HOW TO APPLY FOR IDRC FUNDING

IDRC
CANADA

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PURPOSE

How to Apply for IDRC Funding is a guide for research centres and individuals seeking support from IDRC. This applies whether that support is sought directly from IDRC or through one of the many research, programs, networks, or secretariats receiving funding from IDRC.

It contains the following sections:

- Approaching IDRC
- Evaluation of proposals
- Guidelines to completing a research proposal

How to Apply for IDRC Funding provides a comprehensive guide for researchers who are approaching IDRC for the first time and a checklist for those who are familiar with the Centre and its policies.

APPROACHING **IDRC**

This guide is designed to be used along with other IDRC documentation. Individuals or research centres interested in IDRC support should begin by familiarizing themselves with IDRC's approach and program priorities.

IDRC's development philosophy is described in its *Corporate Program Framework* and in the brochure entitled *Linking People and Ideas*. IDRC's programs are described briefly in the brochure entitled *IDRC's Current Program Initiatives*. More detail on each of IDRC's current program initiatives can be obtained in one-page briefs, which indicate the initiative's current research and activity focus. These can be obtained from IDRC headquarters or from one of IDRC's regional offices. Similar and additional information can be found on IDRC's website at <www.idrc.ca>.

Contact with a program officer in the proponent's area of interest is also recommended at an early stage to determine the closeness of fit between the proponent's area of interest and IDRC's program priorities. Alternatively, the proponent may initiate contact by sending in a "project idea" in a one- to three-page letter.

STANDARD CONTENT OF PROPOSALS

IDRC supports various types of projects, and the following guidelines will require some adaptation on a case-by-case basis. However, all proposals follow a logical pattern containing the same basic elements:

- **Problem and justification:** What is the problem for which support is being sought, and why is it important?

- **Objectives:** What are the objectives of the project against which the success or failure of the project could be assessed?

- **Methodology:** How will each of these objectives be achieved?

- **Results and dissemination:** What are the expected outputs of the research, and how will these be disseminated? What possible impacts can reasonably be anticipated on development?

- **Institution and personnel:** Who will carry out the work, and what are their qualifications for doing so?

- **Timetable and budget:** What resources and time frame are required to achieve the project's objectives?

- **Evaluation:** How will the project's achievements be evaluated?

TYPES OF PROJECTS AND
PARTNERSHIPS

IDRC supports fewer stand-alone projects from individual researchers than it once did, as it strives to achieve a critical mass of knowledge on particular topics of concern to the Centre. This requires a degree of focus and integration that is often obtained by organizing larger research programs or networks. Increasingly, this is done in collaboration with other donors.

IDRC does not generally support stand-alone requests for travel, conference participation, or training. However, partial funding for conferences is occasionally provided as part of IDRC's network-building efforts.

IDRC's principal approach is to support projects and partnerships proposed by developing-country research institutions. However, this does not exclude South-North partnerships, and Canadian institutions may propose an initiative in collaboration with one or more developing-

country partners. Researchers at Canadian universities should refer to: *A Guide for Canadian Researchers*, which can be found on IDRC's website at <www.idrc.ca/institution/guide_index_e.html>.

Partnerships involving other developed countries are most likely to be considered when funding is available from other donors, provided the partnership is seen as a means of strengthening IDRC-supported research in developing countries.

Where essential, IDRC may provide funds to help lay the groundwork for project initiatives. For example, travel funds may be available for researchers in different locations to meet and finalize their joint submission, in collaboration with an IDRC representative. In most cases, this category of funds is only available for out-of-pocket costs, not for salaries or fees.

THE ROLE OF PROGRAM OFFICERS

Proposal preparation is a time-consuming process, and IDRC pursues the process in stages. Proposals are commonly reviewed and revised several times before the final version is submitted for approval. This is done in close consultation with one or more of IDRC's program officers.

