revise the administrative guidelines. The Host Institutions will be informed accordingly.

# Annex A - List of fundable / non-fundable components

The below list of fundable / non-fundable components is not exhaustive. For items not listed within, please contact [research@ial.edu.sg](mailto:research@ial.edu.sg) for clarification before incurring expenses.

| **Type of Expenses** | **Supportable?** | **Description** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Research Manpower** | | |
| Principal Investigator (PI), Co-Principal Investigator and Collaborators | **Not supportable** if they are already employed by the Host Institution.  **Supportable** if they are from partner institutions, and there are direct costs to the Host Institution to engage / collaborate with them.  The funding for these resources needs to be specifically justified and provided for in the grant application and approved by SSG. |  |
| Salary cost of research fellows, research associates, research assistants, admin and other staff. | Yes, but only if deemed necessary to the project, specifically justified and provided for in the grant application, and approved by SSG. | Includes salaries, CPF contributions and fringe benefits including medical, dental, contribution to welfare fund, bonuses, annual leave, staff insurance, etc.  Allowed as part of overall compensation to employees provided such costs are incurred under formal established and consistently applied policies of the host institution.  The salaries offered to staff shall be reasonable, in line with local market benchmarks and comply with formal established pay scale of the host institution that is consistently applied regardless of the source of funds.  It excludes pre-employment medical check-up, application of employment pass, visa as well as any levy (e.g. foreign workers levy) imposed by the government. |
| Student Assistants / Interns | Yes | Only full-time students who are residents of Singapore and are enrolled in local institutes of higher learning qualify to be supported as a student assistant/intern.  Not allowable for students who are recipients of existing awards (or stipends) or students who are not residents of Singapore. |
| Experts’ honorarium | Yes, but only if deemed necessary to the project, specifically justified and provided for in the grant application and approved by SSG. | Only if specifically provided for in the grant proposal and approved by SSG. The Expert must be identified and his/her contribution to the project must be clearly defined and described in the proposal. The Principal Investigator shall verify that the remuneration rates comply with the Host Institution’s standard rates. The budget to be supported will be decided based on the above considerations. |
| Overtime | No |  |
| Staff relocation cost | No |  |
| Staff recruitment and related cost | No | Examples of such costs are advertisement and recruitment agency cost. |
| **Other Operating Expenses** | |  |
| Airfare, accommodation, per diem and local travel expenses | Yes, but should be judicious and only if deemed necessary to the project, specifically justified and provided for in the grant application and approved by SSG.  Include justification of the need to travel, including why no other modes like conference call or online discussion is suitable. | Provided such costs are incurred under formal established and consistently applied policies of the Host Institution. It includes experts coming to Singapore to advise or Principal Investigator, Co- Principal Investigator travelling to consult the experts. |
| Audit fees | No | This includes both internal and external audit fees. |
| Books and specialised journals relevant to the research | No |  |
| Computer & AV Accessories | Yes | PI to consider utilizing equipment from host institution or rental options, if feasible. |
| Conference | No |  |
| Consultancy | Yes | Engagement fee of experts such as consultants. |
| Developmental Tools | No, unless deemed necessary and pro-rated to the project, specifically justified and provided for in the grant application and approved by SSG. | This includes expenses (services and/or equipment) to conduct experiments or develop tools as required within the scope of the research project. For example video production, printing of research collaterals and so on. |
| Entertainment & refreshment | No |  |
| Fines and penalties | No |  |
| Goods and Services Tax (GST) | Yes | Allowed for expenses incurred for the project. |
| Insurance premiums | No | The Host Institution is responsible for the insurance of the equipment, relevant workmen compensation and professional indemnity insurance which are in line with the Host Institution’s risk policies. |
| Legal fees | No |  |
| Local & overseas conferences | No |  |
| Overhead expenses - rental, utilities, telephone charges, facilities management, etc | No |  |
| Patent application, IP related and commercialisation expenses | No | This includes patent application filing, maintenance and other related cost. Such cost shall be paid by the Host Institution. |
| Professional Membership Fee | No |  |
| Professional Fees  (including fees to consultants) | No, unless deemed necessary and pro-rated to the project, specifically justified and provided for in the grant application and approved by SSG. | The proposal must show how the required professional service contribute to the research and why the work cannot be performed by the research team. To include credential of the service provider(s) and fee breakdown. |
