

Health and Medical Research Fund

Guidance Notes - Grant Application for Investigator- initiated Projects

This booklet provides the procedures that should be followed to apply for grants, manage projects and report findings to the Research Council.

Please submit application to the Research Fund Secretariat through the electronic Grant Management System (<https://rfs.fhb.gov.hk/eGMS/>)

December 2021

Preamble

This document is designed to provide background information and advice on the funding opportunities for investigator-initiated projects of the Health and Medical Research Fund (HMRF) administered by the Food and Health Bureau.

Applicants should read this document carefully in conjunction with the *Policy Statement* and the *Explanatory Notes – Grant Application for Investigator-initiated Projects* before preparing grant applications.

Queries should be addressed to the Research Fund Secretariat by email: rfs@fhb.gov.hk or by mail to –

Research Fund Secretariat
Research Office
Food and Health Bureau
9/F, Rumsey Street Multi-storey Carpark Building
2 Rumsey Street, Sheung Wan
Hong Kong

CONTENTS

Part	1	Background
	2	Applying for a Grant
	3	Standard Conditions of Grant
Appendix		
	A	Items Allowable and Unallowable for Reimbursement
	B	Financial Arrangements
	C	Policy Statement

PART 1 BACKGROUND

1.1 Fund Administration

- 1.1.1 The Research Council (RC) chaired by the Secretary for Food and Health is responsible for providing strategic steer for funding health and medical research and health promotion projects and overseeing the administration of the Health and Medical Research Fund (HMRF). The RC is supported by two arms – Expert Advisory Panels as the advisory arm, and the Referee Panel, Grant Review Board (GRB) and Grant Review Board Executive (GRBE) as the technical arm. The Research Fund Secretariat (the Secretariat) provides administrative and logistic support to the RC and their constituent boards and panels.
- 1.1.2 Details of the organisational structure of the HMRF, the roles and responsibilities, composition and terms of reference of its constituent council, panels and boards are stipulated in the *Policy Statement*.

1.2 Project Scope

- 1.2.1 The HMRF will fund investigator-initiated health and medical research as well as health promotion projects in the following broad areas -
 - (a) public health, human health and health services (e.g. primary care, non-communicable diseases, Chinese medicine, etc.);
 - (b) prevention, treatment and control of infectious diseases, in particular emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases;
 - (c) advanced medical research which applies advanced technologies including but not limited to biotechnology in medicine, use of drugs and treatments, clinical trials, virtual health such as telemedicine, etc., to facilitate the translation of knowledge generated from health and health services or infectious diseases studies into clinical practice and to inform health policy; and
 - (d) health promotion that facilitates mobilisation of local resources to promote good health and prevention of illness in the community.

Public health, human health and health services research examine the cause, treatment and prevention of the full range of diseases and conditions that affect human health and the impact of the organisation, financing and management of healthcare services on the delivery, quality, cost, access to, and outcomes of such services. Research proposals under this theme should focus on one of the three broad areas of public health, health services and Chinese medicine.

- Public health research addresses issues such as prevalence, epidemiology and surveillance of specific diseases with the aim of identifying modifiable risk factors and behaviours that can be targeted to enhance treatment and prevention and so improve population health.
- Health services research is essential to determine which interventions and services are effective and cost-effective in the local healthcare setting.

- Chinese medicine represents a locally important and culturally different way of looking at health. Research in Chinese medicine may identify unique approaches in treating and/or preventing a wide range of diseases.

Infectious diseases remain a considerable healthcare burden in Hong Kong and globally. The twin threats of newly emerging infectious diseases and the ease of cross-border travel have increased the possibility of a global pandemic and have made research into infectious diseases a priority. Research proposals should focus on infectious diseases which are prevalent in Hong Kong and neighbouring regions or areas in which the Hong Kong academic community has a competitive edge. Basic science, clinical, translational, epidemiological and health services research studies are supported.

Advanced medical research shall focus on **clinical studies** which apply advanced technologies to facilitate the translation of knowledge generated from health and health services or infectious diseases studies into clinical practice and to inform health policy. For examples, clinical trials on effectiveness of disease treatment using genome editing technologies (such as ZFNs, TALENs, and CRISPR/Cas9) and their derivative reagents as gene editing tools; clinical applications of sequencing technology for disease prognosis, diagnosis and treatment strategies; development of augmented or mixed reality approaches for drug treatments, surgical procedures, systemic therapy and radiotherapy with evaluation in clinical practices; disease diagnosis or monitoring.

Other examples which apply advanced technologies to evaluate treatments and therapeutic interventions in clinical, community or applied settings include **clinical application and evaluation of** pharmaceuticals (including small molecules, vaccines, antibodies, hormones); cellular, tissue and gene therapies (including gene therapy, stem cell therapy, in vitro fertilisation, tissue engineering, faecal microbiota transplantation); medical devices (including implantable devices, mobility aids, dressings, medical equipment and prostheses); surgical, obstetric and dental interventions (including organ and bone marrow transplantation, tissue grafts and transfusions); radiotherapy and other non-invasive therapies (including radiotherapy, microwaves, ultrasound, laser and phototherapy); psychological and behavioural approaches (including cognitive behavioural therapy, counselling therapy and social interventions), etc.

Health promotion projects should be based on scientific evidence and evaluated in a systematic way. They should include a coordinated set of activities that help people adopt healthier lifestyles by enhancing awareness, changing adverse health behaviours or creating a conducive environment that supports good health practices.

- 1.2.2 The HMRF emphasises the importance of the translational potential¹ of research findings.
- 1.2.3 Routine public health or clinical services that are provided by the Government or government funded agencies will not normally be considered for support.