IDRC's program officers are highly qualified researchers themselves. They will act as a sounding board for the researcher's ideas, help the researcher define a problem, and advise on methodology to reach the desired objectives.

Program officers also play an entrepreneurial role in bringing together the people and resources to pursue common objectives. IDRC will often put a developing-country researcher or research institution in contact with the coordinator of an IDRC–supported network or with others working on the same theme to develop mechanisms for research collaboration.

PROJECT REVIEW AND APPROVAL

Program officers responsible for a project will consult other members of their team while the proposal is being developed.

Once a proposal is finalized, a Project Summary will be prepared. This includes the proposal itself and an appraisal section prepared by the program officer. The appraisal is done according to a standard set of criteria that evaluates a project's scientific and technical merit and its potential development impact.

The resulting document is then submitted to the team or to higher management for approval.

Many countries specify that requests for research funds from external sources need government approval. If such clearance is required and to reduce the risk of delays later on, the necessary steps can be initiated by the proponent research organization while the proposal is being processed by IDRC staff.

If the proposal is approved, IDRC sends a Memorandum of Grant Conditions (MGC) to each recipient institution. The MGC is the formal agreement between IDRC and the institution(s) sponsoring the project. It stipulates the value and purpose of the grant, the terms of its administration, the project's objectives, the rights and obligations of all participants, and the formal starting date of the project. Funds can only be released after the recipient has signed the MGC and an official project starting date has been set.

EVALUATION OF PROPOSALS

A proposal is evaluated according to a wide range of criteria that assess a project's scientific and technical merit and its potential impact on development problems. These criteria reflect both the Centre's overall objectives and the different priorities of its programs and regional offices. In a document of this length, it is impossible to list all these criteria. Funding applicants should therefore consult the Centre's corporate brochure and the program statement sheets for details on IDRC's research priorities. There are, however, some questions that are typically asked of all proposals.

DEVELOPMENT RELEVANCE

Is the proposal consistent with development goals that have been identified by policymakers or other development actors in the country or countries where the project will take place? Are the research findings likely to be applicable in developing countries or regions other than the one in which the research takes place? Does the project have the potential to influence larger development agendas? Will the execution and success of the project promote sustainable and equitable development? Will the work help to empower vulnerable or disadvantaged groups?

FIT WITH IDRC PRIORITIES

How well does the project fit within IDRC's current programs? Are there important synergies with other IDRC projects?

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL MERIT

Is the importance of the research problem convincingly demonstrated? Are the project objectives clear and easy to conceptualize in operational terms? Do these flow convincingly from analysis of the problem? Is the methodology proposed appropriate and convincing for achieving

the project's objectives? Are the budget and the timetable realistic?

CAPACITY BUILDING

Will the project contribute to the development of local research capacity? Will the recipient institution be strengthened as a result of the project? Does the project promote South–South cooperation?

GENDER CONSIDERATIONS

Do the design and methodology of the project take into account different gender roles, perspectives, interests, and priorities? Is the project's potential impact assessed from a perspective that recognizes gender inequalities and imbalances? Will data be broken down by sex? Do the project's capacity building features reflect gender considerations?

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Does the project raise any ethical issues affecting those who will be involved in the project, where there could be a negative impact on their health, right to privacy, financial circumstances, or any other matter of significance to them? What measures are suggested to ensure the research will be conducted in such a manner as to minimize any such risks and that participants will give free, informed consent to their participation?

HUMAN AND INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES

Have the proponents of the project succeeded in mobilizing the necessary collaboration and interest to ensure the success of the project and the most effective use of financial resources?

Guide to Completing a Research Proposal

Introduction

These guidelines reflect the objectives and funding criteria of all of IDRC's programs. Because of their general nature, some of the subcategories may not apply in every case.

The guidelines cover the major categories required in a proposal and address some general questions concerning the proposed structure and content of the documentation.

