



شبكة النهرين

## **The Nahrein Network Research Grant Awards – Peer Review**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this document is to help you, as peer reviewer and/or Management Committee member, to prepare for the review of Small and/or Large Grants applications submitted to the Research Grant Awards call.

If you have any questions about the contents of this document, please email the Nahrein Network administrator: [nahrein@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:nahrein@ucl.ac.uk)

### **Overview**

The process is as follows:

- Immediately after a Research Grants round closes, all applications are checked for eligibility and completeness
- All eligible Small Grant and Large Grant applications are assigned to two peer reviewers for independent assessment ahead of the next Management Committee meeting. Reviewers who are not members of the Network's academic leadership team are typically assigned 2–3 applications each; every application is read by the Director and one Co-Director.
- Meanwhile eligible applications that are missing supporting documentation are asked to supply it within a week in order to be considered for funding. These will be supplied to peer reviewers as soon as they are received; if they are not received the reviewers will be notified that the incomplete projects are not eligible for consideration.
- Reviewers make independent assessments of the projects they are assigned and complete a short evaluation form. They return these to the Nahrein Network administrator: [nahrein@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:nahrein@ucl.ac.uk) to an agreed deadline ahead of the Management Committee meeting
- The Management Committee uses the reviewers' evaluations, and the project outlines, as the basis for final funding decisions, within the constraints of the budget available in each funding round.
- Applicants and reviewers are notified of the Management Committee's decisions as soon as possible after the meeting.

### **1. The role of the peer reviewer**

As a peer reviewer, you will be provided with a small number of eligible Small and/or Large Grant applications and an assessor's form. In advance of starting work on reviewing them we advise you to:

- familiarise yourself with these guidelines and assessment criteria for the scheme
- alert the Nahrein Network administrator to any conflicts of interest you may have, including potential conflicts.
- inform the Nahrein Network administrator if you expect to be unavailable for the following Management Committee Meeting and make arrangements to submit your review notes

In reviewing the applications you should:

- use your knowledge, judgement and expertise in order to reach clear, sound, evidence-based decisions.
- treat all applications, and the discussions about them, as **strictly confidential** at all times.
- strive to be fair and objective
- adhere to the **Nahrein Network's EDI policy** which states that:

The Nahrein Network is committed to eliminating unlawful discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity and good relations across and between the defined equalities groups in all of their relevant functions. Accordingly, no eligible funding applicant or external stakeholder should receive less favourable treatment on the grounds of gender, marital status, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, race, colour, nationality, ethnicity or national origins, religion or similar philosophical belief, spent criminal conviction, age or disability. Equally, all proposals will be assessed on equal terms, regardless of the sex, age and/or ethnicity of the applicant. Proposals will, therefore, be assessed and graded on their merits, in accordance with the criteria and the aims and objectives set for each call for funding.

### **Safeguarding decision making**

We are committed to ensuring that those who make funding decisions recognise the factors that introduce risk into the decision making process. To do this, it is important to be aware of and take steps to remove any impact of unintentional bias in our processes, behaviours and culture. We know that pressure to make decisions, time pressures, high cognitive load and tiredness all create conditions that introduce the risk of unintentional bias.

To minimise these risks please consider the following:

- All applications must be assessed on equal terms and objectively assessed on their merits using the evaluation form
- Decisions must be based on all the information provided
- Question and challenge cultural stereotypes and bias
- Be aware that working with a high cognitive load, with time pressures and the need to make quick decisions, creates conditions for bias
- Try to slow down the speed of your decision making, allowing sufficient time considering each application
- Reconsider the reasons for your decisions, recognising that they may be post-hoc justifications
- Question cultural stereotypes and be open to seeing what is new and unfamiliar
- Remember you are unlikely to be fairer and less prejudiced than the average person
- You can detect unconscious bias more easily in others than in yourself, so all panel members should feel able to call out bias when they see it

For further information, the Royal Society has issued a Briefing and video on unconscious bias: <https://royalsociety.org/topics-policy/publications/2015/unconscious-bias/>).