¹ Translational research implements a "bench-to-bedside" model, from laboratory experiments through clinical trials to point-of-care patient applications to create improvements in medical practice and meaningful health outcomes. (Source: *What is Translational Science? Tufts Clinical and Translational Science Institute, Boston, MA, USA*. <https://www.tuftscsi.org/about-us/what-is-translational-science/>).

- 1.2.4 The project scope described in 1.2.1 and 1.2.2 may be subject to change and refinement by the RC. The RC will also determine the thematic priorities, currently under the following five broad themes: Infectious Diseases; Primary Healthcare and Non-communicable Disease; Mental Health; Cancer; and Implementation Science, which will be announced concurrently with the open call for applications and publicised on the Secretariat's website at <https://rfs.fhb.gov.hk>.

PART 2 APPLYING FOR A GRANT

2.1 Grants

- 2.1.1 The HMRF supports quality health and medical related research, in particular those applied research that would have impact in changing health policies, clinical practices, or behaviour of people with ultimate aim in improving the health of the population. The HMRF also supports evidence-based health promotion projects in the community. The normal grant ceiling for an investigator-initiated project is HK\$1,500,000. Higher grants may be awarded where justified.
- 2.1.2 The threshold of mini-grant has been raised from HK\$100,000 to HK\$500,000 and renamed as **seed grant** so that larger-scale pilot studies such as those evaluating trialability and scalability for future implementation or small-scale research with achievable objectives can be conducted. Examples include small clinical trials, feasibility studies for future clinical trials, validation of screening tools / diagnostic frameworks, epidemiological modelling of infectious or non-communicable diseases, cost-effectiveness studies, and analysis of prospective / retrospective clinical data, etc. Studies may be conducted in clinical, community or applied settings with a small sample size for preparation of a large-scale research with full sample size in future. For example, clinical validation of a diagnostic tool with tests for acceptability and feasibility; evaluation of clinical surveillance method for pathogens in a small community region; investigation of the prevalence of disease risk factors within a specific subject group; comparison of clinical outcomes retrospectively or prospectively, etc.
- 2.1.3 Grants are intended to cover direct costs attributable to the project **excluding** costs of premises, established academic or service staff, and sub-contracting project work without the RC's approval. In general, indirect costs of projects will not be supported. A list of allowable and unallowable items is shown in Appendix A.
- 2.1.4 Having regard to the general aim of funding a wide spectrum of project with maximum possible coverage of contemporary health care issues, the RC may give higher priority to lower cost projects in the event that scientific merits of proposals under consideration are similar.

2.2 Eligibility

- 2.2.1 In general, members of any discipline or profession in the health or health-related field can apply for funding. Grants may be awarded to tertiary institutions, hospitals, medical schools, non-profit-making organisations, registered community groups or other appropriate centres, units or services. Members of other disciplines, such as social welfare and education may also apply if the proposed project is within the ambit of the HMRF.
- 2.2.2 The principal applicant shall be based in a Hong Kong organisation throughout the project period and be employed by the administering institution at the time of submitting the application.
- 2.2.3 Individuals not employed by any administering institution and staff of Government Bureaux/Departments are not eligible to apply as principal applicants but their participation as co-applicants is acceptable.

2.3 Availability of Advice

- 2.3.1 Applicants are strongly recommended to consult the field experts to improve the feasibility of proposals, in particular clinical studies and those involving human subjects.
- 2.3.2 For advice on specific aspects of a proposal, applicants should approach the Secretariat by email: rfs@fhh.gov.hk. Detailed information about the HMRF can be found on the Secretariat's website (<https://rfs.fhh.gov.hk>).
- 2.3.3 Applicants from UGC-funded institutions should direct their inquiries to the Research Offices of the respective institutions in the first instance.
- 2.3.4 All clinical trials should be conducted according to Good Clinical Practice (GCP) guidelines covering the responsibilities and expectations of investigators, monitors, sponsors and Institutional Review Boards (IRBs). Detailed information is available from the International Conference on Harmonisation of Technical Requirements for Registration of Pharmaceuticals for Human Use (ICH) at <https://www.ich.org>.
- 2.3.5 Reporting of randomised controlled trials should conform to the Consolidated Standards of Reporting Trials (CONSORT) statement. Applicants should refer specifically to the "Checklist of information to include when reporting a randomised trial" at <http://www.consort-statement.org/>.
- 2.3.6 Reporting of randomised controlled trials involving Chinese materia medica should conform to the CONSORT for Traditional Chinese Medicine (<http://www.consort-statement.org/extensions>).
- 2.3.7 Reporting of studies involving animals should conform to The ARRIVE Guidelines (<https://arriveguidelines.org/>).

2.4 *Grant Applications*

- 2.4.1 Applications under the broad scope of health and medicine topics described in 1.2 can be submitted. **Applications addressing the thematic priorities announced in the current application round will be given higher priority for funding. The priorities areas include –**
- (a) **Infectious Diseases;**
 - (b) **Primary Healthcare and Non-communicable Disease;**
 - (c) **Mental Health;**
 - (d) **Cancer; and**
 - (e) **Implementation Science.**

The full list of thematic priorities can be found on the Secretariat's website (<https://rfs.fhb.gov.hk>).

Responsibilities of grant applicants

- 2.4.2 Each principal applicant is allowed to submit one application only (either a new or a resubmission of an application).
- 2.4.3 The principal applicant shall inform the Secretariat immediately if he/she plans to leave his/her administering institution after submission of application. Failure to do so will result in disqualification of the application.
- 2.4.4 Principal applicants and co-applicants are jointly responsible for the scientific oversight and implementation of the project. Before making a grant submission, applicants are required to read the *Explanatory Notes – Grant Application for Investigator-initiated Projects* which can be downloaded from <https://rfs.fhb.gov.hk>.
- 2.4.5 Principal applicant's track record of overdue or unacceptable report(s) of project(s) supported by the HMRF or any of its preceding funding schemes is taken into consideration when assessing a grant application. Approval for new funding will not be granted if the principal applicant has not submitted the overdue final or dissemination report.

