



# Infectious Diseases Research Grant Program

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**CALL FOR PROPOSALS; MAY 2017**

Infectious Diseases Research Grant Program Secretariat  
KACST | RIYADH

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction to the Infectious Diseases Research Grant Program .....	2
About the Program .....	2
Program’s Strategic Objectives .....	2
Program Governance .....	2
R&D Focus .....	3
Scope of the Program .....	3
Eligibility for Funding .....	4
Core Requirements .....	4
Participant Requirements .....	4
Essential Activities .....	4
Fields of Research .....	4
Funding Level and Use of Funds .....	5
Overall Scale and Duration of Funding for the Program .....	5
Scale of Funding per Proposal and Timeline .....	5
Use of Funds .....	5
Anticipated Duration of Projects in this Round .....	6
Program Management .....	6
Organization Structure .....	6
Role of Host Institutions .....	7
Application and Proposal Selection Process .....	7
Application Process .....	7
Review Process .....	7
Award Process .....	7
Program Monitoring and Evaluation .....	8
Reports .....	8
Key Performance Indicators .....	8

# Introduction to the Infectious Diseases Research Grant Program

## About the Program

Emerging (e.g. MERS-CoV) and indigenous (e.g. Alkhurma) infectious diseases have been documented in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for years, and have affected the Kingdom and the world greatly in the past few decades. Combined with the increasing yearly influx of pilgrims, the subject merits the highest attention from both scientific and regulatory prospective. These diseases and their subsequent complications can have a huge social, economic and political impact, and can inevitably result in an additional burden on the healthcare system.

Recognizing the urgent need to simultaneously address both indigenous communicable diseases and potential threats of epidemics outbreaks, top leadership of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have directed serious attention to research and development in related areas. Accordingly, the health, agriculture, and research institutions have collectively undertaken a highly orchestrated and expedited R&D initiative (Infectious Diseases Research Grant Program). The IDRGP is a research funding and management program that enables Saudi Arabia's academic and health research community to raise a concentrated battle against these diseases. The Program was conceptualized in November 2015 and the first round was officially launched in May 2016 (known as the MERS-CoV Research Grant Program) after a series of stakeholder meetings and a range of strategic planning activities. The scope of funding and thematic research priorities of the second round of funding (2017) is now expanded beyond MERS-CoV and will cover a broader range of communicable diseases. The second round of the Program is envisioned to stimulate research and development activities in a focused range of subjects related to infectious diseases over a period of three years.

This Call for Proposals (CFP) is a formal announcement related to the second round of funding through the Infectious Diseases Research Grant Program. The purpose of this document is to share important information regarding the IDRGP and to invite proposals from relevant research communities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

## Program's Strategic Objectives

The Infectious Diseases Research Grant Program is a concerted effort of the Saudi Arabian government to expand the knowledge base related to infectious diseases. The Program has the following strategic objectives:

- Increase research output to support the Saudi knowledge base in Infectious Diseases;
- Stimulate high quality research through strict program monitoring and evaluation; and
- Engage Saudi researchers and enhance their productivity through appropriate research networks and critical infrastructure.

## Program Governance

The Program is a collaborative endeavor of three of the key national stakeholders dealing with the Infectious Diseases challenge:

- The Ministry of Health (MOH),
- The Ministry of Environment, Water, and Agriculture (MEWA), and
- King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology (KACST).

As such, the Program is governed by an Oversight Committee drawn from the leadership of the aforesaid agencies. The Program's Secretariat, responsible for smooth coordination and Program execution, resides within KACST.

## R&D Focus

In consultation with leading experts in the field, the program's Steering Committee has resolved the focus of the Program to consist of the following broad research areas:

- MERS-CoV;
  - Animal to Human transmission (Epidemiology).
  - Human to Human transmission (Epidemiology).
  - Immuno-pathogenesis.
- Dengue;
  - Epidemiology.
  - Vector related studies.
- Rift Valley Fever;
  - Epidemiology.
  - Vector related studies.
- Zika;
  - Epidemiology.
  - Vector related studies.
- Alkhurma Hemorrhagic Fever (AHF);
  - Epidemiology.
  - Vector related studies.
- SARI (severe acute respiratory infection);
  - Epidemiology.
- Q fever;
  - Epidemiology.
  - Vector related studies.
- Anti-Microbial Resistance (AMR); Only through requests by assigned government bodies.
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## Scope of the Program

The Program is envisioned to be administered through the Directed Research Program. This second round, launched in May 2017, encourages proposals to be executed over a period of one to two years. The intent is to execute projects with specific, measurable, and immediate impacts to urgently address the increasing threats of Infectious Diseases in the Kingdom.