Proposals are submitted to the Nahrein Network in confidence and may contain confidential information and personal data belonging to the applicant (and other researchers named in the proposal). Please ensure therefore that all proposals are treated confidentially. Please ask the Administrator [nahrein@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:nahrein@ucl.ac.uk) for further guidance on confidentiality, data protection, and freedom of information.

## 2. Conflicts of interest

It is vital that peer reviewers and Management Committee members are seen to be completely impartial at all stages of the review process.

Peer reviewers or Management Committee members (including the Chair) should not take part in the assessment of any proposal where a conflict of interest is at play. If you think you might have a conflict, as per the Nahrein Network's guidance document, please inform us at [nahrein@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:nahrein@ucl.ac.uk).

If any Management Committee member is in conflict with a proposal, they will be required to leave the meeting whilst the proposal is being discussed.

## 3. Approach to assessment

In order to fully understand the quality and content of the proposals, all peer reviewers and Management Committee members must ensure their judgements are based solely on the [scheme requirements](#), the Nahrein Network's Aims and the assessment criteria for the Research Grants Scheme, as well as the information that is provided in the application form.

Reviewers and Management Committee members should not allow private knowledge of the applicant or the proposed research to influence their judgement and panellists are expected to decline invitations to review if their private views, knowledge or relations will affect the judgement of applications.

Before you start the review process:

- read the entire proposal thoroughly.
- familiarise yourself with the Nahrein Network's Aims and the scheme assessment criteria.
- contact the Nahrein Network administrator [nahrein@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:nahrein@ucl.ac.uk) if anything is unclear.

### Review

- always provide evidence to support your observations. Use only the information provided in the application form.
- take into account the information you are asked to provide under each heading or item in the scheme assessment criteria. Ensure sufficient detail is provided for each one.
- give a clear assessment of strengths and weaknesses of the proposal and indicate whether these are major or minor concerns.
- provide an evaluation of the risks associated with the project.
- contextualise the proposal that you are assessing within current work in the field, and comment on its relative importance/significance.
- be receptive to new ideas and approaches to thinking within your discipline as well as methodology.
- identify any inconsistencies and contradictions in the proposal.
- scrutinise the budget and justification of resources for appropriate level of detail and value for money
- in the case of interdisciplinary applications, assess if the different disciplines meet up in a coherent way.
- provide enough information to enable a judgement on the relative quality of this proposal compared to other applications.

### General points

You should:

- provide an impartial, objective, fair and analytical assessment of the proposal which you are reviewing.
- ensure you are providing an evaluation, not a description of the work proposed.
- ensure your grade is justified by, and consistent with, your comments.

#### 4. Grading proposals

In the scheme evaluation form, you should comment briefly on the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal, against each of the following criteria:

1. The research question / problem and context are relevant and adequately explained
2. The work is important
3. The work meets one or more of the Network's aims
4. The applicant is qualified to do this work
5. The partner organisations (where relevant) are suitable
6. The proposed methodology and project management are appropriate
7. The budget is accurate, comprehensive and only includes eligible costs
8. Ethical issues have been adequately considered
9. The risks associated with the project have been appropriately assessed
10. The proposed outputs are suitable and viable

You should score each criterion of assessment in the range 1–5, where 1 is *Poor* and 5 is *Excellent*. Please also indicate whether you consider the project to be ***fundable***, ***not fundable*** or ***fundable after revision***.

- Please submit your completed evaluation forms to [nahrein@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:nahrein@ucl.ac.uk) by the agreed deadline ahead of the Management Committee
- The Management Committee will be guided in your evaluation and scoring in their decision-making, alongside other criteria such as the range and profile of proposals under consideration, and the amount of funding available in each round.

#### 5. The role of the Management Committee

The Nahrein Network Management Committee meets to discuss the peer review reports, make final decisions on which proposals to fund and, where necessary, to agree broad feedback for applicants.

Comments and grades will not be used outside the funding decision making process, unless they are subject to specific legal requirements or to be used as the basis of feedback.