A proposal's maximum length can be discussed with the program officer. Generally, the Centre prefers that the total length of the research proposal, excluding appendices, not exceed 20 single-spaced pages.

Proposals may be submitted in English or in French. They can also be written in Spanish, but if they are, a summary of several pages will need to be translated into English or French at the time that the proposal is finalized. Translation services are available from IDRC for this purpose.

Project Overview

- **Title:** This should be a short phrase describing the subject of the proposal.
- **Proponent:** Provide the name of the research organization, the name of the project leader, and collaborating research organizations.
- **Estimated budget:** Give an estimate of the total cost of the project in national currency. Indicate the current exchange rate of the national currency against the Canadian dollar.

- **Estimated duration:** Indicate how many months it will take to complete the entire project, including writing and submitting the final reports.

- **Objectives:** Indicate both the general and specific objectives of the project.

- **Abstract:** Provide a summary of 150 to 300 words of the problem, how it will be studied, the expected results, and how they will be used.

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

- **Project leader:** Name the person(s) who would have the main responsibility for the technical and administrative coordination of the project. Include the project leader's title, address, work and home telephone numbers, cable/telex and fax numbers, and email address (if available). Proposals to establish a research network should include the name of the network's coordinator and the institution where the network will be headquartered.

- **Recipient institution:** Name the recipient organization that will administer the research funds. The recipient institution must be a recognized legal entity that is able to enter into contractual arrangements and assume legal obligations. Include the institution's address, telephone, cable/telex and fax numbers, and email address (if available). **Note that researchers must be affiliated with an institution to receive a grant from IDRC.**

- **Collaborating institution:** In some cases, all or part of the research may be carried out in an institution other than the recipient institution administering the funds. Give the names and addresses of any collaborating institutions.

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- **Other donor agencies (if any) funding this proposal:** Provide the names and a description of the roles of other agencies and, if known, the amount of funds they will contribute.

- **Other donor agencies (if any) to whom this proposal was submitted for independent funding:** Provide the name(s) of any other agency currently considering this proposal for funding.

- **Supporting administrative documents:** The institution's responsible officer should attach a letter of formal request for support from IDRC when the final research proposal is submitted. (The responsible officer is the person authorized to submit official requests for funding on behalf of the institution, such as the rector or president of a university, the head of a government department, or the executive officer of a nongovernmental organization.) In cases where the research leader and the responsible officer are the same, please have the responsible financial officer of the institution submit or cosign the formal request.

In cases where there has been no previous collaboration between the institution presenting the proposal and IDRC, a copy of the document certifying the legal status of the institution should be attached to the proposal. In cases where there are collaborating institutions, please submit a document certifying collaboration.

As noted earlier, many countries require that government approval be obtained for outside funding of research projects. This may apply even if that funding is not going to a government institution. Where such clearance is required, IDRC cannot fund any project until a copy of the official approval document has been submitted to the Centre.

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PROBLEM AND JUSTIFICATION

This section should normally make up between one quarter and one half of the proposal. It should describe the problem that is to be investigated and the questions that will guide the research process. Note that proper justification of the importance of the research questions to be addressed requires some sense of the likely contribution to knowledge that the research will make and its place in current debate or technological advance. Often, this can be presented in the form of research hypotheses to be tested.

This section should provide a brief overview of the literature and research done in the field related to the problem and of the gaps that the proposed research is intended to fill.

To show the importance of the problem, this section may discuss such points as:

- How the research relates to the development priorities of the country or countries concerned;
- The scientific importance of the problem;
- The magnitude of the problem and how the research results will contribute to its solution;
- The special importance of the project for vulnerable social groups; and
- The need to build up research capacity in the proposed area of research.

Note that capacity building is very often an objective in IDRC projects. Proposals should be explicit about the capacity building needs that the project will address.

If the proposal is for the second phase of a project or if the applicant has received IDRC

funding in the past for similar work, describe the results of the previous work and indicate why additional work is required.