As stated above, the Program funds competitive proposals through research grants. To ensure funding of proposals of the highest quality and impact, the Program has set in place a highly selective process that includes an unbiased review of research proposals by independent external reviewers. The Program also adopts global best practices in research program management to ensure researchers deliver the intended results on time and within budget. More information on the grants proposal application and review process is provided in latter part of this document.

## Eligibility for Funding

### Core Requirements

**Successful proposals must meet standards of research excellence, human and social capital development, and field relevance.** International experience has shown all three areas to be critical to success of a mission-oriented research grants proposal. Excellence in research and related activities is the essential element of this Program as it will build confidence in pharmaceutical industry and health service providers that faculty and students possess the skills to address critical problems.

The combination of research excellence and focus on relevant problems not only builds trust, it also builds the human and social capital so highly valued by companies that translate research results into drugs, vaccines, medical devices and usable processes. This goes beyond skills to conduct research, and it includes knowledge of the processes of technological innovation, skills in planning and managing applied R&D, identifying and fostering potentially commercializable ideas, and managing intellectual property.

Proposals must demonstrate clearly the current understanding of the issues at hand, and must clearly articulate approaches to solve unsolved problems with adequate emphasis on management of research activities, IP and innovation leading to appropriate solutions.

### Participant Requirements

The Program envisages supporting high quality research proposals submitted by individual Principal Investigators from academic institutions and health research organizations, and through requests by assigned government bodies. Therefore, leading researchers from the Kingdom's universities are encouraged to apply for funding.

The Program encourages participants to leverage their host institution's infrastructure, systems, and human resources to propose ready-to-execute projects.

### Essential Activities

Proposals must focus on the following activities:

- Short- to medium-term, goal-oriented research with specific objectives;
- Information and knowledge exchange activities including sharing of research results at conferences, seminars and workshops;
- Activities to deploy research outputs and encourage adoption by pharma industry and health service organizations directly through licensing, consulting, or via spin-off companies;
- Strategic planning to achieve integration of research, education, outreach, and technology transfer and implement it in ways that engage faculty, students, and industry researchers and managers, and public health agencies.

### Fields of Research

All fields of research relevant to Infectious Diseases and aligned with the abovementioned R&D focus of the Program are eligible for funding.

## Funding Level and Use of Funds

### Overall Scale and Duration of Funding for the Program

The Program is anticipated to fund research over a period of two years. However, the actual funds disbursement, and therefore the number of proposals funded, will be driven by the total funds available annually, quality of proposals received, and scale of investment required by selected proposals.

### Scale of Funding per Proposal and Timeline

The Program divides funding amount per project into three brackets;

Bracket	Funding per proposal	Maximum duration of proposal	Decision to be made by
<b>1 Fast track</b>	Less than 200,000 SAR	12 Months	31 <sup>st</sup> of August
<b>2</b>	200,000-750,000 SAR	24 Months	30 <sup>th</sup> of November
<b>3</b>	750,001-2,000,000 SAR	24 Months	31 <sup>st</sup> of December

Budget requested by each principal investigator (PI) must be **fully justifiable**.

The following timeline will be strictly followed for this round of the Infectious Diseases RGP:

Activity/ Milestone	Date
<b>Release of Call for Proposals</b>	31 May 2017
<b>Deadline for Submission of bracket 1 Proposals (Fast track)</b>	31 July 2017
<b>Deadline for Submission of bracket 2 &amp; 3 Proposals</b>	31 August 2017

The Program assumes that proposals will leverage existing infrastructure and investments in their host institutions. Therefore, researchers are requested to exercise good judgment to reduce use of Program funds to build infrastructure.

