Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) GRADUATE RESEARCH GRANTS (GRG) CALL FOR PROPOSALS

For more information on RUFORUM, please visit www.ruforum.org

Call ID: RU/CGS/GRG/30/03/14
PROPOSAL DEADLINE: 30th March 2014
For selection in June 2014

This is to announce the Fifth Call for Proposals of the RUFORUM Graduate Research Grants (GRG). Twenty (20) projects will be selected for funding. The purpose of the Call is to support capacity building at graduate level and to link universities more closely with rural communities and with research, extension and development agencies. For further information please refer to the Competitive Grants Manual (visit www.ruforum.org). The CGS Manual provides guidelines and other details on how to respond to Calls for proposals.

This is an open call for GRG participatory action research project proposals that are in line with the broad thematic area “Innovation for sustainable crop-livestock systems within value chains that improve smallholder incomes” and which clearly meet identified demand. The lead applicant must be from an eligible RUFORUM Member University (the funding for this Call excludes some of our members, see list below to determine if your university is eligible¹). Universities not eligible for the award of grants are encouraged to participate by twinning with eligible member institutions.

TIME FRAME for Call ID RU/CGS/GRG/30/03/14
1. Deadline for Proposal submission to RUFORUM Secretariat by 30 March, 2014
2. Compliance Review and send to External Reviewers by 15 April, 2014
3. External Reviewers to return proposals with comments to Secretariat by latest 15 May, 2014
4. Secretariat to compile proposals for review by Technical Committee by 16 – 23rd May, 2014
5. Technical Committee meeting to be held 29-31 May, 2014
6. Results from the selection will be communicated to PIs by end June, 2014.

THE RUFORUM GRADUATE RESEARCH GRANT (GRG) AWARD PROCESS
SUMMARY OF GENERAL INFORMATION
(Applicants with difficult internet access please note that these documents are available on CD in the Principals/Deans office at all member universities)

¹ The following RUFORUM member universities are not eligible, because of funder restrictions to respond to this call: Africa University, Universite’ Catholique de Bukavu, University of Gezira, Kordofan University and Uganda Martyrs University.
Calls for Proposals

Calls for proposals are posted on the RUFORUM website (www.ruforum.org) but are also sent via email to all the member universities. For the preparation of submissions all Applicants should refer to the Competitive Grants Manual and to GEAR.

NON COMPLIANCE WITH THE GUIDELINES IN THE COMPETITIVE GRANTS MANUAL WILL LEAD TO DISQUALIFICATION.

Proposal submission

1. The grants are for up to a maximum of US$65,000 over 2 years with full funding for at least 2 M.Sc students in each project (and should include 4 undergraduate interns acting as their research assistants during one vacation). Pre-proposal (preparatory) grants are not funded.

2. The grants are to support participatory action research and training of MSc students.

3. Each grant will have one Principal Investigator working in collaboration with other department/faculty/university members, partner institutions and the two graduate students who will form the core focus of the research.

4. The RUFORUM Technical Committee is responsible for selecting proposals and approving the grants after an external review process. Members of the Technical Committee are not eligible to apply as Principal Investigators but may participate as co-researchers/ supervisors. Technical Committee members will not participate in deliberations while proposals from their own institutions are being tabled.

5. Under the GRG, up to a maximum institutional administrative support fee of 5%.

Eligibility and Compliance:

1. The Principal Investigators (PI) must be Ph.D holders (or in exceptional cases, a full Professor without PhD) on full time employment in any one of the eligible RUFORUM member universities (see list attached to this Call).

2. Applicants may not participate if they have pending accounting of RUFORUM funds or projects. Applicants who do not currently hold a RUFORUM Grant may be considered on priority basis.

3. Proposals must be received by 30th March 2014 to be considered eligible.

4. All applications must be channelled through their respective University offices (usually the Deans or Principals). The Dean/ Principal is required to provide a signed covering letter (scanned copy) indicating that the proposals have undergone internal review and received approval within their respective institutions.

5. The research should be participatory and demonstrate its relevance and/or response to demand. It must have a monitoring and evaluation component and a dissemination strategy for the results of the research. These must all be specific to the particular issues being researched by the two students. The research activities for each of the two students must be separately and clearly specified.

6. There must be partnerships with other institutions, faculties and/or departments, whether local, regional or international. Partners may include private universities, government departments, local and international research centres, NGOs, community or farmer organisations, private sector, and development agencies or other relevant institutions. Letters from each partner, indicating their role, must be submitted.

7. Only proposals that comply with the budget limit and duration of the project and are achievable within the time limit will be considered.

8. The proposal should be no more than 10 pages (A4, 12-point Times New Roman, single spaced with 1 inch (2.54cm) margins on either side) and follow the proposal writing guidelines contained within the CGS Manual.
Proposal review
The proposals go through an internal university review, a Secretariat compliance review, external review, and Technical Committee selection.

The Internal Review
To help to ensure high quality of the proposals put forward for funding, each proposal must be internally reviewed by the submitting Department or Faculty, normally through faculty peer review teams. The university will be held to account for the quality of proposals being submitted including issues of IPR (see RUFORUM IPR policy at www.ruforum.org).

