

Science, Technology & Innovation Funding Authority
www.stdf.org.eg

Guide for Applicants

Second COVID-19 Pandemic Emergency Call

November (2020)

I. COVID-19 Pandemic Emergency Call (Objective)

COVID-19 emerged as an infectious disease caused by a novel virus; SARS CoV-2. The global spread of the highly infectious disease during the early months in 2020 led to the declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic by the WHO in March 11th. Egypt has been affected by the pandemic where a partial lockdown was imposed during the early months of disease proliferation in the country earlier this year.

Despite extensive international scientific efforts and global spending, specific drug treatments or effective vaccines are yet to be realized. This points at knowledge gaps in our understanding of the epidemiology, pathogenesis, clinical course including the devastating immunologic response to the virus as well as the long-term impact of infection. These constitute urgent questions to be prioritized and addressed to support healthcare providers and policy makers in taking decisions to combat the current pandemic. For example, efficient screening and diagnostic tools are urgently needed. Epidemiologic information must be continuously updated and analyzed for clinical insights.

Science, Technology and Innovation Funding Authority STDF announces the second COVID-19 Pandemic Emergency Call in response to the continuing unprecedented challenge of the global spread of SARS CoV-2 with its associated impact on health, society and economy. The aim of the call is to fund research proposals which are expected to have direct impact on the current pandemic.

A highly competitive funding opportunity for pathophysiology will be also provided within this call.

Special megaprojects with a funding of up to 30,000,000 Egyptian pounds can be also applied for.

Retrospective studies including available patients' datasets are also encouraged.

The main goals of the call are:

1. Limiting spread of infection both at individual and community level.
2. Optimizing diagnosis and management of cases
3. Improve efficiency of healthcare system to maintain delivery of healthcare services to both COVID-19 and to non-COVID-19 cases
4. Maintain psychological and social integrity. Mitigate economic impact and explore possible economic opportunities.
5. Understanding pathophysiologic mechanisms of COVID-19

II. Research topics

1. Limiting spread of infection both at individual and community level:

- a. Development and implementation of efficient screening tools (molecular, serological: antibody or antigen detection) limiting spread of infection, viral genotyping
- b. Immunological aspects and seroepidemiology.
- c. Vaccine development
- d. Epidemiological studies, modelling, nowcasting and forecasting.
- e. Non-pharmaceutical interventions.
- f. Innovation in personal protective equipment (PPEs) and disinfection

- g. Information technology in prevention and control
- h. Unconventional approaches to impose social distancing and improve public sanitation and hygiene

2. Optimizing diagnosis and management of cases:

- a. Development of accurate diagnostic tools including point of care tests (POCs)
- b. Descriptive studies including multidisciplinary approaches to manage acute and post-COVID-19 cases
- c. Clinical drug trials including drug repurposing
- d. Retrospective studies on available patients' datasets
- e. In-vitro drug studies
- f. Innovations in biomedical equipment

3. Improving efficiency of healthcare system:

- a. Medical supply chain
- b. Health system's research
- c. Crisis management

4. Maintain psychological and social integrity. Mitigate economic impact and explore possible economic opportunities:

- a. Impact of disease and non-pharmaceutical interventions on psychological and social aspects.
- b. Economic impact of the pandemic, mitigation interventions and possible opportunities.

5. Understanding pathophysiologic mechanisms of COVID-19:

For example, cellular and molecular basis of organ failures, blood clotting and inflammatory responses, underlying causes of differential pathophysiology depending on age, sex, and social statuses.