The Management Committee also welcome peer reviewers' comments and recommendations for improving the application and assessment process for applicants and reviewers in future rounds of the scheme.

#### 6. Amendments, conditions and feedback

The Management Committee can make recommendations on individual proposals based on reviewers' comments, for example:

- **Costings:** the Committee may recommend adjustments to the costs identified in proposals prior to making awards, if the reviewers are clear that the case has not been made for the costs.
- **Conditions:** the Committee can suggest conditions, based on panellists' comments, for the Network to impose on the award. These could either be conditions that need to be met

before an award is confirmed OR a requirement that the condition be met during the undertaking of the project. Once the award holder has advised the Network that they have met the conditions imposed for the award to be granted, the Network will expect the Director or a designated Management Committee member to advise on whether they are satisfied the conditions have been met.

- Feedback: The Committee can decide to provide feedback if the application is successful and it wishes to highlight some advice from the reviewers, but where it is not significant enough to be made a condition of the award.
- The Committee may also choose to provide unsuccessful 'near miss' applications with specific feedback, in order to help them in preparing future bids.

Any feedback for both successful and unsuccessful applications should be agreed in principle by the Management Committee, providing either specific text, or a clear set of bullet points, with the final text of the feedback being agreed by the Director before being communicated back to the applicant.

## **7. Resubmission Policy**

Resubmission of unsuccessful applications is not permitted except in very particular circumstances, where the Management Committee may exceptionally decide to invite the applicant to resubmit the proposal on one further occasion.

This will happen only where the Committee identifies an application of exceptional potential and can identify specific changes to the application that could significantly enhance its competitiveness. In this case, the Committee will need to agree specific feedback — based on the reviewers' comments — to be provided to the applicant.

In order for a proposal to be invited for resubmission the Management Committee should satisfy itself that it meets all of the following criteria:

- the core research ideas and approach are original, innovative and exciting and the proposal has outstanding, transformative potential. It has clear potential to secure funding if the identified weaknesses can be satisfactorily addressed
- there should be clear potential for the revised proposal to significantly increase its overall grading and priority for funding
- the Management Committee should be confident that issues identified in deeming a proposal to be unfundable can be addressed through resubmission and that these are surmountable. This does not necessarily mean that the Committee is able to identify how this will be achieved, just that they are confident that it is possible.
- the issues should be of sufficient scale and significance that they could not have been adequately addressed through the use of conditions. Requested changes should be of sufficient scale to require the proposal to go through the full assessment process once more.
- the Management Committee must be able to provide clear guidance on the key issue or issues which need to be addressed in any resubmission.

When invited resubmissions are submitted they will be assessed in the usual way in competition with all other proposals.

Invited resubmissions should not be used:

- where the identified weaknesses relate to under-development, poor presentation or other problems relating to the preparation of the proposal, which could reasonably have been expected to be addressed in submitting a proposal of this kind.
- for proposals where the core ideas, rationale and foundations, aims and focus or overall design of the project need substantial re-working, since such radically revised proposals could be submitted as a significantly re-worked new proposal rather than as a resubmission.

## **8. Feedback on processes**

If reviewers or Management Committee members have any feedback on Nahrein Network policy, process and/or documentation for this scheme, this will be discussed in the meeting and recorded once all funding decisions have been made. Reviewers are also welcome to submit feedback via email to [nahrein@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:nahrein@ucl.ac.uk). All feedback will be formally recorded and used by the Network to inform the future development of processes.

## **9. After the Management Committee meeting**

It is vital that peer reviewers and Management Committee members do not divulge or discuss the content of applications, evaluations or funding outcomes with any individual who is not directly involved in the assessment and awarding process. **Maintaining confidentiality is paramount.**

All announcements of outcomes and funding decisions will be made by the Nahrein Network. Any peer reviewer or Management Committee member who is asked directly for feedback by applicants should refuse and advise applicants to direct all such requests to [nahrein@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:nahrein@ucl.ac.uk).

Following the meeting, you will be reminded to delete all copies of applications and evaluations that you have created, in order to maintain compliance with GDPR legislation.