### Use of Funds

Funding received from the Program may be used for the following categories:

- Salary and incentives – broken down by specific categories – undergraduates, graduates, post graduate scholars, faculty, permanent staff, visitors, and consultants;
- Equipment to be purchased, including maintenance fees and upgrades;
- Software to be purchased, including maintenance fees and upgrades;
- Materials and supplies;
- Travel – domestic and international in separate categories;
- Fees related to management of intellectual property
- Legal and other professional services including consultant fees;
- Publication fees; and
- Support services;

While the above expense categories are used to provide PIs with high-level guidance, the Program does not set limits or stringent criteria on how the funding can be best applied to achieve its goals. Rather the Program offers the PIs reasonable degrees of freedom in constructing high impact proposals. To ensure high impact within short periods, ready-to-execute proposals will be given highest priority.

PIs may have the flexibility in selecting the best possible mix of faculty, post-doctoral and graduate student researchers. PIs may have the flexibility of selecting industrial and international experts to bring the maximum value to the Program and meet its goals

## Anticipated Duration of Projects in this Round

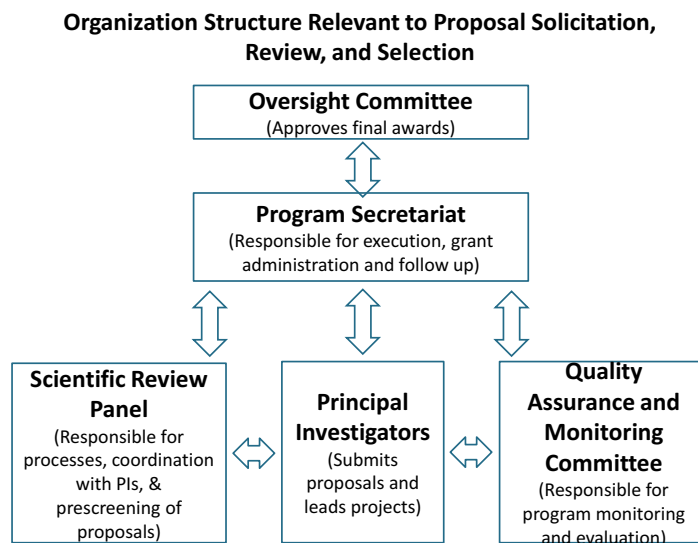
The general guideline is to formulate research proposals keeping short to medium-term targets in mind. As such in this first round of funding, the Program encourages proposers to construct proposals to be executed within a maximum of two years from date of award.

## Program Management

### Organization Structure

The Program is governed by an Oversight Committee drawn from the leadership of key stakeholder organizations. The Oversight Committee sets the overall strategy and direction of the Program. Program execution is managed by the Program Secretariat, which resides in KACST. The Program Secretariat provides the administrative support required for proposal solicitation and review, and grant award management. A Scientific Review Panel serves as the interface between the PIs and the Program Secretariat. The Panel establishes guidelines for research proposals, prescreens those for technical review by external reviewers and produces summary reports on the review process. During the prescreening process, the Scientific Review Panel ensures that all required information is furnished by the PIs and that the proposals selected for external review are aligned with the strategic objectives of the Program.

To ensure highest level of objective review, research proposals are reviewed by a panel of external reviewers (Advisory Board) drawn from leading researchers around the world in epidemiology, virology and other related disciplines. Proposals are ranked based on the scores assigned by the external review panel completely based on the technical merit. Neither the Program Secretariat nor the Oversight Committee influences the selection of proposals.



The Program lays emphasis on tangible research outcomes within a reasonable period through effective research management practices. Therefore, quality assurance and performance management are key aspects of the Program. During the execution of the projects, the Quality Assurance and Monitoring Committee will liaise with PIs to collect and compile necessary data and information on research teams, activities and outputs. This committee will review progress on behalf of the Program Secretariat. Based on periodic reviews, the committee will make recommendations to continue funding for the project.

