

POLICY STATEMENT

Research Fund for the Control of Infectious Diseases

Health and Health Services Research Fund

FOOD AND HEALTH BUREAU

Effective Date: July 2010

Version: 2

Preamble

In 2001, the Government announced in its Policy Objective the setting up of a Health and Health Services Research Fund (HHSRF) to support local health and health services research. The Fund will follow a focused research agenda in which thematic priorities are formulated together with our partners in health. The Fund is open for application to conduct research studies and projects in public health, health services or Chinese medicine. It is anticipated that the Fund will help strengthen local research capabilities in the field of health and health services, contributing to the ultimate goal of maximising population health.

During the SARS epidemic in 2003, a Research Fund for the Control of Infectious Diseases (RFCID) was established to encourage, facilitate and support research on the prevention, treatment and control of infectious diseases in Hong Kong, in particular emerging diseases such as SARS.

Both research funds are within the purview of the Food and Health Bureau (FHB). A Research Council has been established by the Secretary for Food and Health (SFH) to oversee the research direction and administration of both the RFCID and HHSRF. This Policy Statement lays down the overall framework and policies of the two funds. Procedures, guidance notes or any material that assists the operation of the research funds under the purview of the Research Council should be developed in consistence with this document.

The Research Council should approve exceptions to this policy on a case-by-case basis.

Research Fund Secretariat

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1 OVERALL FRAMEWORK

1.1 Research Fund for the Control of Infectious Diseases

1.1.1 Mission

The Research Fund for the Control of Infectious Diseases ('RFCID') aims to encourage, facilitate and support research on the prevention, treatment and control of infectious diseases, in particular emerging infectious diseases such as SARS.

1.1.2 Scope

The RFCID will consider funding applications for research projects relevant to the control of infectious diseases in the areas of:-

- Etiology, epidemiology and public health
- Basic research
- Clinical and health services research
- Enhancement of research infrastructure

1.1.3 Funding

The RFCID will support studies initiated by individual investigators, in addition to those commissioned by the FHB, to address health problems, fill scientific gaps and respond to public threats or needs. For investigator-initiated grant applications, the normal cost ceiling for a Full Grant is \$1,000,000 and for a Mini-Grant is \$80,000. Higher grants may be awarded where justified. Mini-Grants are intended for small scale, non-renewable or pilot studies.

1.1.4 Thematic Priorities

The RFCID will establish a focused research agenda in which thematic priorities are formulated to guide the decision on fund allocations.

1.2 Health and Health Services Research Fund

1.2.1 Mission

The Health and Health Services Research Fund ('HHSRF') aims to maximise population health and improve the quality of life, and enhance the standard and cost effectiveness of the health system through the generation of new knowledge in areas of human health and health services.

1.2.2 Objectives

The objectives of the HHSRF are to:

- Ascertain the health care requirements of the community.
- Strengthen the scientific rigour of evaluating health interventions and their cost effectiveness.
- Disseminate research findings to the wider community.
- Build research capacity in the field of health and health services.

1.2.3 Scope

The HHSRF will consider funding applications for public health, health services research or Chinese medicine from local researchers working in the public, private and academic sectors.

1.2.4 Funding

There are two types of awards: Full Grants and Mini-Grants. The normal cost ceiling for a Full Grant is \$1,000,000 and for a Mini-Grant \$80,000. Mini-Grants are intended for small scale, non-renewable or pilot studies.

1.2.5 Thematic Priorities

The HHSRF will establish a focused research agenda in which thematic priorities are formulated to guide the decision on fund allocations.

2 ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

The RFCID and HHSRF are administered through 2 key committees, supported by 3 task groups: -

Committees

- Research Council
- Grant Review Board

Task Groups

- Grant Review Board Executive
- Research Fund Secretariat
- Referee Panel

2.1 *Research Council*

2.1.1 **Role and Responsibilities:** The Research Council (RC) assumes fiduciary responsibility for all aspects of the administration of RFCID and HHSRF and the allocation of funds for approved grants. The RC appoints members to the Grant Review Board. The funding decision of the RC is final.

2.1.2 **Composition:** The Secretary for Food and Health / Permanent Secretary for Food and Health appoints the RC normally for a two-year term.

2.1.3 **Terms of Reference:** The terms of reference for the RC are:

- (a) Determine research agenda and funding control mechanism of the Research Fund for the Control of Infectious Diseases, and the Health and Health Services Research Fund.
- (b) Approve procedures for inviting, and criteria for vetting research applications.
- (c) Approve standard terms and conditions for grant-holders.
- (d) Approve funding allocation after peer-review process.
- (e) Approve processes for the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of approved research projects.
- (f) Establish Grant Review Board to carry out the technical work of the RC.

