

**Ministry of Education**  
**TERTIARY EDUCATION RESEARCH FUND (TRF)**

Administrative Guidelines  
Updated 2 March 2021

## 1. Introduction

1.1. The MOE Tertiary Education Research Fund (TRF) supports applied educational research on a competitive basis at Singapore's Institutes of Higher Learning<sup>1</sup> (IHLs) so as to fulfil the following objectives:

- a) Empower educators and institutions to actively and continuously improve teaching and learning (T&L) practices **based on reliable research and data**;
- b) Promote effective and innovative T&L practices which have the potential to improve the quality of T&L across all IHLs in Singapore.

1.2. Each grant proposal submitted should have a total project value (TPV) of between \$40,000 and \$250,000 over a duration of 2 years.

1.3. **TRF projects should have a direct impact on students' learning outcomes.** In all cases, **they should be strongly grounded in reliable research and data.** TRF projects may take on one of following forms:

### 1.3.1. Ideation or Proof of Concept Projects

These projects develop existing ideas into implementable models (e.g. synthesis of existing principles or theories to develop a curriculum/lesson for a class or division).

### 1.3.2. Translation Projects

These projects implement proven and tested ideas in new contexts (e.g. the implementation of a practice from one faculty/school to another).

### 1.3.3. Scaling Projects

These projects implement tested ideas in a larger number of sites than currently in practice (e.g. implementing an idea across the different faculties/schools in an institution).

### 1.3.4. Evaluation Projects

These projects verify the value or effectiveness of new and/or existing projects, programmes, procedures and/or interventions, as well as the overall outcome or change (e.g. how successful the implementation of an idea has been).

1.4. TRF projects allow for joint submissions from the IHLs.

## 2. Application and Approval of Project Grant

### Application

2.1. PIs and co-Is must be full-time staff of the IHLs in order to be eligible for TRF funding<sup>2</sup>. TRF funding will not be available for collaborators. PIs can choose to work with a Co-I from a different IHLs.

2.2. Similar versions or part(s) of the proposal submitted for TRF funding should not be submitted to other agencies for funding.

2.3. Prior to submission, all proposals have to be verified by the Office of Teaching and Learning (OTL) and endorsed by the Director, Office of Teaching and Learning (DTL). OTLs shall inform the PIs of the terms set out in these guidelines and ensure compliance by the applicants.

2.4. Submission of TRF proposals should be done through the IHLs. PIs should not submit individual proposals directly to MOE.

2.5. TRF funding can only be spent on research conducted by our IHLs. Unless expressly allowed by MOE, the funds or any part thereof shall not be channelled to fund research and development activities overseas.

2.6. The start date of the TRF project is the date on which the account for the project is activated. The activation of the account should be within six months of the Letter of Conveyance<sup>3</sup> to the IHLs through the President or Principal of the institution, otherwise the project approval would be considered as lapsed.

<sup>1</sup> The IHLs are National University of Singapore (NUS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore Management University (SMU), Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD), Singapore Institute of Technology (SIT), Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS), Temasek Polytechnic (TP), Nanyang Polytechnic (NYP), Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP), Republic Polytechnic (RP), Singapore Polytechnic (SP) and the Institute of Technical Education (ITE).

<sup>2</sup> Defined as a minimum commitment of 9 months per year.

<sup>3</sup> The letter of conveyance refers to the letter that MOE sends to the AUs' President after each grant call, conveying the specific budget approved for funding for each project.

- 2.7. MOE will support indirect research costs (IRC) at a flat rate of 18%<sup>4</sup> of the total qualifying direct costs. Total qualifying direct costs refer to the costs of items approved for funding in the TRF grant
- 2.8. Please refer to the general “Guidelines on the Management of Competitive R&D Grants” in Enclosure 1, which apply to the management of TRF grants.
- 2.9. Approved TRF projects will be subject to the general “Terms and Conditions of a Competitive Grant” stipulated in Enclosure 2.
- 2.10. IHLs should **ensure that there are adequate internal financial controls and processes as well as adequate cost control measures to ensure that resources are utilised prudently.**

#### Unsuccessful Applications and Re-submissions

- 2.11. Appeals for unsuccessful applications will not be entertained.
- 2.12. Proposals which have been rejected for TRF funding will not be considered in the following grant calls and OTLs should ensure that PIs do not re-submit the same proposals<sup>5</sup> for consideration.
- 2.13. Applicants whose proposals are allowed for re-submission may do so, but have to provide a point-by-point response to the Expert Panel’s comments and address any concerns raised.

### **3. Training & Education Programmes**

- 3.1. MOE may request PIs and/or the research team to participate in education-related programmes, such as:
  - (a) Presenting their research work in MOE schools and other IHLs or at a conference to be decided by MOE; or
  - (b) Supporting MOE’s initiatives in creating a practitioner-led educational research culture in schools and IHLs.

