

NATIONAL RESEARCH FOUNDATION

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Research Excellence Centers (REC) Program 2008 Competition

Call for Submission of Proposals

KEY DEADLINES

Expression of interest submission
Full Proposal submission

13:00, Sunday, June 15, 2008
13:00, Sunday, September 14, 2008

Terms of Reference

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All responses to this Call for Proposals will be treated in confidence and no information contained therein will be communicated to any third party without the written permission of the applicant except insofar as is specifically required for the consideration and evaluation of the proposal or as may be required under law.

National Research Foundation
RESEARCH EXCELLENCE CENTERS

Introduction

The National Research Foundation (NRF) of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) advances the national research agenda by awarding grants for research on a competitive basis in those fields of endeavour that will improve the quality of life of the citizens of the UAE.

The Research Excellence Centers (REC) program is intended to support outstanding groups of researchers in each of the UAE federal institutions of higher education, namely, United Arab Emirates University (UAEU), Zayed University (ZU) and Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT). The REC program has been designed to facilitate the clustering of outstanding researchers to carry out joint research activities in areas of importance to the UAE, while encouraging cooperation between federal institutions and with international partners.

Objectives of the REC Programme

- Create clusters of internationally-competitive researchers in the three federal institutions of higher learning.
- Exploit opportunities where the complexity of the research agenda requires the advantages of synergy, scale and shared resources that clusters of research partners can provide;
- Facilitate the development of new research partnerships and the strengthening of existing partnerships between international researchers;
- Build interdisciplinary links among researchers;
- Support excellence in research as measured by international merit review;
- Educate and train new researchers;
- Support frontier investigations across disciplines that are valuable for improving the quality of life within the UAE.

Funding

REC grants will be made for an initial period of 5 years with a possible extension of a further 5 years. In addition to the direct costs, the NRF also makes an indirect or overhead contribution to the host research bodies, which is reflected as a percentage of the direct costs (excluding equipment). Overheads are payable as a contribution to the federal institution for the indirect costs of hosting RECs and are intended to enable the federal institution to develop internationally competitive research infrastructure and support services. For the REC 2008 competition, the overhead is set at 25%.

However continuation of the grant from year to year and particularly beyond the first 5 year period will depend critically on satisfactory progress on achieving the goals of the award.

Awards will normally range up to 10 million Dirhams (direct costs) per year over the five year period. The budget requested should be appropriate to the number of participating Principal Investigators (PIs), their experience and recent track record, and the scale of the research programme to be undertaken.

Eligible costs include:

- Relevant research expenses, including personnel, equipment, consumables, collaboration, and travel costs.
- Contributions to the salaries for staff hired specifically to carry out the research programme

- Partial released time from teaching for one or more of the PIs provided this can be justified.
- Access to any necessary specialised facilities even beyond the UAE.

Applicants are asked to note that given NRF budget constraints and the importance of cooperation between institutions, it is unlikely that the Foundation will fund two REC's operating in closely related areas from different institutions. **REC applications that optimise national collaboration in a particular thematic area are, therefore, strongly encouraged.**

Eligibility

(1) REC applications must be submitted by **one** of the federal institutions listed above. There is **no limit to the number** of REC proposals that each of the federal institutions may submit. However the NRF expects to make about 6 awards in total.

(2) REC applications must have **two or more** Principal Investigators (PI) engaged as project participants to be deemed eligible. One PI should be nominated as Lead-PI, with other applicants named as co-PI's.

(3) REC applications are strongly encouraged to have partners from at least one other federal institution, and from high quality international institutions.

Principal Investigators are defined by NRF as follows:

Lead-PI and co-PI descriptions: All applicants will be expected to have a proven record of internationally recognised independent research accomplishments and to have at least three years of independent research experience beyond the Ph.D. or equivalent¹. An applicant must be a member of the academic staff of an eligible UAE federal institution. Institutional endorsement on the cover page of the application conveys that the applicant meets these criteria.

Industry and Community Involvement

The NRF encourages industry, business and community involvement in the RECs. While matching funding from industry or community partners is not required, such contributions (in cash, equipment or the time of industry, or community researchers participating in the project) will be considered important as supporting evidence of the commitment of the partners and will be taken into account in assessing the likely impact on the economic, industrial, commercial and social development of the UAE.

Intellectual Property Management

According to the NRF's Terms and Conditions any intellectual property (IP) generated by awards supported by the NRF belongs to the Research Body receiving the award. All Research Bodies are encouraged to develop IP policies consistent with international best practices to encourage patent and licensing activities by their faculty members. The NRF anticipates that if there is any business/industry involvement in the project the Research Body will work out an IP agreement between the partners. This agreement must be sent to the NRF for review within 2 months of an award being made.

¹ MD degree or demonstrated research accomplishments measurable through metrics appropriate to the field of international research such as publications in peer review journals and awards.