Compliance
Submitted proposals will be screened by the RUFORUM Secretariat to ensure that they adhere to the compliance criteria provided above and the guidelines in the CGS Manual. Non-compliant proposals will be rejected. Compliant proposals will be sent out by the Secretariat for external review.

The External Review Process
All proposals will be reviewed by at least two, and usually three external reviewers.

Criteria for external reviewers evaluating proposals
1. Overall project design and quality, including write-up
2. Appropriateness/relevance and contribution to RUFORUM objectives
3. Participatory action research for development
4. Graduate students research activities clearly defined
5. Feasibility: can the M.Sc students achieve this in the time available and is it of the expected standard for the level
6. Good conceptual framework and clearly defined hypotheses
7. Clear identification of achievable research issues, objectives and research methods
8. Evidence of a good understanding of the literature, rationale for the particular project and the theoretical basis for the research
9. Evidence of good understanding of the applicable research approach and methodology
10. Contribution to scientific knowledge and methods
11. Clear, simple, monitoring and evaluation incorporated in the project
12. Clearly outlined and achievable dissemination activities articulated

RUFORUM relies on the professional expertise, experience and judgment of the reviewers. The emphasis for the reviewers is on the technical soundness of the proposal and its contribution to RUFORUM’s goal of producing relevant, high quality graduate students.

Reviewers should be objectively critical while at the same time offering suggestions for improving the proposals, even for those being recommended for major revision or rejection. An important component of the process is the learning and feedback received by all who participate.

The reviewers will classify the proposals into:
A. Accept as presented
B. Accept with minor revisions
C. Accept with major revision
D. Reject

Criteria for selection and ranking by Technical Committee
1. Good external reviews
2. Clear articulation of problem/hypotheses and evidence of quality approach to research
3. Realistic timeline and budgets and achievable objectives (not over-ambitious)
4. Clearly defined role of the graduate students and relationship with client groups, supervisors and partners

5. Participatory, action oriented research for rural development will be prioritised and any pure science enquiry will require strong motivation

6. Alignment with RUFORUM goals and core values
   a. Proposals with recognition and steps to promote women and/or marginalised groups will receive some preference
   b. Proposals that are inter-disciplinary will receive some preference as will relevance, potential for subsequent internships, promoting sustainability and/or scaling up, and bringing new dimensions (value addition).
   c. Response to demand by farmers/rural communities/governments/civil society
   d. Partnership and the effective integration of partners in the process

7. Evidence of systems for internal monitoring and evaluation of the ongoing research

8. Clear Results Framework and accountability to RUFORUM on expenditures and results

9. Clearly outlined and achievable dissemination plan.

The Technical Committee will select 70% of the proposals strictly on merit based on reviewers’ comments and provided they conform to the criteria for the Technical Committee. The remaining 30% of projects selected for funding will take into account under-representation with respect to gender, university, discipline and geographic area.

**Grants awarded**
Grant letters are prepared for each approved proposal and sent to the relevant Vice Chancellor, with a copy to the Dean and the Principal Investigator. The grant award letter specifies the amount of the grant, purpose and responsibility of the university in monitoring the use of the grant funds and reporting requirements. Funds are only disbursed after full commitment through signature by the respective University Senior Official. Grants awarded are published in the RUFORUM News and are posted in the RUFORUM website (www.ruforum.org).

**Student recruitment**
Once the proposal has been approved, the respective university, through its established procedures, recruits the graduate students. The names of students recruited and their biodata must be submitted to the Secretariat as soon as the universities have selected the students. The students will be expected to constitute themselves into groups within respective universities and across universities and become actively involved in RUFORUM activities which include retreats, workshops, seminars and conferences.

**Student mentorship**
The PIs of funded projects and their partners are expected to form mentorship consortia for their students within and across universities and partner institutions. On completion, all students are admitted into the RUFORUM Alumni network.

**Reporting requirements**
PIs are required to submit half-yearly progress reports (narrative and financial) to allow for close monitoring by RUFORUM Secretariat’s Grants and M&E Units. In addition, students are expected to produce brief quarterly progress reports to the PI. Two months after termination of each grant, the PIs must submit a substantive report, detailing outputs and or outcomes of the project. No-cost project extensions may be requested by the PI, but must be accompanied by satisfactory progress and financial reports.
Accounting of funds must be timely. If accounting of funds is not received within the authorized period, RUFORUM suspends consideration of proposals from that university and any other remittance of funds to that university, until satisfactory account statements and reports have been received and approved by the Secretariat.

PIs are required to submit an electronic copy of all student theses and all publications to the Secretariat whenever these become available.

**Proposal Submission**

A soft copy of the complete application package must be submitted by email (all supporting documents, including from collaborators must be included in the same email from the PI). It is recommended that you zip the files into one folder to attach. The file name on the actual proposal should indicate the country of research and one or two key words to identify the proposal e.g. Swazi Goat Breeding. Please do not use the name of the PI in the proposal or other file names in order to retain confidentiality. Where an applicant submits more than one proposal, each proposal **must** be sent separately. Applications should be addressed to:

**The Grants Manager**

RUFORUM Secretariat,

[Call ID: RU/CGS/GRG/30/03/2014]

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