| Printing of final reports and other deliverables as stipulated in the proposal | Yes | For submission to SSG only. |
| Publication Fee | No | This includes submission fee to subscription and open access journals. |
| Staff retreat | No |  |
| Survey-related expenses | Yes | This include:   * Cost related to survey administration and logistics * Purchase of survey or administration database * Incentives to garner responses (in accordance to Host Institutions policy and practices) * Refreshments for focus group sessions. |
| Training | No |  |
| Transportation, postage & courier services | Yes | Only for expenses directly related to the project. This includes postage, courier and freight charges for bringing in equipment and specialised research consumables and reimbursement for staff transportation. |
| Working tools such as IT equipment and software | No, unless deemed necessary and pro-rated to the project, specifically justified and provided for in the grant application and approved by SSG. | Equipment shall be on rental or subscription basis, unless it can be justified that it is more cost effective to purchase the item(s).  Purchase of IT equipment must be in accordance with the IT policy of the Host Institution regardless of source of funds. |

Annex B - Guidance for Processing Variation Requests

| **S/N** | **Type of Request** | **Key Considerations** | **Norms** | | **Supporting Documents Required** | **Types of checks by ORE** | **Approval Authority** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1 | Amendment to Project (General) | | | | | | |
| General considerations | | Stage of project | There should not be any amendments three (3) months from the end of project. | | Form A5 (Project variation form) | Form A5 is duly completed and endorsed. All supporting documents attached. | **All amendments must be approved by SSG.** (See exceptions at 1b, 1c). |
| Latest statement of accounts | Fund availability |
| Need for amendments | Amendments should support the original objectives of the project only, not for support of “follow-on” research, changes to scope or research questions. | | N.A. | The PI has no outstanding half-yearly/final progress reports and final research reports for any SSG grants. PIs with overdue reports are not allowed to submit variation requests. |
|  | Amendment to Project (Specific Requirement) | | | | | | |
| 1a) | Change of PI/Co-PI | Suitability of proposed PI/Co-PI | Ability of the new PI/Co-PI to contribute and achieve the intended objectives of the project. | | Form A5  Information on incoming and outgoing PI/Co-PI: last day of work in Institution, name of Institution he will be joining, etc. | Application should reach SSG three (3) months’ in advance before PI/Co-PI leaves (for contract expiry/termination cases) and as soon as practicable for resignation cases. ORE should consider working closely with HR and schools to ensure timeliness especially in submitting change of PI request. | Request for a change in the PI/Co-PI must be made to SSG and be endorsed by the ORE of the existing and/or new Host Institutions. The new PI/Co-PI must be a recognised expert in that area and possess the necessary expertise to continue with the research work. |
| Cost implications | Must be within the approved Research Manpower budget. | | CV, Letter of recommendation and credentials of incoming PI/Co-PI | ORE needs to determine whether the proposed PI /Co-PI is eligible based on WDARF Grant eligibility criteria and whether he/she is suitable and has the skills to continue and complete the research work. If in doubt, ORE could request for Letter of recommendation from current employer of proposed PI/Co-PI. |
| SSG reserves the right to terminate the grant if:   * No suitable replacement is found; * Proposed PI is rejected; or * New PI cannot achieve the necessary outcomes. * Impact on research outcomes and timeline | **Only applicable to Change of PI:**  Mitigation Plan while waiting for new PI/Co-PI to come in: Research Office and new PI should jointly develop a mitigation plan to sustain/ resuscitate the project, including:   * reassessing project milestones/KPIs * taking steps to ensure students’ graduation is not disrupted * identifying and committing to put in all necessary resources and time where relevant   The plan should be signed off by both the dean of department and the current/new PI/Co-PI. | ORE needs to assess the feasibility of the mitigation plan |
| 1b) | Change of Collaborators/Experts  (Removal/ Replacement/ Addition) | Impact on research outcomes and timeline  Relevance and contribution to project outcome | The need for the collaborators/experts must be driven by the project need and justified accordingly | | Form A5 or equivalent documentation required by ORE | ORE has to ensure timeliness in submitting requests to Director of Research (DOR) for changes in collaborators/experts, such as removal or addition of collaborators/experts.  ORE needs to assess the suitability of the collaborators/experts to the proposed role and contribution to the project. | Request involving the removal, replacement or addition of collaborators/experts within the approved budget for collaborators/experts shall be approved by DOR (or above).  Written assessment supporting the request for change, including the assessment of impact to the project and justification for the appointment, should be provided to SSG at least 2 weeks before the change is affected.  For requests that exceeds the approved budget for fees paid to Collaborators/Experts (i.e. Experts Honorarium), SSG’s approval will be sought on fund virement (refer to item 2b). No request to increased budget is allowed. |