Proposal Review and Funding Criteria

The following National Research Foundation criteria will be applied in assessing submissions:

- Quality, significance, and relevance of the proposed research, including the potential to advance knowledge and understanding within its own field or across different fields.
- Quality, significance, and relevance of the recent research record of the proposed investigators.
- Quality, significance, and relevance of the research cluster's contribution to fields that benefit the general economic, industrial, commercial, scientific, and educational development of the UAE.
- The quality of the track record and skills of the proposed Director designate as a researcher, a leader and a manager.
- The level of cooperation demonstrated between the federal institutions.
- The level of partnerships demonstrated with high quality international research institutions.
- The potential for significant added-value (in terms of outputs, outcomes and impact) arising from funding the proposed research activities as a center rather than a set of individual research grants – i.e. the “whole being greater than the sum of the parts”.
- The involvement of business and/or industry and/or community in the project, especially the provision of matching funds.
- The availability of current and future NRF funds.
- The relative academic and strategic merits of other proposals.

Application Process

Applicants are required to submit the following documentation;

- (1) Expression of Interest (2-page project outline)
- (2) Full Proposal

(1) Expression of Interest

Applicants must register their intention to participate in the competition by submitting a brief Expression of Interest (EoI) document to the NRF. EoIs are for information and planning purposes only and will not be used to eliminate applicants from the competition.

However, only applicants that submit an EoI will be eligible to submit a full proposal.

Expressions of Interest should take the form of a **two page** description of the applicant's vision for the proposed REC. This document should include the following information:

- Title of the Project.
- Name of Principal Investigator (PI).
- Affiliation of PI and appropriate contact information including: email, telephone numbers, department telephone.
- Names of collaborators/co-PIs and their affiliations.
- Abstract describing briefly the subject matter of the research proposed to be undertaken by the REC, its importance and potential applications, if any, in 300 words or less.

- Major discipline areas: maximum four to be cited.
- Keywords: 3-5 keywords descriptive of the REC's core work proposed.
- A brief description (maximum 250 words) of the potential impact of this REC on the UAE.

The deadline for receipt of Expressions of Interest is **13:00, Sunday, June 15, 2008**.

Submissions should be submitted electronically to REC2008@nrf.ac

2) Full Proposal Description

The full proposal will consist of a document containing the following information;

- Description of the research to be undertaken (maximum length 15 pages)
(Must demonstrate value-added above individual research applications)
The proposal must address the following five questions in describing the research plan:
 1. What major research challenge(s) will the center address? (i.e. What outcomes of the research are expected? How will the different research projects and strands contribute to the larger mission of the center?)
 2. Why is this research challenge significant?
 3. How will the problem(s) be addressed? This section should include individual project plans and the proposed management structure of the REC.
 4. What is the evidence, based on their track record, that the team assembled can carry out the proposed research plan?
 5. What is the expected value of this research to the quality of life within the UAE?
- Description of the partnerships between UAE institutions, including any industry², community, or other stakeholders, and the role each will play in the research carried out by the REC (2 pages maximum).
- Description of the international partnerships involved in the REC, including any international industry, community, or other stakeholders, and the role each of the international partners will play in the research carried out. **Evidence of the commitment of the international partners** should be presented. (3 pages maximum)
- CV's of all PI's.
Lead-PI; 3 pages; Co-PI's and industry, or community lead; no more than 2 pages each
- Outline of budget with justification (2 pages maximum)
- Full details of any cost share, including signed letters of commitment from the partners, clearly stating their contribution to the center's activities.

Note. If any of the page limits are exceeded, the proposal will be declared to be invalid and will not be considered further.

Full Proposal Review Process

The Full Proposal review process will utilize postal reviewers, and panels of experts who will meet in the UAE.

Following postal reviews from international experts, panels of international experts will be formed from peers with expertise in the substantive areas of the proposed REC. NRF

² Note that while the NRF makes every effort to ensure the confidentiality of this process, industrial partners should take care not to reveal any strategically sensitive or proprietary company information.

program officers will select these reviewers. Each proposal will be reviewed by a number of panellists and discussed by the full panel. The full panel will make recommendations to the Director of the NRF.

Some or all of the applicants, accompanied by a small team of their choosing (e.g. the Director designate if different from the applicant, representatives of academic and industry partners) **will be invited to meet with the panel** in late October or early November. More details of these interviews will be made available in the middle of October.

Applicants, whether successful or not, will receive anonymous copies of all reviews including postal and panel reviews at the conclusion of the process.

Deadlines

Expressions of Interest must be received by the NRF no later than **13:00 on Sunday, June 15, 2008**.

Full proposal submissions must be received by **13:00 on Sunday, Sept 14, 2008**. **Applications must be received at NRF by the deadlines or they will not be considered further in this round.**

Submission

Expression of Interest documents should be submitted via email to REC2008@NRF.ae. Submissions should be made on behalf of prospective clusters by the **Research Office of the lead-PI's institution** on behalf of the applicants.

Full proposal applications must be submitted electronically. More advice on exactly how to do this will be provided to the applicants by early September.

Full proposals will only be accepted with a fully completed original cover sheet which has been stamped and signed by the appropriate Research Body signatory authority.

Questions

Before approaching the NRF with questions, please check the NRF website for Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), which should be available on the NRF web-site from June 15th 2008. Contact information for other questions will be provided by June 15th 2008.

Subsequent Steps

The expectation is that Full proposals will be reviewed during October and November 2008 and an announcement of awards will be made before the end of December, 2008. The start date for all awards will be January 1st, 2009.