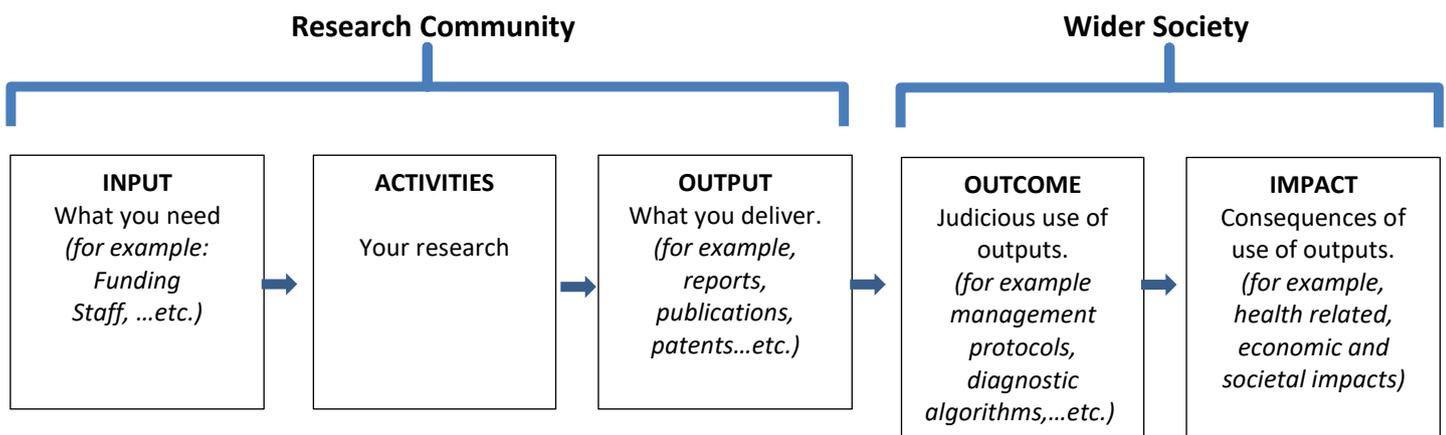
II.1 Eligibility Criteria

The call is open to any Egyptian institution, the lead institution, however, must be a higher education or research institution. Pharmaceutical and biomedical industries are allowed to join applicants from higher education and research institutions on a basis of a co-funding mechanism managed by STDF. Applicant institutions already involved in COVID-19 research or patient management are preferred. Collaborative research involving multiple institutions is also preferred. Project duration should not exceed 9 months and in exceptional cases 12 months. The pathophysiology project and the megaproject can be of up to 18 months duration given an interim report with significant outputs is submitted after 9 months.

II.2 Submission Process

All applications must be uploaded to the STDF website (www.STDF.org.eg) following required registration. Applicants are invited to submit proposals in the specified research areas of this call. The detailed proposal should be drafted according to the template and guidelines for preparing STDF proposals. Generally, the proposal should include the following sections:

- Cover Page
- Research team (Annex 1: Research team Information Table - Annex 2: CV of the principle investigator (PI) and all other members of the research team)
- Abstract written in English and Arabic
- Introduction and background information
- Objectives of the proposed work
- Description of the proposed research work including the methodology to achieve its objectives
- A clear delineation of the expected outputs and outcomes and their impact on the current pandemic either in a graphic display or tabulated. The impact on the pandemic should be rated as short-, medium- or long-term.



- Evidence of former contributions of members of the research team to the proposal's topic are needed. This may include a list of relevant publications of team members in the last five years
- Budget table (Annex 3: Budget format)
- Budget justification.
 - Facilities, software and equipment needed
 - Travels if needed.
 - Cost of organization of schools, workshops and related activities
- References
- A list of keywords (minimum 5)
- Abstracts of 5 most recent and most relevant abstracts to the proposal (even if still in preprint form)
- Appendices (any additional documents)
- Acknowledgement form
- Institutional endorsement letters together with the submitted proposal, it is preferred for the applicants to enclose:
 - A list of five internationally recognized scientists in the field of the proposed research.

II.3 Budget Estimation

Grants of up to 10,000,000 Egyptian Pounds are awarded to accepted projects in order to cover all costs required to accomplish the project during its entire period. A highly competitive funding opportunity for pathophysiology will be also provided within this call. Grants exceeding 3,000,000 Egyptian pounds are awarded only to consortia with multiple Egyptian partners.

A highly competitive funding opportunity for pathophysiology will be also provided within this call with funding up to 10,000,000.

Furthermore, megaprojects with funding up to 30,000,000 can be applied for. Successive phase 2 funding can be applied by each accepted project. A well-founded application should be submitted 2 months before project end to be eligible for the successive phase 2 funding.

II.3.1 Eligible costs (Allowable)

The eligible direct costs for the research are the costs identified as specific costs directly linked to the performance of the research. In case of clinical trials including patients, only the extra costs incurred by the research and its consequences are covered.

II.3.2 The Incentives of Team Members

Monthly incentives are granted to members of the research team, based on their role/assigned tasks and time dedicated to the project up to 25% of the project budget.

II.3.3 Travel Cost

The cost of stay in other countries is calculated according to STDF rules and regulations. Justification for travel should be provided in the proposal.

II.3.4 The Cost of Equipment and Software

The allocated amount for the purchase of equipment and software should be utilized for the purchase of new equipment, software licenses and facilities that are directly related and essential to the research project submitted. The budget format in the proposal should be signed and stamped by the PI host institution.