Resubmission

- 2.4.6 Applications not supported in previous application rounds of the HMRF investigator-initiated research projects/health promotion projects meeting the following criteria should be submitted under the category of "Resubmission" –
- (a) Application rated "3" which should be revised to address all reviewers' comments in a structured and consistent manner in the resubmission.
 - (b) Application rated "2" which should be **substantially** revised to address all reviewers' comments in a structured and consistent manner in the resubmission.

The continued relevance of the application with respect to knowledge gaps, policy needs, translational value and prevailing thematic priorities at the time of resubmission will be considered. Having satisfactorily addressed reviewers' comments is not a guarantee of funding.

Applications declined by the HMRF or other funding agencies

2.4.7 Applications declined on the ground of misconduct by the HMRF (including investigator-initiated research projects/health promotion projects and Research Fellowship Scheme) or any of its preceding funding schemes, or other funding agencies (local or overseas) will not be considered.

2.4.8 **Resubmission of the rejected application is not accepted.** Applications rejected in a previous application round of the HMRF investigator-initiated research projects/health promotion projects (i.e. no rating, rated “1”, incomplete or outside of the funding scope) or Research Fellowship Scheme, or other funding agencies (local or overseas) must be submitted **as a new application with extensive changes or improvements** made to the rejected application and with full justifications. Principal applicant should provide (a) all comments raised by the funding agency; (b) the principal applicant’s responses to address these comments; (c) the revised proposal with highlights of changes made; and (d) detailed explanation and justifications if no change is made in the proposal.

Similar studies and other funding

2.4.9 **Applicants should declare any duplicate funding in the electronic Application Form.** At any time before the announcement of the funding decision of the HMRF application for investigator-initiated projects, applicants are required to notify the Secretariat immediately about –

- (a) any other similar or related application submitted to other funding agencies in addition to those listed in the electronic Application Form; and
- (b) the funding decision of any similar or related application once available.

Supplementary sponsorship

2.4.10 Supplementary sponsorship must be fully justified. Applicants shall state clearly whether any supplementary support has been/will be received from other sources, including but not limited to monetary, investigational new drugs/devices, reagents, and consumables and rental of equipment.

2.4.11 Administering institution or any of the applicants listed in Section 9, or any of the proposed personnel and sub-contractors/agencies to be engaged in the project, shall declare any actual or perceived conflict of interest, such as receiving any funding or assistance directly or indirectly from industries (including but not limited to tobacco related businesses, infant formula companies, or organisations funded by such businesses). The declaration shall include any use of the grant monies to purchase products or services from businesses owned wholly or partly by the administering institution or any of the applicants, or any of the proposed personnel and sub-contractors/agencies to be engaged in the project.

Plagiarism

2.4.12 The Principal Applicant is responsible for ensuring that the submitted grant application and all supplementary materials (where applicable) comprise **original work** and are not plagiarised (or self-plagiarised) from other sources according to the definitions in 2.4.13 and 2.4.14. Plagiarism, including self-plagiarism, is not tolerated and is considered as a type of serious misconduct.

2.4.13 Plagiarism is the appropriation or use of the work of others for example, copying sentences, paragraphs, sections or whole articles from other publications without

acknowledgement or credit. Apart from words, figures, tables, images and software, etc., can also be considered plagiarism if the source is not acknowledged.

- 2.4.14 Self-plagiarism occurs when researchers reuse their own data or previously published work without appropriate acknowledgement that the material had previously been published.
- 2.4.15 Common examples of plagiarism and self-plagiarism found in the preparation of grant applications are illustrated below:
- (a) **Example 1 (plagiarism):** The applicant copies verbatim the sentence(s) from another source in the proposal without citing the reference or giving any indication that it had been previously published by others. This is unacceptable – the source of the original text must be acknowledged; the passage should be enclosed by quotation marks to indicate that it has been cited in its entirety.
 - (b) **Example 2 (plagiarism):** The applicant copies a sentence or text from another source and makes minor editorial adjustments such as adding or removing abbreviations, changing tenses, etc. but acknowledges the original source. This is unacceptable – the acknowledgement of the original source merely indicates the text was consulted; it does not indicate that a portion has been quoted almost verbatim with only minor editorial changes. For the avoidance of doubt, the edited passage should have been enclosed in quotation marks.
 - (c) **Example 3 (plagiarism):** The applicants replicates the plan of investigation, research aims, objectives and hypotheses of another research group without acknowledgement. This is unacceptable – the research study should be original and studies conducted by others should be acknowledged clearly.
 - (d) **Example 4 (plagiarism):** One or more of the figures used in the grant application was found to have been used in a previous publication or public presentation such as a symposium or conference without acknowledgement. This is unacceptable – plagiarism can involve non-textual items such as figures, images, tables, software, etc. and prior usage should be acknowledged clearly.
 - (e) **Example 5 (self-plagiarism):** The applicant reproduces text and/or figures from his/her own previously published work in the proposal without acknowledgement. This is unacceptable – all previously published work by the applicants should be acknowledged.

Management of track records

- 2.4.16 The RC has delegated its authority to the GRBE to exercise its discretion on cases of management of track records. Failure to comply with the requirements in paragraphs 2.4.9 - 2.4.15 will lead to severe consequences including but not limited to disqualification from the current application round, debarment from applying and receiving grants from the HMRF in the capacity of principal applicant and marking of the track record of the applicants. The track records of all applicants will be taken into account when considering applications to any funds administered by the Secretariat. *The Management of Track Records of Applicants* can be downloaded from <https://rfs.fhb.gov.hk>.