| Cost implications | Aligned to university’s norms and based on the responsibility and deliverables and within the approved budget for collaborator/experts | | ORE to assess the reasonableness of the requests, e.g. the job scope is commensurate with the duration, and assess if consultation, if required, can be done via email/ video conferencing. |
| 1c) | Change of Research Fellows/ Research Associates/  Research Assistants/  Student Assistants/ Other Staff  (Removal/  Replacement/Addition) | Impact on research outcomes and timeline  Relevance and contribution to project outcome | The need for changes in the approved number of the project team members (due to removal or addition of research assistants/research associates/student assistants) must be driven by the project need and justified accordingly. | | For changes in number or/and name of research assistants/research associates/student assistants, no variation is needed if there is no need for fund virement. | ORE has to ensure the changes in number or/and name of research assistants/research associates/student assistants do not require fund virement. | Host Institution to inform IAL of any changes in number or/and name of research assistants/ research associates/ student assistants for record purposes. |
| If fund virement is required, please refer to Para 2. | |
| 1d) | Project Extension | Impact on deliverables and usefulness of final research outcome in view of the delay | To ensure currency of research, extension will be capped at 6 months | | Form A5  Evidence of satisfactory progress (e.g. copies of publication arising from the research, abstracts of conferences attended etc.)  Justification for the delay(s) encountered and why the mitigating measures taken did not achieve their intended objectives  Revised Project Implementation Schedule (Gantt Chart) | ORE needs to assess if it is realistic for the project to achieve closure with the requested extension. Request for extension will not be supported merely due to manpower constraints.  Request for grant extension must reach SSG at least six (6) months before end date of project.  The PI must ensure sufficient funds in each vote to support the extension request. Any virement requests necessary to meet the extension period must be made known as part of the extension request. | SSG may consider a one-time extension of up to six (6) months with no-cost involvement if the PI is able to demonstrate ability to deliver on the other remaining milestones and furnish strong justifications for the extension.  An extension beyond six (6) months may be considered on a case by case basis. No additional funds would be given for any extensions. |
| Cost implications | Must be within the approved budget. | |
| 1e) | Change of scope | Change of scope is not allowed as this will amount to a new research project which would have to be separately evaluated by the expert review panel and approval is required by the research committee on its own merits. | | | N.A. | N.A. | N.A. |
| 1f) | Change of research design and research methodology | That it increases the usefulness of the final research outcomes but that does not affect the approved scope and research questions. | | Must be within the approved budget. | Form A5  Details and rationale of the change(s) and how it increases the usefulness of final research outcomes should be included. | Review and support the request. Form A5 is duly completed and endorsed. All supporting documents attached. | Request for a change in research design and research methodology must be made to SSG for approval and be endorsed by the ORE. |
| 1g) | Termination/ Lapse of Project | Alternative options to termination | Other options should be explored to ensure that the best outcome is achieved with the investment already made. Justification why these options are not feasible and termination is the only option. | | Form A5  Department report: Department should prepare a report that includes:   * A review of what went wrong for the project * What are the alternatives to terminations and why they are not applicable in this case * Preventive measures to avoid future occurrence.   The report should be signed off by both the dean of department and the DOR. | ORE to assess the adequacy of the winding-down plan and the Department report. | SSG  (Per the termination clause in the grant agreement) |
| Automatic Termination | If the original PI has become unavailable (e.g. resignation, passing), Host Institution should propose a replacement PI. If the replacement PI is not acceptable to SSG, the project is automatically terminated. | |
| Orderly conclusion of project | Project accounts should be frozen immediately once termination proceedings are initiated.  A separate winding-down budget should be drawn up for SSG’s consideration. This covers expenses necessary to effect an orderly conclusion, for a period not exceeding three (3) months from the date of termination. | |
| 2 | Fund Virement (General) | | | | | | |