II.3.5 The cost of Organization of Schools and Workshops

The allocated amount will be based on a favorable description of this activity that should be directed towards the promotion of the area of research specified in the proposal. The details of the activities and their cost should be listed in the proposal.

II.3.6 Indirect Costs

A total of 10% of the total budget of the project excluding the cost of equipment might be allocated as indirect cost that are payable to the researcher(s) host institution (where the researcher(s) is/are conducting the research work). Such indirect costs are payable for the usage of facility and infrastructure of the host institution and could cover the cost and salaries of administrative work.

II.4 Evaluation Criteria

Generally speaking, the funds are awarded based on the following criteria:

- Potential impact on the current pandemic
- Proposal scientific/technological/innovative quality (shall involve, but not limited to the following: comprehensible writing, added value and novelty, relative scientific expertise of researchers, adequate methodology, budgeting and proper costing, project management;

Upon the eligibility check phase, eligible proposals are technically evaluated for final decision. Evaluation of proposals is carried out by STDF with the assistance of national / international independent experts. STDF staff ensures that the evaluation process is transparent, robust and fair, and in alignment with its rules and regulations.

II.5 Payment Procedures

When a project is approved by STDF, a contract agreement will be signed between STDF, the principle investigator (PI), and the host institute. The budget will be disbursed as installments. The number of installments depends on the duration of the project. The first installment will be disbursed at the beginning of the project. The other installments will be paid after the receipt and approval of the progress reports. The disbursement of the final installment of the project (10% of the budget) is conditioned upon the delivery of the outputs specified in the proposal in the scheduled time and will cover only the rest of the incentives and the indirect costs.

II.6 Follow Up

A- Technical Reports

Bimonthly technical progress reports should be submitted according to STDF progress reports formats. The final report of the project should be submitted no later than one month after the official end date of the project, and should follow STDF final report format together with an Achievements Report.

All submitted reports are evaluated by STDF and a feedback is sent to the project's PI and host institute. For rejected follow-up reports, STDF has the authority to impose additional follow-up and monitoring progress reports totally independent from the regular way.

If the submitted progress/final reports show that the team did not achieve the set objectives as specified in the original proposal and/or the team is performing poorly, STDF will take all measures in order to stop the project and recover the budget allocated.

B- Financial Reports

Two financial reports are requested per project signed and stamped from the institution as well as all the expenditure vouchers. The first report is at mid-term and the second is the final report. Projects of 3 months duration or less are exempted from the mid-term financial report.

III. General Remarks and Conditions

- All proposals must be uploaded to the STDF website, proposals submitted by e-mail or send as hard copies will not be considered.
- All proposals must use the exact formatting requirements for the current call given in the attached Application Form. Failure to adhere to the exact format required will result in rejecting the proposal.
- All proposals MUST be in English Language.
- The application must include a signed and stamped Endorsement letter from the institution's legal representative as shown in the Application Form.
- Same proposal should not be submitted in more than one grant. (Duplicate submission of the same proposal is not allowed).
- Each PI can only submit a maximum of two proposals until notified with the evaluation results of his/her submitted proposals.
- At any time, a contracted STDF project team member should only be participating in a maximum of 3 projects (or a maximum of 2 projects as a PI/Co-PI).
- DO NOT submit proposals previously funded either by STDF or any other funding agency. Proposals deemed to be funded by other grants will be disqualified & applicants will be banned from submitting proposals to STDF.
- Any publications delivered as a result of STDF funded proposals, should acknowledge STDF funding in the publication.
- STDF's intellectual property rules (IPR) rules and regulations in addition to STDF code of ethics are applied to all submitted proposals.
- Foreign partners are allowed in this grant only as consultants given that the relevant security approval has been obtained, and only consultants' fees are allowed for those partners.
- Equipment purchased using STDF funds must be made available to all Egyptian researchers, provided that the project work is not disrupted.
- If more than one institution is involved it has to be clearly stated which institution is in charge and the role of each partner institution has to be specified.
- Extending a project's duration is not allowed. Only under very strict justified conditions shall STDF allow project extension, and any request for project extension will affect negatively STDF future decisions regarding the performance of the research team members.
- Having members from different departments or research institutes in the same research team is allowed and encouraged.
- Conflict of interest should be avoided in any proposal application.
- All proposals will be evaluated on a competitive basis.