2.5 *Submission of Applications*

- 2.5.1 All applications must be submitted via the electronic Grant Management System (eGMS) (<https://rfs.fhb.gov.hk/eGMS/>) by completing the electronic Application Form on or before the deadline of submission specified by the Secretariat. Principal applicants, especially those who are new to the eGMS are strongly advised to prepare their applications **well before the deadline of submission** to avoid unexpected situations.
- 2.5.2 Applications that are incomplete, inconsistent with the submission requirements, or insufficiently detailed to allow external peer review will not be processed and may result in administrative withdrawal. Applications which do not use the standard proposal template (Section 13) will be treated as incomplete.
- 2.5.3 As the HMRF emphasises the importance of the translational potential of research findings, the principal applicant is required to provide a clear explanation in simple language on how the research findings will benefit patients and/or the healthcare system such as improving patient care and/or population health, influencing clinical practice and/or health services management, or informing health policy in Hong Kong (Section 5a).
- 2.5.4 The principal applicant should **select the most relevant respective reference code of thematic priority** in the application (Section 5b). If the application is outside the thematic priorities, please select “N/A” (i.e. Not Applicable) in the Section 5b.
- 2.5.5 Application without the endorsement(s) of principal applicant, co-applicant(s), Head of Department (or Head of Agency in Non-governmental organisation (NGO)), and authorised persons on behalf of the administering institution and finance office will be treated as incomplete application and will not be considered.
- 2.5.6 Collaborative project, including collaboration with non-local organisations is encouraged. A principal applicant and **up to nine co-applicants** may work together in a project team.
- 2.5.7 Interested parties from non-academic institutions are highly recommended to collaborate with partners from academic institutions to prepare implementation science proposals.
- 2.5.8 The principal applicant should make sure that all co-applicants endorse the application as the track record for the whole project team might be adversely affected if misconduct/fraud is found. All project team members should be well aware of their participation and roles and responsibilities in the project.
- 2.5.9 Administering institutions should make sure that all applicants meet the eligibility requirements before submission of grant applications.
- 2.5.10 Provision of the ethics approvals/consent for accessing third-party data is not required at the time of submission. Principal applicants should submit such approvals/consent **within 12 weeks** (or as specified by the Secretariat) from the date of decision letters. Failure to do so will result in withdrawal of grants. Letters of exemption for non-applicable regulatory committees are not required. For details regarding Independent Ethics Committee/IRB, please refer to Section 3 of

Efficacy Guidelines (E6 – Good Clinical Practice) published by the International Council for Harmonisation at <https://www.ich.org/page/efficacy-guidelines>.

- 2.5.11 Principal applicants should ensure that the protocol/scope approved by the relevant regulatory body/IRB is the same as that approved by the HMRF.
- 2.5.12 For research proposals on clinical trials, in particular those involving the use of Chinese medicine, principal applicants are strongly advised to confirm the need for a Clinical Trial Certificate/Medicinal Test Certificate from the Department of Health as early as practicable (preferably during the submission of applications to the HMRF) to avoid delay in project commencement. If a Clinical Trial Certificate/Medicinal Test Certificate is required, failure to present a valid certificate within a specified deadline will result in withdrawal of the grant.

2.6 *Assessment Criteria*

- 2.6.1 Applications will undergo peer review process and be assessed according to the following criteria –

Health and medical research projects

- (a) Originality;
- (b) Relevance to the fund and thematic priorities;
- (c) Significance of the research questions;
- (d) Quality of scientific content;
- (e) Credibility of design and methods;
- (f) Applicability to local context; and
- (g) Translational potential/value.

Health promotion projects

- (a) Potential impact in response to the health needs of the target local community;
- (b) Scientific evidence of effectiveness of the proposed health promotion activities;
- (c) Innovation;
- (d) Relevance to thematic priorities;
- (e) Feasibility of the proposal;
- (f) Evaluation plan of programme effectiveness
- (g) Cross-sector collaboration, in particular collaboration between NGOs and tertiary institutions;
- (h) Impact and sustainability of the programme; and
- (i) Potential to build community capacity in health promotion.

- 2.6.2 The RC may at its absolute discretion invite non-local experts to participate in the second-tier peer review.

2.7 *Funding Decisions*

- 2.7.1 Applicants will normally be informed within six months of the deadline of submission whether or not their application has been successful. Information about the approved applications will be posted on the Secretariat's website at <https://rfs.fhb.gov.hk> for public inspection.
- 2.7.2 Priority will be given to principal applicants with demonstrable capability in research/project leadership. The track records of the project team as a whole will be carefully considered when assessing grant applications. Principal applicants are advised to form a project team that has the appropriate skills and experience to enable the proposed project to be conducted smoothly.
- 2.7.3 The funding decision of the RC is final.

2.8 *Project Duration and Expenditure Estimates*

- 2.8.1 Funded projects must start **within six months** from the grant approval date and should be completed within three years. Longer duration may be awarded where justified.
- 2.8.2 The "commencement date" is the first day on which the project starts regardless of whether expenditure will be incurred under the grant. Costs of work (e.g. the purchase of equipment or the first working day of a project staff) incurred before the commencement date or the writing-up of such work are **not** allowed.
- 2.8.3 Claims for reimbursement of expenditure are compared against the relevant estimation in the approved budget. The principal applicant and the administering institution should submit change request to the Secretariat for prior approval if a claim varies from the estimate.