### **4. Grant Variation**

- 4.1. PIs should submit all grant variation requests through the IHLs’ OTLs, using the appropriate forms:

No.	Type of Variation	Form
1	Amendments to Projects	RGF1
2	Fund Virement	RGF2

- 4.2. PIs should refer to “Guidance for Processing Variation Requests” ([Annex A](#)) in their preparation of the variation requests to ensure that all supporting documents have been duly completed.
- 4.3. For requests that require MOE’s approval, OTLs should first evaluate the requests based on the considerations, norms and checks listed in Annex A and make recommendations for MOE’s consideration.
- 4.4. For all variation requests, MOE’s decision is final and appeals will not be considered. **Retrospective variation requests will not be allowed, unless there is compelling justification for submission of a late variation request.**

### **5. Compliance with Administrative Guidelines**

- 5.1. In the event of non-compliance with these administrative guidelines, MOE reserves the right to:
  - (a) withhold or withdraw the funding;
  - (b) disqualify the PI from subsequent TRF funding; and/or
  - (c) carry out any action as MOE deems appropriate.

<sup>4</sup> The rate of IRC funding is subject to revision at MOE’s discretion.

<sup>5</sup> Proposals will be regarded as the same if there are no substantial changes. Examples of changes that are not substantial include: (1) Rewording large parts of the application while retaining the scientific goals, objectives and/or approach, (ii) Adding/removing co-Is and collaborators, (iii) Including new preliminary data, and (iv) Deleting part of the approach, such that the subsequent application is a subset of the earlier application.

**6. Miscellaneous**

- 6.1. MOE reserves the right to change, including without limitation, modify, delete or replace the information and materials set out in this document unilaterally. MOE shall notify the IHLs in writing, enclosing the revised terms and conditions accordingly.
  
- 6.2. As and when directed by MOE, IHLs should allow an auditor appointed by MOE to carry out an audit of its financial and related processes/procedures pertaining to the utilisation of TRF grants.

**Guidance for Processing Variation Requests  
(Effective from 1 January 2020)**

S/N	Type of Request	Key considerations	Norms	Supporting Document required	Types of checks by ORE
1	Virements	The critical role of the proposed items to project outcome and the reason it was not budgeted in original proposal	Fund virement is to support the project only, not for support of "follow-on" research <sup>6</sup> .	RGF2	RGF2 is duly completed and endorsed. All supporting document attached. Check is done on whether requested item is in the approved budget and whether requested item is fundable.
		Cost-savings principle	It is possible for PI to use cost-savings within approved project cost to purchase essential new items not previously budgeted.  However, purchase must be based on needs; availability of savings is not a reason for new purchase.	Latest statement of account  Relevant quotations	Fund availability  Reasonableness of quotes by cross-referencing similar purchase or independent checks  Whether proposed purchase items are already available in Host Institution, or can be more cost-effectively leased.
		Stage of project	Compelling justifications to be provided for virement requests if project is ending in a year or less.		The PI has no outstanding annual/final reports for any MOE grants. (PIs with overdue reports are not allowed to submit variation requests.)
1 a)	Virements into Expenditure on Manpower (EOM)	If new headcount is requested, PI has to explain the staff's job scope		Job scope of additional EOM	ORE needs to assess the reasonableness of request, e.g. the job scope is not too small for the headcount. If the need is short-term, ORE needs to assess if part-time manpower is more appropriate
1 b)	Virements into EOM for Visiting Professor /Visitors <sup>7</sup>	Relevance and contribution to project outcome	The need for VP/visitors must be driven by project need (e.g. not because AU requires VP to give public lecture or other non-project activities.)	Curriculum Vitae/bio of prospective candidate	ORE needs to assess the role and expertise of the visitor.
		Track record		Job scope/deliverables of VP	ORE needs to assess reasonableness of request, e.g. the job scope is commensurate with the duration requested. Particularly, ORE needs to assess if the work can be done via email/tele-video conferencing.
		Duration of stay	The job scope and deliverables of VP must be clear for assessment of the duration required of his/her service.		
	Salary	Pay for VP must be reasonable and aligned with university's norms.			
1 c)	Virement into Equipment/OOE for New Items	Cost and useful life of equipment  Depreciation of equipment of significant value should be charged to the project for the	Depreciation of equipment costing >\$20k and which has useful life >5 years can be charged to the project for the project duration if the <b>purchase is made within 1 year from</b>	For equipment costing >\$20k and whose useful life is >5 years: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Letter of commitment to co-fund equipment</li></ul>	For equipment costing >\$20k and which has useful life >5 years, letter of commitment to co-fund equipment must be furnished from co-funders, who can be department, university or other agencies.  Considerations that the PI should address in the variation request: expected utilisation of

<sup>6</sup> An exception is for PIs whose requests for 6-month extensions to explore additional scope are approved.

<sup>7</sup> Visitors includes staff who have short-term appointments with the AU and concurrently retain full-time positions overseas. This is regardless of the job title such staff may have (e.g. Research Fellow/Visiting Research Fellow) at the AU. Also includes speakers and participants of conferences/events organised as part of the programme.