| General considerations | | The critical role of the proposed items to project outcomes and the reason they were not budgeted in original proposal | Fund virement is to support the project only, not to support any “follow-on” research. | | Form A5 | Form A5 is duly completed and endorsed. All supporting documents are attached. Check is done on whether requested item was in the approved budget and whether requested item is within WDARF Grant fundable list, as well as value for money considerations. | Fund virement  SSG delegates the approval authority for the virement of funds between approved votes to the Host Institution, subject to a cumulative amount not exceeding 10% of the original total project direct cost value (excluding IRC). SSG is to be notified, through Secretariat, of all virement made between and within approved votes in the progress report.  For virement between approved votes which is cumulatively above 10%, the approval authority remains as SSG.  Inter-institutional virement requires SSG’s approval and acknowledgement from the DOR (or equivalent) for all institutions involved. |
| Cost-savings principle | It is possible for PI to use cost-savings within approved project cost to purchase essential new items not previously budgeted.  However, purchase must be based on needs; availability of savings is not a reason for new purchase. | | Latest statement of accounts | Fund availability |
| Relevant quotations | Justification of need for the purchase. Reasonableness of quotes by cross-referencing similar purchase or independent checks and comply with the prevailing procurement rules of the Host Institution.  Whether proposed purchase items are already available in Host Institution, or can be more cost-effectively leased. |
| Stage of project | Compelling justifications to be provided for virement requests if project is ending in a year or less.  Virement would not be approved if project is ending in three (3) months or less, unless in exceptional cases. | | N.A. | The PI has no outstanding half-yearly/final progress reports and final research reports for any SSG grants. (PIs with overdue reports are not allowed to submit variation requests.)  Justification for virement. |
| Fund Virement (Specific Requirement) | | | | | | | |
| 2a) | Overseas travel | Only for PIs, Co-PIs and Experts | Follows the travel policies and guidelines of Host Institution | | Form A5 | ORE has to ensure the institution’s travel policies and guidelines are adhered to in PI’s amendments to the travel budget during Budget Phasing.  Justification for need to travel and why no other modes like conference call is suitable. | **Virement of funds into the Overseas Travel sub-vote is not allowed.**  **Overspending will not be reimbursed.** |
| 2b) | Collaborator and Expert (Beyond the approved budget for engagement of collaborator(s) and Expert(s)) | Relevance and contribution to project outcomes | The need for a Collaborator/Expert must be driven by project needs (e.g. not because Host Institution requires Collaborator/Expert to give public lecture or other activities.)  Why the need was not identified at stage of proposal submission or before entering the agreement. | | Form A5  Curriculum Vitae of prospective candidate | ORE needs to assess the role, credentials and expertise of the Collaborator/Experts. If in doubt, to request an independent assessment from the dean of department.  Justification for need to travel and why no other modes like conference call is suitable. | Approval by SSG |
| Track record | N.A. | | Form A5  Job scope/deliverables of Expert | ORE needs to assess reasonableness of request, e.g. the job scope is commensurate with the duration requested. Particularly, ORE needs to assess if the consultation can be done via email/tele-video conferencing, rather than through appointment of Expert. |
| Duration of stay | The job scope and deliverables of Collaborator/Expert must be clear for assessment of the duration required of his/her service | |
| Fees/Honorarium | Fees/Honorarium for Collaborator/Expert must be aligned with Host Institution’s applied policies and guidelines | |
| 2c) | Change of Research Assistants/  Research Associates/  Student Assistants  (Removal/  Replacement/Addition) | Impact on research outcomes and timeline  Relevance and contribution to project outcome | The need for changes in the approved number of the project team members (due to removal or addition of research assistants/research associates/student assistants) must be driven by the project need and justified accordingly. | | Form A5 | Form A5 is duly completed and endorsed. All supporting documents are attached. Check is done on whether requested item was in the approved budget and whether requested item is within WDARF Grant fundable list, as well as value for money considerations. | Fund virement  SSG delegates the approval authority for the virement of funds between approved votes to the Host Institution, subject to a cumulative amount not exceeding 10% of the original total project direct cost value (excluding IRC). SSG is to be notified, through Secretariat, of all virement made between and within approved votes, in the progress report.  For virement between approved votes which is cumulatively above 10%, the approval authority remains as SSG.  Inter-institutional virement requires SSG’s approval and acknowledgement from the DOR (or equivalent) for all institutions involved. |