2.9 *Reimbursement of Expenditure*

- 2.9.1 **Financial arrangements:** Details of financial arrangements are shown in [Appendix B](#).
- 2.9.2 Costs of Audited Account allowable are: (a) HK\$5,000 per project for grant amount between HK\$100,001 and HK\$1,000,000 and (b) HK\$10,000 per project for grant amount over HK\$1,000,000.
- 2.9.3 For grant amount of HK\$100,001 or above, authorised expenditure up to 80% of the grant limit is reimbursed bimonthly in arrears. Actual expenditure is compared with the relevant estimate in the approved budget. The remaining 20% is payable subject to the acceptance of a final report, a dissemination report and an audited account to the satisfaction of the RC.
- 2.9.4 For grant amount of HK\$100,000 or below, authorised expenditure up to 90% of the grant limit is reimbursed bimonthly in arrears. The remaining 10% is payable subject to the acceptance of a final report, a dissemination report and a certified financial statement for the grant to the satisfaction of the RC.

2.10 *Research Ethics / Safety Approval / Clinical Trial Certificate / Medicinal Test Certificate / Third-party Data*

- 2.10.1 The status of seeking ethics and safety approvals should be documented on the Application Form at the time of submission. The primary responsibility for seeking relevant approvals rests with the principal applicant. Written clearance from recognised ethics committee/IRB and safety approval from a designated Safety Officer, or equivalent, must be obtained prior to the commencement of the project.
- 2.10.2 As stipulated under Regulation 36B of the Pharmacy and Poisons Regulations (Cap 138A), for the purpose of conducting a clinical trial on human beings or a medicinal test on animals, a Clinical Trial Certificate/Medicinal Test Certificate issued by the Department of Health must be obtained prior to the commencement of the project.
- 2.10.3 The ethics committee/IRB determines whether or not ethics approval is required for the intended proposal.
- 2.10.4 Consent for accessing third-party data, e.g., a letter of support, must be obtained from the data owner (or their authorised representative) when access to third-party data is required by the applicants. Any fee or payment required for accessing third-party data should be clearly documented under “Other Expenses”.

PART 3 STANDARD CONDITIONS OF GRANT

This section sets out the general conditions under which the RC may offer to support investigator-initiated projects. Non-compliance with these terms and conditions may result in the suspension of the grant and/or the principal applicant's future grant applications. The specific conditions under which a grant is provided are set out in the contractual agreement.

Grants will be awarded to applications in the name of the principal applicant with the approved grant allocated to the administering institution. Both the principal applicant **and** the representative of the administering institution are required to sign a contractual agreement covering the terms and conditions of the project. A template of the agreement is available from the Secretariat's website for reference.

3.1 *General Terms and Conditions*

- 3.1.1 The project shall be carried out by or under the general direction of the person named in the Application Form as the principal applicant who shall be responsible for the scientific oversight and management of the project.
- 3.1.2 The RC will withdraw the grant if the project does not commence **within six months** from grant approval date.
- 3.1.3 The principal applicant and the administering institution are responsible for ensuring that the project is completed within the financial limits of the grant and must advise the RC immediately of any occurrence which may prejudice the completion of the project.
- 3.1.4 The administering institution shall be responsible for the provision of the basic facilities required to support the project including employment service of the required project staff, procurement of services and equipment, accounting services, etc.
- 3.1.5 The principal applicant and the administering institution shall submit interim, progress, final and dissemination reports, certified financial statements and/or audited accounts as required by the RC.
- 3.1.6 The principal applicant and the administering institution are jointly and severally responsible for ensuring compliance with all conditions contained in this section.

3.2 *Staff*

- 3.2.1 All employment under projects funded by the HMRF should observe the Laws of Hong Kong.
- 3.2.2 It is the responsibility of the administering institution to enter into contracts of employment with all persons whose salaries are reimbursed from the grant. Such contracts should provide the rate of pay normally applicable to the appropriate grades of the persons employed by that institution.

- 3.2.3 The administering institution shall comply with the relevant Ordinances such as the Employment Ordinance (Cap 57), the Employees' Compensation Ordinance (Cap 282), the Mandatory Provident Fund Schemes Ordinance (Cap 485) and the Minimum Wage Ordinance (Cap 608).

3.3 *Equipment*

- 3.3.1 Applicants should refer to the contractual agreement (Clauses 14 and 15) for complete details of the requirements related to equipment purchased under the grant. The administering institution should pay attention to the transparency and fairness in the procurement process and follow its disposal procedures properly. Where the relevant guidelines are not in place, the administering institution should adopt the *Notes on Acquisition and Disposal of Equipment Items for Institutions without Established Guidelines* which can be obtained from the Secretariat.

Risk in and Title to the Equipment

- 3.3.2 Any equipment paid by the HMRF shall be and remain the property of the administering institution and shall be in the care of, and maintained in good condition, by the administering institution.
- 3.3.3 The risk in and the legal and beneficial title to the equipment shall vest in and remain with the administering institution as and when it passes upon procurement of the equipment by the administering institution.
- 3.3.4 The administering institution (a) shall retain the legal and beneficial title to the equipment from the date of procurement of the equipment until at least two years after the closure of the project; and (b) shall not sell, lease, mortgage, charge, create any encumbrance or otherwise part with possession of the equipment or any part thereof during the period from the date of procurement of the equipment until at least two years after the closure of the project.
- 3.3.5 For any piece of equipment with unit price more than HK\$200,000, notwithstanding that the risk in and legal and beneficial title to the Equipment have passed to the administering institution, the Government may at any time within two years after the closure of the project, or at any time upon the termination of the project, direct the administering institution to deliver and hand over any or all of such equipment to the Government or Government's nominee at the administering institution's sole cost and expense. Upon service of a notice on the administering institution, the legal and beneficial title and ownership to and in that piece of equipment specified in the notice shall vest in the Government absolutely and the administering institution shall forthwith at its own cost and expense arrange physical delivery of the equipment to the Government.