S/N	Type of Request	Key considerations	Norms	Supporting Document required	Types of checks by ORE
		project duration only. This encourages prudent purchase and fair sharing of costs by those who will stand to benefit from the equipment even after the project has ended.	<b>the project's completion date.</b>		equipment; availability of same equipment in the department or university.
2 a)	Departure <sup>8</sup> of PI/Co-I; Change of PI/Co-I	Suitability of proposed PI/Co-I	Ability of the new PI/Co-I to capture the benefits and achieve the intended objectives of the project	Information on outgoing PI/Co-I: last day of work in Institution, name of institutions he will be joining, etc.  CV of proposed new PI/Co-I/ Job scope of replacement PI/Co-I/Letter of recommendation	Application should reach MOE 3 months' in advance before PI/Co-I leaves (for contract expiry/termination cases; sabbatical or other extended leave) and as soon as practicable for resignation cases. ORE should consider working closely with HR and schools to ensure timeliness especially in submitting change of PI requests.  ORE needs to determine whether the proposed PI /Co-I meets the eligibility criteria and whether he/she is suitable and has the skills to continue and complete the research work  If in doubt, request for Letter of recommendation from current employer of proposed PI/Co-I.
		<b>Applicable to Departure of PI:</b> MOE reserves the right to terminate the grant if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No suitable replacement is found;</li> <li>Proposed PI is rejected; or</li> <li>New PI cannot achieve the necessary outcomes.</li> </ul>		<b>Applicable to Departure of PI:</b> Mitigation Plan: Department and new PI should jointly develop a mitigation plan to sustain/ resuscitate the project, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>setting new milestones/KPIs</li> <li>taking steps to ensure students' graduation is not disrupted</li> <li>committing to put in all necessary resources and time</li> </ul> The plan should be signed off by both the dean of department and the new PI.  Should the PI plan to be away for more than 3 contiguous months in a year and/or cease active involvement in the project, the PI should submit a mitigation plan to MOE at least 3 months in advance, to explain how the project will be kept on track. The AU may also wish to propose a covering PI. The mitigation plan must be endorsed by the department and DOR.	ORE needs to assess the feasibility of the mitigation plan.  Where the PI leaves the institution less than 1 year after the start of the project, ORE should explain why the PI is doing so, despite declaring that he/she has no plans to leave the university within the duration of the project when accepting the grant. Please note that change of PI requests arising from PI resignations will generally be viewed less favourably in the first year.
2 b)	Project Extension	Impact on deliverables and usefulness of final research outcome in view of the delay	To ensure currency of research, extension will be capped at 6 months	Evidence of satisfactory progress (e.g. copies of publication arising from the research, abstracts of conferences attended etc)	For extension requests that are motivated by project delays, a cap of 3 months will be applied.  MOE may consider a no-cost extension of 6 months only if the PI is able to demonstrate excellent scientific progress. Such PIs can use this extension to explore follow-on research that is beyond the original scope of the project. As a general rule of thumb, the PI should have met the key project deliverables before submitting such requests. PI must submit a 1-page write-up on the additional research to be done during the extension.
		Cost implications	Must be within approved budget.	Revised Project Implementation Schedule (Gantt Chart)	

<sup>8</sup> This includes resignations, retirement, extended no-pay leave, extended sabbatical leave as well as other instances where PI/Co-I may be considered to no longer meet the eligibility criteria.

S/N	Type of Request	Key considerations	Norms	Supporting Document required	Types of checks by ORE
2 c)	Change of scope	Change of scope to pursue different research objectives is not allowed; this should be submitted as a new proposal.		N.A.	N.A.
2 d)	Post-project Conference Travel	Timing and importance of conference		Acceptance of conference presentation/paper.	The conference presentation/paper should be accepted before the project end-date. The conference is within 3 months from the project end-date. Variation request should be submitted to MOE within a month from the date the conference presentation/paper is accepted. ORE must confirm that the conference presentation arises from work supported by the grant. DOR/HOD should explain why it is important for the PI to participate in the conference.
2 e)	Change of Autonomous University by the PI	Impact on the project		Variation request endorsed by DORs of both the original and new AU.  Transition plan, showing how the transfer will take place with minimal disruption.	ORE needs to assess the feasibility of the transition plan.
2 f)	Termination	Alternative options to termination	Other options should be explored to ensure that the best outcome is achieved with the investment already made.	Department report: Department should prepare a report that includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A review of what went wrong for the project</li> <li>• What are the alternatives to terminations and why they are not applicable in this case</li> <li>• Preventive measures to avoid future occurrence.</li> </ul> The report should be signed off by both the dean of department and the director of research.	ORE to assess the adequacy of the winding-down plan and the Department report.
	Orderly conclusion of project	A winding-down budget should be drawn up for MOE's consideration. This covers expenses necessary to effect an orderly conclusion, for a period not exceeding 3 months from the date of termination.			