- (g) Disseminate key findings of funded projects.

2.2 Grant Review Board

2.2.1 **Role and Responsibilities:** Through the Grant Review Board (GRB) all applications, final and dissemination reports for funded grants are subject to peer review for their scientific merit and compliance with the scope of funding. The GRB acts as the scientific advisor to the RC and makes recommendations with regard to initial funding, requests for additional funds and assesses the outcomes of funded research.

2.2.2 **Composition:** Members are appointed by the RC and are drawn from a wide spectrum of medical, health, social and analytical sciences. Potential members are identified through established network, publications, scientific roles and committee meetings or collaborative work. The Secretary for Food and Health nominates the GRB Chairpersons.

2.2.3 **Terms of Reference:** The GRB terms of reference are:

- (a) Set Standard Operating Procedures for the grant submission and review process, and the assessment and dissemination of final reports.
- (b) Distribute guidelines for the formulation of research proposals, grant applications and the submission of final and dissemination reports.
- (c) Review and assess applications and recommend projects for funding.
- (d) Review and assess final and dissemination reports.
- (e) Promote the development of research in the areas of health, health services and controlling infectious diseases in the wider community.
- (f) Monitor the progress of approved projects.
- (g) Monitor the financial performance of approved projects.

2.3 *Grant Review Board Executive*

2.3.1 **Role and Responsibilities:** The Grant Review Board Executive (GRBE) is established to assist the GRB on an *ad hoc* basis, to consider/suggest amendments to standard operating procedures, deal with matters arising for funded grants, monitor grant activity, requests for additional funding or changes to the study proposal.

2.3.2 **Composition:** Main committee

- Grant Review Board Co-Chairs and Deputy Co-Chairs
- Members of the Grant Review Board (Optional)
- Key Secretariat Personnel

2.3.3 **Terms of Reference:** The terms of reference for the Grant Review Board Executive are:

- (a) Assess and recommend action (on behalf of the GRB) on requests for additional funds, budget revision, and/or reallocation, changes to study design or methods.
- (b) Monitor the quality of the peer review including the assignment of referees to grants for review.
- (c) Monitor the response of grant applicants and grantholders to requests by the GRB.
- (d) Evaluate and advise the GRB regarding changes to the grant or final report review process.
- (e) Advise the Research Fund Secretariat on the monitoring of the progress of current research projects.

2.4 Research Fund Secretariat

2.4.1 **Role and Responsibilities:** The Research Fund Secretariat (Secretariat) supports all the activities of the RC including the outcome of the grant application review process, financial status on funded grants, monitoring of on-going projects, approved amendments, and the dissemination and final reports.

2.4.2 Composition:

- Consultant (Research Office)
- Scientific Review Director
- Senior Grant Management Executive
- Senior Secretariat Executive (Grant Review & Management)
- Grant Review Board Coordinator (Government Consultant)
- Executives and supporting staffs

2.4.3 **Terms of Reference:** The terms of reference of the Secretariat are:

- Support the operations of the RC, GRB, GRBE and Referee Panel.
- Maintain administrative information systems as needed to support the work of the RC, GRB, and GRBE.

2.5 *Referee Panel*

2.5.1 **Role and Responsibilities:** Individual members of the Referee Panel, according to their specific field of expertise, are selected to review grant applications for funding on the basis of scientific merit and to assess the outcomes of funded projects.

2.5.2 **Composition:** Local and overseas referees are identified through a variety of sources: recommendation of the GRB members, bibliographic sources such as Medline, the reference section of the grant proposal or through internet contacts particularly in evidence-based health and health services literature.

2.5.3 **Terms of Reference:** The terms of reference for the Referee Panel are:

- (a) Assess the scientific merit of submitted grant proposals in terms of
 - originality
 - scientific content
 - design and methods
 - statistical analysis
 - outcome measures
- (b) Assess the relevance of the proposal to the thematic priorities and the applicability of the research to the local context.
- (c) Assess the 'value for money' as presented in the final and dissemination report.

3 CONFLICT OF INTEREST

3.1 *Definition*

A conflict of interest arises when a person's judgment concerning a primary interest, such as scientific knowledge, could be unduly influenced by a secondary interest, such as personal advancement or financial gain.

3.2 *Disclosure or Declaration of Conflict of Interest*

Financial or academic conflict of interest should be disclosed to the appropriate body (RC, GRB and Secretariat) in a timely and transparent manner. Declarations of conflict interest should be made verbally during a meeting or in writing to the Chairman.