Equipment List

- 3.3.6 Unless otherwise directed by the Government, the administering institution shall submit to the Government a list of equipment (i.e. inventory register) which has been procured for the purposes of the project. The inventory register should contain (a) serial number or unique stock code; (b) date of purchase; (c) location; and (d) actual value of each item of equipment purchased under the grant.

3.4 Finance

- 3.4.1 The principal applicant and the administering institution shall exercise financial control of the grant. All expenditures on the project shall be met in the first instance by the administering institution, which shall submit bimonthly claims for reimbursement to the RC. Such claims shall indicate the category of the expenditure under which they fall, which shall be consistent with Section 10 of the Application Form.
- 3.4.2 The RC shall not be bound to reimburse claims for expenditure in any category in excess of the maximum stated in the approved budget or in excess of any amended maximum which has been agreed in accordance with paragraph 3.13.
- 3.4.3 The RC shall pay claims only in respect of expenditure properly incurred during the currency of the grant (as stated in the Application Form), or as has been agreed in accordance with paragraph 3.13. The administering institution is required to provide such additional financial information as may reasonably be requested by the RC.
- 3.4.4 For grant amount exceeding HK\$100,000, the RC shall pay claims of up to 80% of the approved grant and the balance when a final report, a dissemination report and an audited account are accepted to the satisfaction of the RC.
- 3.4.5 For grant amount of HK\$100,000 or below, the RC shall pay claims of up to 90% of the approved grant and the balance when a final report, a dissemination report and a certified financial statement are accepted to the satisfaction of the RC.

3.5 Sub-Contracting

- 3.5.1 The principal applicant and the administering institution shall not sub-contract any part of the project without the prior written consent of the RC. In giving consent for the engagement of sub-contractors, the sub-contractor concerned will be required to enter into a direct covenant with the Government to indemnify the Government against any loss or damage caused. The principal applicant and the administering institution shall remain liable for the full remuneration and liability of the contractor.

3.6 Privacy, Confidentiality and Data Protection

- 3.6.1 The principal applicant and the administering institution are responsible for ensuring that the requirements of any data protection are fully observed. In particular, the principal applicant shall ensure at all times that any personal data collected in the course of the project shall be securely held and handled and that the anonymity of persons to whom the data refer shall be preserved in any report or publication.
- 3.6.2 The principal applicant and the administering institution shall adhere to the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance (Cap 486).
- 3.6.3 The personal data provided in the Application Form will be used by the RC, External Reviewers, and the GRB, the Secretariat and the relevant government

department or its authorised users for the purposes of assessing applications to the HMRF or checking of plagiarism/duplicate funding. For successful applications, such data will also be used for project monitoring, research and statistical analysis, promotion, publicity and dissemination purposes as appropriate. Contents of the submitted application set out in Sections 1 to 9 with the status of project will be made available for public access once funding approval is offered.

- 3.6.4 Applicants have the right to access and correct the personal data provided in accordance with sections 18 and 22 and Principle 6 of Schedule 1 of the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance (Cap 486). Their right of access includes the right to obtain a copy of their personal data provided in the Application Form.
- 3.6.5 Enquiries concerning the personal data collected by means of this Application Form, including access and corrections, should be addressed to –

Research Fund Secretariat
Research Office
9/F, Rumsey Street Multi-storey Carpark Building
2 Rumsey Street, Sheung Wan
Hong Kong

Email address: rfs@fhh.gov.hk
Website: <https://rfs.fhh.gov.hk>

3.7 *Ethics*

- 3.7.1 Written documentation of approval from a recognised ethics committee/IRB **must** be provided prior to commencement of any approved application. The RC reserves the right to refuse an award on ethical grounds, even if the approval of an ethics committee/IRB has been obtained. If the project involves multiple centres (e.g., Hospital Authority hospital clusters), the written approval of all relevant ethics committees/IRBs must be obtained.
- 3.7.2 Applicants shall comply with Animals (Control of Experiments) Ordinance (Cap 340) and Pharmacy and Poisons Regulations (Cap 138A) (specifically Regulation 36B Clinical Trials and Medicinal Tests), where applicable.
- 3.7.3 As stipulated under Regulation 36B of the Pharmacy and Poisons Regulations (Cap 138A), a Clinical Trial Certificate/Medicinal Test Certificate issued by the Department of Health shall be obtained prior to commencement of a clinical trial on human beings.

3.8 *Monitoring and Evaluation*

- 3.8.1 After a reasonable notice is provided by the RC to the principal applicant, an authorised member of the RC or a group appointed on its behalf must be allowed to discuss any aspect of the project with the principal applicant or the staff involved, and to inspect any equipment or other materials provided under the grant.
- 3.8.2 The principal applicant and the administering institution shall provide an interim report on a yearly basis or as may be required by the RC. Such reports must

conform to guidelines which are issued from time to time by the RC. The timing and frequency of such reports, which shall depend on the nature of the project, shall be notified to the principal applicant and the administering institution by the RC.

- 3.8.3 If after due assessment, the project is not considered to be making satisfactory progress, the RC reserves the right to discontinue the provision of financial support under the terms of the grant and may seek the return of any funds provided to date.
- 3.8.4 Within six months, or three months if the grant amount is \$100,000 or below, after the end date or within 60 days after the termination of the project, the principal applicant and the administering institution shall provide a final report and a dissemination report to the RC. The reports must conform to the guidelines which are issued from time to time by the RC.
- 3.8.5 Within the timeline as specified by the Secretariat, the principal applicant shall complete a post-completion survey to assess the outcomes and impacts of the funded project. The format of the survey shall be determined by the RC.
- 3.8.6 If any false, fictitious, under declaration, or fraudulent statements or claims are detected and subsequently substantiated after the project is approved, the principal applicant and the administering institution shall refund all grants received, and are liable for damages and losses incurred.