A NOTE ON TECHNOLOGICAL RESEARCH

If one of the project's objectives is to produce a prototype of a "hard" or "soft" technology and there are reasonable expectations that it will be widely distributed and marketed, the proposal should discuss the socioeconomic implications:

- **Demand and supply:** the expected level of demand for the technology; marketing requirements; users' willingness or ability to pay; alternative sources of supply; price and quality competitiveness; input and credit availability; pricing policies.

- **Profitability:** the financial viability for entrepreneurs, farmers, or consumers; cost effectiveness relative to alternatives.

- **Social impact:** the impact on working conditions or quality of life; distribution of benefits between income classes and genders; degree and nature of local participation; effect on culture and values; long-term sustainability; the costs and benefits to society (for example, implications for government subsidies, tariff protection, pollution, taxes, skill, employment generation, savings).

OBJECTIVES

The objectives section of a proposal is typically very brief, usually a half page at most. This is because the rationale for each objective will already have been established in the previous section, while the ways of achieving the objectives should be explained in the methodology section.

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The **General objectives** provide a short statement of the development goal being pursued by the research.

The **Specific objectives** are operational in nature. They may indicate specific types of knowledge to be produced, certain audiences to be reached, and certain forms of capacity to be reinforced. These are the objectives against which the success of the project will be judged. It is important to distinguish the specific objectives from the means of achieving them, such as pursuing field work, organizing a network or a workshop, or publishing a book.

METHODOLOGY

It is best to organize the methodology to explain how each specific objective will be achieved. The proposal should provide enough detail to enable an independent scientific assessment of the proposal. Assuming that the research questions and research hypotheses to be addressed by the project have been clearly identified in the "problem and justification" section, the purpose of the methodology section is to show how these questions will be answered in the most rigorous way possible.

The methodology section deserves greater emphasis than applicants typically give to it. The proposal needs to be clear about what activities are envisaged in pursuit of each objective, and this must be done before funding is approved. Indeed, it is impossible to define the budgetary needs of the project in the absence of a solid methodology section.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The proposed research may be exploratory or highly structured, quantitative or qualitative. However, the methodology section should begin in all cases by defining the conceptual

framework and theoretical frame of reference that will guide the research. The main explanatory and dependent variables should be identified and related one to another.

USER PARTICIPATION

Participatory aspects of the project are often important. Indicate whether the ultimate users of the research results were involved in the design of the project and what role they will play in executing the project or in implementing the results.

DATA COLLECTION

Proposals should indicate what approaches and methods will be used to collect primary and secondary data and information. Provide details on available sources of secondary data or the methods to be used for the collection of primary data, such as questionnaires and group discussions. Outline the procedures for the development, pretesting, and administering of any research instruments.

If survey work is involved, give detailed information on the study area. If the research is related to human populations, information on the study population should also be provided. Include a description of the procedures for selecting the population sample and the sample size. The survey sample should reflect ethical considerations to protect confidentiality and an appropriate gender balance among surveyors or those surveyed.

If biological samples are to be collected, provide information on the number and type of samples, the method of collection, who will perform the collection, and how the samples will be transported, stored, and analyzed.

If laboratory procedures are involved, standardized procedures and protocols must be stipulated (quote relevant references). Describe new

or unique procedures in detail and specify the quality assurance procedures that will be followed.

DATA ANALYSIS

Finally, describe what types of data analysis or modeling exercises will be carried out. Describe the procedures for processing and analysing the data, including the project's needs for computer facilities.

GENDER CONSIDERATIONS

State whether gender considerations constitute an important dimension of the project in defining the important relationships of the problem or in data collection and show explicitly how the methodology will address them.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Projects that involve research on human subjects, the collection of private or personal information, or the participation of individuals in experiments must be designed in ways that protect the privacy, dignity, and integrity of those who are the subjects of research.