Failure to disclose conflicts of interest will result in the person's track record with the Fund being adversely affected.

3.3 *Conflict of Interest and the Grant Review Board*

Grant Review Board members when named as an investigator must leave the meeting and not take part in the discussion or review process. GRB members who are colleagues or associates of an applicant (e.g. head or senior member of the same department) are not normally asked to leave the meeting. However, they would not be asked to participate in the discussion but might be asked for points of clarification. This approach has been found to be acceptable and practicable.

4 CONFIDENTIALITY

The RC, GRB, GRBE and Secretariat will abide by internationally recognised standards of personal information in medical research and complying with the local requirements of the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance.

It is the principal applicant and administrating institution's responsibility to ensure that any conditions relating to data protection in Hong Kong are observed.

5 ALLEGATION OF SCIENTIFIC MISCONDUCT

5.1 *Definition*

Scientific misconduct means fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, or other practices that seriously deviate from those that are commonly accepted within the scientific community for proposing, conducting, or reporting research. It does not include honest error or honest differences in interpretations or judgments of data.

5.2 *Allegation of Scientific Misconduct*

Allegations of scientific misconduct are, fortunately, rare but the RC takes them very seriously as part of its responsibility to the public and the scientific community. In the event of research misconduct found during the course of funded research, the RC will withdraw funding support immediately.

The Administrating Institution should have in place adequate systems to ensure the quality of research that is carried out by their staff. Effective mechanisms for identifying scientific misconduct and agreed procedures for investigating allegations of such misconduct should be clearly publicised by the Administrating Institution.

5.3 *Preparation of grant applications*

The grant application should comprise the principal applicant's original work. Plagiarism is not tolerated. Work presented for assessment or publication should not include sentences, paragraphs or longer extracts from published or unpublished work of others without proper acknowledgement. The work (including concept, methodology, design) of others should not be presented in any form without proper acknowledgement of the source.

6 ADMINISTRATIVE GUIDELINES

6.1 *Research Grant Application*

The RFCID will support studies initiated by individual investigators as well as those commissioned by FHB to address specific health problems, fill scientific gaps and respond to public health threats or needs.

For commissioned projects, only institutions specially invited by FHB will be eligible to submit a portfolio of research for consideration.

For investigator-initiated research projects, annual funding round will normally be issued in the third quarters of the year. The Secretariat maintains an updated database of all funded grants.

6.2 *Grant Review Process*

Research applications are assessed in two stages, first by external referees, and then by the GRB according to the criteria set out below. The external referees are blind to the grant applicants to protect confidentiality.

Grant Review criteria:-

- originality of the research topic
- relevance to the scope of funding and thematic priorities
- significance of the research question
- quality of scientific content
- credibility for study design and method
- feasibility of the intended project

The GRB will also take into account the past performance and track records of the grant applicant(s), research capability of the administering institution, and the proposal's value for money when considering the funding recommendation. The RC will approve the funding recommendations of the GRB. The GRB will provide specific feedback for each application.

6.3 *Financial Arrangement*

Commissioned Projects

Release of funds will be tied to the attainment of interim objectives of the research activities and the project timelines accepted by the RC.

Mini-Grant

For Mini-grants, the RC shall pay claims of up to 90% of the approved grant and the balance when a final report, a dissemination report and a certified financial statement are submitted to the satisfaction of the RC.

Full Grant

For Full Grants, the RC shall pay claims of up to 80% of the approved grant and the balance when a final report, a dissemination report and an audited account are submitted to the satisfaction of the RC.

Only the direct costs attributable to the research project will be covered by the grant allocation. The costs of premises, salaries for established academic or service staff, or overhead charges will not be supported. Limited conference expenses of up to \$10,000 may be included in the full grant application. Approval for release of this grant has to be sought prior to making arrangement to participate in the conference.

6.4 *Monitoring of Research Progress*

To minimise the potential failure to meet targeted aims, the GRB will implement a process for the on-going review of funded grants. Interim reports with financial summary will be submitted yearly and reviewed by the GRBE and the Secretariat.

All requests for amendments to the study design or methods will be subject to peer review.

The RC reserves the right to withhold funds or terminate the award at any time if the grant fails to show satisfactory performance or if the applicants are in breach of the terms and conditions of the grant stipulated in the Agreement.

6.5 *Dissemination of Research Results*

On completion of approved projects, all grant holders must submit a final report and dissemination report(s). The final and dissemination reports will be assessed and graded by the GRB. The RC will disseminate the outcomes of research funded by the RFCID and the HHSRF. From time to time, principal applicants will be required to conduct press conferences to publicise research projects supported by the RFCID and HHSRF.