3.9 *Publicity of Financial Support and Objectives*

- 3.9.1 The RC, principal applicant and administering institution may publish details of the financial support and objectives of the project.

3.10 *Acknowledgement, Publication or Disclosure of Results*

- 3.10.1 The RC attaches great importance to the publication of the results of the project undertaken with the assistance of the grant. The principal applicant and administering institution shall properly acknowledge the contribution of the Government, specifically “the Health and Medical Research Fund, the Food and Health Bureau, The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region” to the project in any relevant correspondence, public announcement, advertising material, report or other material produced by, on behalf of or through the principal applicant or the administering institution in any manner relating to the project.
- 3.10.2 In addition to the presentation of interim, final and dissemination reports the principal applicant must inform the RC of any publications containing results, information or technical knowledge connected with the project and shall forward a royalty-free copy of the work to the RC. The RC will maintain a database of all published work attributed to projects funded by the HMRF (as well as its preceding funding schemes).

- 3.10.3 The RC may approach former and/or current principal applicants at intervals in order to ensure that all relevant publications and other relevant outcomes attributable to the grant have been reported.

3.11 *Intellectual Property Rights*

- 3.11.1 All rights in the results of the project shall jointly belong to the Government and the administering institution as their absolute property. This does not preclude in any way normal academic and professional use of data and documents, subject to the requirements in 3.10. Applicants should refer to the contractual agreement (Clauses 10 and 11) relating to intellectual property rights and invention.

3.12 *Commercial Application of Results*

- 3.12.1 The principal applicant and the administering institution shall inform the RC in writing of any discovery, development, application or technical knowledge arising in the course of the project which could have commercial value.
- 3.12.2 Commercial use of the project results may not be made without the prior written consent of the Government. The principal applicant and the administering institution must obtain the Government's approval in advance of any proposed discussion or negotiation with any person, company or firm with a view to commercial use or other application of such results.
- 3.12.3 The Government reserves the right to be represented in any negotiations held with a view to commercial use or application of any discovery arising from the project.

3.13 *Variation of Conditions*

- 3.13.1 No alteration, deletion or addition may be made to any of these conditions or any part of the Application Form without the **prior** agreement in writing of the RC if the change is proposed by the principal applicant and the administering institution. In particular -
- any change of substance in the objectives and methodology of the project;
 - any change of the principal applicant, co-applicants and the administering institution;
 - any change of the approved budget total for each category (Staff, Equipment, Other Expenses) of the grant given in the Application Form or the accumulated spending of any individual item within a category exceeds (a) 10% of the budget of that item or (b) the ceiling for that item as set out in the grant policy;
 - any change of the type of project staff under approved Staff budget given in the Application Form;
 - any change of the duration/commencement date/end date of the project

must be so approved. If the RC does not approve a change proposed by the principal applicant and the administering institution, the RC may cancel or renegotiate the arrangements for support of the project and may seek the return of any funds provided to date, if necessary.

3.14 *Liability*

3.14.1 Notwithstanding the provision of the grant by the Government, or the compliance by the principal applicant and the administering institution with the conditions of such grant the principal applicant and administering institution shall remain solely liable for all costs, liability or damages relating to the project and the publication of such work.

3.14.2 Without limiting 3.14.1, the principal applicant and the administering institution shall be solely responsible for claims that the project or any part thereof infringes the intellectual property or other rights of a third party.

3.15 *Conflict of Interest*

3.15.1 The principal applicant and the administering institution shall render their advice or recommendation on an impartial basis without giving favour to any particular product or service in the project. The principal applicant and the administering institution shall seek the Government's permission to all or any facts which may reasonably be considered to give rise to a situation where the financial, professional, commercial, personal or other interests of the principal applicant or the administering institution or any of their respective associates and associated persons, or any member of the Project Team (i.e. co-applicant(s)), conflict or compete, or may conflict or compete, with the principal applicant's or the administering institution's duties under the approved project.

ITEMS ALLOWABLE AND UNALLOWABLE FOR REIMBURSEMENT

1. Items Allowable

1.1 Staff costs

Funds may be requested for the salaries of project staff and other supporting staff. Staff cost (full or part-time) includes salary and mandatory provident fund of staff employed. For part-time staff, the aggregated and averaged part-time effort must meet at least the 20% threshold.

For instance, the RC is prepared to reimburse 20% of staff salary for a project or support staff provided that it is used for 20% of time on the project. When applying for reimbursement, the principal applicant should specify the particular staff to which the costs relate and the percentage of time the staff spent on the project.

The proposed project staff shall enter into **contract of employment with the administering institution**.

1.2 Facilities

1.2.1 Computer equipment, software and computing consumables

The principal applicant should provide valid justifications for purchase of software and computing equipment/facilities. Local departmental computing charges which can be assigned to the project will be considered as an allowable cost, including stationery supplies and software licences. Expenses for computing equipment specific for the project, such as notebook computers, software, etc., will be covered. Central computing facilities remain the responsibility of the administering institution.

1.2.2 Equipment

Maintenance costs, service contracts and spare parts for equipment not purchased specifically for the project but used for a significant portion of the project will be paid on a pro rata basis.

For example, a piece of equipment that is used 50% of the time for an approved project and 50% of the time for other purposes will be covered for half of the maintenance costs. When applying for maintenance costs, the principal applicant should specify the piece of equipment to which the costs relate and the percentage of time the equipment will be in use on the project.

Equipment costing less than HK\$10,000 should be charged under "Other Expenses".

- 1.3 Administrative services
 - 1.3.1 Cost of Audited Account

HK\$5,000 per project for grant amount between HK\$100,001 and HK\$1,000,000.