For projects involving research on human subjects, which raise ethical issues, IDRC requires that an independent ethical review committee, whether in the recipient institution or in the host country, must approve ethical protocols. This applies most often in health research. In these cases, please attach a document certifying that ethical approval has been given. The proposal should also provide detailed information on the ethical dimensions of the research and how these are being handled.

For projects involving the collection of corporate or personal information, the proposal should provide details on how informed consent will be obtained and how the information will be kept confidential.

For projects that involve individuals participating in an experiment (such as farmers testing a new farming practice or community members responding to group questioning), provide information on the free consent of participants and how it will be obtained. Outline how research findings will be reported back to the people concerned.

TRAINING

Identify how the project might contribute to the training of staff and whether it would be necessary for certain staff to undergo training prior to or during the project. What kinds of training would be most appropriate (e.g. formal graduate training, nonformal skills upgrading course, visits, or missions) and how it would be organized?

ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

For larger projects, or networked initiatives, coordination and decision-making processes are an essential part of the methodology, and may constitute an important part of the methodology section.

COLLABORATIVE ARRANGEMENTS WITH CANADIAN INSTITUTIONS

In the case of collaborative projects with Canadian institutions, give the reasons for collaboration with Canadian scientists. How will the cooperation between Canadian researchers and researchers in developing countries be organized? What will be the division of labour?

Results and Dissemination

Begin by defining the major outputs expected from the project, while outlining plans for disseminating or implementing the findings of the proposed research. Examples of outputs include workshops and conferences, reports and publications, new methodologies or technologies, improved research skills, and institutional reinforcement. Show how research results will be communicated to users and decision-makers.

Discuss how research results are likely to be used. Identify the immediate or intermediate users of the results and show how they will be given access to the research results. Who will ultimately benefit if the project results are appropriately used?

The expected impact of research results can be discussed in reference to some or all of the following:

- Their potential use in other settings;
- Their contribution to existing technical and scientific knowledge;
- Policy formulation and implementation;
- Development processes at the local, national, and regional levels; and
- The needs of specific target populations.

Discuss any possible obstacles to the execution of the research and to the eventual use of the results. These may include possibilities of political or economic instability, expected difficulties in securing access to data, the difficulty of coming to categorical conclusions, and the partial nature of the results for addressing specific development problems.

A Note on Intellectual Property

Research inevitably leads to the creation of intellectual property. IDRC's policy is that written

materials and documentation are owned by their creator, who also holds copyright. However, IDRC seeks the right to disseminate the information so that the benefits of the research will be circulated as widely as possible. If a technology is developed during a project, IDRC's main objective is to ensure its dissemination and utilization. Where relevant, the recipient will be asked to sign a Memorandum of Understanding which sets out the ownership and royalty regimes that will govern the project. Typically, IDRC's role is to help secure appropriate protection for intellectual property rights internationally, with the recipient having full licencing rights in all countries. Apart from recouping any costs of patenting, IDRC will receive a share of any profit only in those cases where significant revenues may be generated. It is IDRC's policy to recoup any grant given to a private sector company if the technology it develops is successful. If improved germplasm is developed in a project, IDRC requires that it be made freely available to others on the understanding that they will not subsequently try to acquire ownership rights to the material.

INSTITUTIONS AND PERSONNEL

INSTITUTIONS

Briefly describe the research institution, including its history and objectives. Similarly, provide information on collaborating agencies and those institutions or agencies that have been involved in planning the research, that will be involved in carrying it out, and that will be asked for funds. Highlight the particular strengths or past achievements of the institution.

Describe previous or ongoing support to the person, unit, or institution in the field of research related to the proposal. How might the proposed research complement the institution's existing program?

PERSONNEL

List the personnel who will be involved in carrying out the project, their roles, and their time commitments. Describe their qualifications, experience, or any other relevant information. Include the resumes of the principal professional staff.