## Role of Host Institutions

The Program offers significant freedom and flexibility to PIs to articulate the research proposal, form their research teams, execute projects and compensate researchers who contribute effectively. However, the Program reckons that the PIs are affiliated with academic institutions that have their own policies and procedures with regard to research project management. The Program encourages the PIs to strictly follow their respective host institution's policies and execute the projects in harmony with their affiliations. The host institutions must officially endorse the applications of PIs for the application to be eligible for review.

## Application and Proposal Selection Process

### Application Process

The Program solicits applications in a predesigned format to facilitate comparable, consistent and expedited review. The portal is available to applicants through the KACST Directed Research Program website (<https://gpurc.kacst.edu.sa/DRP.aspx>) after PI's registration and account activation.

Applicants must read and understand guidelines for each section of the application form before completing the full application. No other means of submission is acceptable.

All application must be submitted no later than the deadline stipulated in the call for proposals.

### Review Process

The Infectious Diseases Program adheres to global best practice in research program management to ensure utmost degrees of objectivity and quality. A qualified Scientific Review Committee appointed by the Oversight Committee will monitor, guide and facilitate the entire grant review process. Throughout this process, the Infectious Diseases program personnel and selected external reviewers will adhere to all conflict-of-interest and confidentiality requirements.

In keeping with best practices, the Program has adopted a two-step process for application review.

- First, an initial review of every application will be conducted upon receipt of the grant application forms to ensure that the proposal meets all requirements stipulated in the call for proposals. The Scientific Review Panel will interact with PIs as needed to solicit any missing information.
- Second, complete grant applications that meet program priorities and budget constraints are, subsequently, evaluated in terms of scientific and technical merits. This step is conducted by at least three external and independent reviewers. Scientific committee of the program will select reviewers to each application based on relevant scientific expertise and/or research experience. Following the receipt of reviewer's feedback, a summary statement report for each application is prepared which include reviewers' written critiques, recommendations and an average final score. The summary statement is forwarded to the secretariat of the oversight committee and funding recommendation of highly scored applications will be approved. A notice of approval or rejection will be sent to the applicant once the review process is complete.

### Award Process

With the notice of award, the process of project award sets in. The Scientific Committee will communicate with the PIs for necessary documentation and hand over the coordination to the Quality Assurance and



Monitoring Committee. While the Program will follow KACST grant management infrastructure in general, the Program Secretariat will proactively interface with the relevant departments within KACST to ensure awarded projects are initiated quickly.

## Program Monitoring and Evaluation

The program takes a balanced and systematic approach to monitoring and program evaluation. The Program Secretariat, in consultation with the Quality Assurance and Monitoring Committee, sets forth periodic reviews to ensure all funded project move toward timely completion with results. Technical and financial reports are expected to be submitted by the PIs in consistent format. The PIs of the winning proposals will be provided with the data collection forms and report templates upon grant award.

## Reports

The Program will deploy three key tools for program monitoring and evaluation:

1. **Semi-annual Review:** to enable oversight across the Program, while at the same time, to minimize burden on the PIs, semi-annual reviews will be conducted by the Program Secretariat using simple forms and report templates.
2. **Annual Reports:** for projects spanning more than a year, an annual report will be submitted by the PIs. In this report, comprising a technical section and a management and financial section, the PIs are expected to show activities completed, ongoing activities, progress accomplished toward stated goals and any risks that may affect the project's progress.
3. **Final Project Report:** PIs will submit a final report for each project within 30 days of project completion. Similar to the Annual Report, the Final Report will comprise a technical section and a management and financial section. The final report will clearly articulate the research results. The report will be prescreened by the Scientific Committee before being reviewed by the Quality Assurance and Monitoring Committee. At their discretion, the Committee may have external reviewers review final technical reports.

## Key Performance Indicators

A set of project performance indicators will be regularly tracked and reported by the Program. Each KPI is weighted in terms of points, and each project must exceed a certain number of points based on its budget and duration. It is critical to have the KPI's reported by PIs in the semi-annual review, annual reports and in the final project reports.

### Example KPIs

- Number of publications
- Number of presentations at leading conferences
- Number of inventions disclosed
- Number of patents filed
- Number of students trained