TIMETABLE AND BUDGET

Indicate the time needed to carry out each phase of the project, as well as the project's total duration. Remember to take into account the time required for staff recruitment and equipment purchases. Indicate possible constraints in adhering to the timetable. Estimate the project's total costs, indicating the yearly contributions to be made by each institution or agency involved. Allow for inflation and indicate the level of inflation used in the estimate. All budget items must be quoted in national currencies.

The budget should be divided into two categories, the IDRC contribution and the local (recipient) contribution. The local contribution can be an estimate of "in kind" resources such as salaries or equipment. The budget estimates should be computed on an annual basis.

The following are brief descriptions of IDRC's standard budget categories. More details on budget preparation and reporting can be found in *How to Administer Projects: A Guide to IDRC's Financial Procedures.*

SALARIES

Salaries include all remuneration, allowances, and benefits paid to staff and to advisors hired for a specific project. Project advisors are those people hired for fairly long periods and paid regular sums. IDRC does not generally permit topping up of salaries for existing staff.

RESEARCH EXPENSES

Research expenses encompass services and materials (including reference materials) required to carry out the research.

CAPITAL EQUIPMENT

This category covers equipment purchased by either the recipient, or IDRC on behalf of the recipient, that has a useful life of more than one year and costs over 1,000 CAD per item.

CONFERENCES

This category covers the costs of attending project-related seminars, meetings, and conferences that may be organized by the recipient. This category does not cover the cost of conferences held specifically to disseminate IDRC research results. These activities are to be reported under Dissemination.

CONSULTANTS

This category covers all expenses related to acquiring the services of a consultant for a specific activity within the project. The consultant should provide expert professional advice to project staff. He or she usually works on a "fee for service" basis. Compared with project advisors (see Salaries), consultants are contracted for shorter periods to work on specific assignments.

TRAINING

This covers a trainee's registration and tuition fees, living and other allowances, research and training expenses, and travel costs during his or her participation in degree or diploma programs, short courses, student field work, postdoctoral training, or other scholarly activities. Training for project staff that relates to the implementation of research activities should be shown under research expenses. If the training is

for a postgraduate degree in Canada, the US, or Europe, the Centre has a standard schedule of allowable expenses.

TRAVEL

This covers costs incurred by project staff outside the local research area. (All local travel is to be reported under Research Expenses.)

DISSEMINATION

This budget category includes the costs of publication and of project-related seminars, meetings, or conferences that may be organized for the purpose of disseminating IDRC-funded research results.

SUPPORT SERVICES

Support services should only encompass those administrative costs that are not directly related to research. They can include such items as clerical, accounting, or secretarial help, general office expenses, office accommodation, rent, and utility charges.

OVERHEAD

The Centre expects the recipient to absorb the overhead or administrative costs of a project as part of its local contribution. If the recipient will not or cannot do so, IDRC will consider contributing overhead costs up to a maximum of 13% of all recipient-administered costs, excluding capital equipment costs.

COORDINATION

This category covers expenses related to the coordination of a project, whether it is a network covering recipient institutions in several countries, several institutions within a country, or several components (or subprojects) within an institution. The coordination function

involves overseeing the various components of a project to ensure that all concerned follow the same objectives and approaches, including budgetary monitoring. Note: A budget note is required for each line item in the budget. The budget notes should state exactly what is covered under the heading and the basis on which the budgeted amount was calculated.

EVALUATION

Certain projects benefit from more extensive evaluation than that corresponding to normal management and monitoring. Such cases include projects that are particularly innovative or risky, those from which significant lessons can be learned, and those that require a very high level of accountability. Indicate if the project will include an explicit evaluation component. A description of the evaluation component should:

- Identify who will use the evaluation findings and for what purpose(s);
- Focus on a few specific issues that are well defined and relate directly to the project's objectives and activities;
- Specify the methods by which data will be collected; and
- Identify the resources necessary for the evaluation.

APPENDICES

Attach any supporting documents such as maps, the resumes of personnel, or bibliographies.