HK\$10,000 per project for grant amount over HK\$1,000,000.
 - 1.3.2 Administrative expenses

Costs such as printing, telephone, fax, postage, etc., are allowed where they are separately metered and can be attributed to a specific project.
- 1.4 Others
 - 1.4.1 Travel and subsistence

All reasonable costs associated with conference attendance are supported up to a maximum of HK\$10,000 (e.g., registration, travel, accommodation, subsistence and preparation of materials).

The cost of local travel for project staff to attend clinics, training sites, patients' homes, etc., for purposes directly related to the project are allowed.
 - 1.4.2 Publication costs

The cost of publishing the results of project grant up to a maximum of HK\$20,000 is allowed.
 - 1.4.3 Reference materials

Purchase of essential reference materials, e.g., textbooks downloads of articles, is an allowable cost up to a maximum of HK\$5,000.
 - 1.4.4 Incentives

The purchase of gifts, coupons, etc., as incentives/tokens of appreciation for study participants is allowed if well justified with valid reason(s). A governance system shall be in place to adequately monitor the disbursement of incentives to ensure accountability and traceability.

2. **Items Unallowable**

- 2.1 Employment of all applicants listed in Section 9 of the Application Form.
- 2.2 Employment of established academic and service staff (e.g., Assistant Professor and Post-doctoral Fellow) supported by other funds (e.g., University Grants Committee/Research Grants Council).
- 2.3 General premises costs including -
 - construction and maintenance of buildings
 - land purchase/lease
 - refurbishment/renovation/adaptation
 - basic services and utilities (including heating, lighting and communications)
 - lease/rent/rates
 - insurance
 - cleaning/pottering/security/safety
- 2.4 Cost of unspecified research/project work.
- 2.5 Cost of work incurred before the commencement of the project date, or the writing-up of such work.
- 2.6 Cost of literature surveys.
- 2.7 Remuneration of undergraduates (other than payment for vacation work under the existing award if such earnings are allowed by the administering institution).
- 2.8 Any costs associated with a research student supported by other funds (e.g., University Grants Committee/Research Grants Council). The administering institution shall ensure whether the undertaking of a research student allows to take up other duties.
- 2.9 Cost of the facilities of the administering institution to which the applicants and hired staff normally has free access.
- 2.10 Staff benefits such as gratuity, bonus, severance payment and untaken leave of staff employed.
- 2.11 All kinds of insurance costs, such as medical insurance, labour insurance, clinical trial insurance.
- 2.12 Costs for clearance/approvals/certificates from relevant ethics committees/IRBs and regulatory bodies.
- 2.13 Entertainment and overseas visits not directly related to the research/project.
- 2.14 Advertising costs for recruitment of staff.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

1. Approval of Grant

- 1.1 Approved projects are funded on actual basis with a pre-approved cash ceiling.

2. Payment of Grant

2.1 For grant amount of HK\$100,000 or below

The principal applicant and the administering institution must ensure that the expenditure incurred is within the ambit and the scope of the approved budget. A duly completed reimbursement claim form signed by principal applicant and the administering institution and the supporting documents thereof (including, for the latter, the original of all relevant invoices and receipts or, where invoices and receipts are not available for reasons reasonably accepted by the Government, all declaration of expenditure duly signed by the principal applicant and the administering institution) to request payment by the Government no more frequently than every two months from the commencement date.

The administering institution shall submit the certified financial statement **within three months** after the end date or **within 60 days** after the termination of the project, whichever is earlier.

2.2 For grant amount of HK\$100,001 or above

An annual certified financial statement must be submitted covering the 12-month period from the project commencement date. The administering institution shall submit an annual certified financial statement **within two months** following the first anniversary of the commencement date, and shall submit the audited account **within six months** after the end date or **within 60 days** after the termination of the project, whichever is earlier.

2.3 Final claim for reimbursement of expenditures

Claims for reimbursement of expenditures may only cover **the period between the commencement date and end date** of the project. A final reimbursement claim form shall be submitted together with the audited account and the final report.

POLICY STATEMENT

Health and Medical Research Fund

FOOD AND HEALTH BUREAU

Preamble

Over the past decade, the Food and Health Bureau (FHB) has provided dedicated funding support for health and medical research in two areas, namely public health & health services and control of infectious diseases. The *Health and Health Services Research Fund* (HHSRF) and the *Research Fund for the Control of Infectious Diseases* (RFCID) provided funding support specific for research in these areas over and above the general funding for local tertiary academic institutions and health and medical institutions. These funds have generated evidence-based scientific knowledge that has informed health policies and been applied to health services and clinical practices leading to improvements in population health.

Building on the successful experience of the HHSRF and RFCID, and leveraging on the expertise established to support health and medical research, in December 2011 FHB created a new **Health and Medical Research Fund** (HMRF) by consolidating the HHSRF and RFCID and expanding the funding scope to cover specific areas of advanced medical research.

In order to create synergy and provide more flexibility in the support of health and medical research and health promotion efforts, the HMRF and the *Health Care and Promotion Fund* (HCPF) were consolidated on 28 April 2017, with the HCPF renamed as *Health Care and Promotion Scheme* (HCPS).

FHB oversees the operation of the HMRF at the policy level. A Research Council has been established by the Secretary for Food and Health to oversee the research direction and administration of the Fund.

This Policy Statement lays down the overall framework and policies of the Fund. Procedures, guidance notes or any materials that assist the operation of the HMRF should be consistent with this document.

Approval of exceptions is on the discretion of the Research Council on a case-by-case basis.

Research Fund Secretariat
Research Office
Food and Health Bureau
Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government

1. OVERALL FRAMEWORK

1.1 Mission

The Health and Medical Research Fund (HMRF) aims to build research capacity and to encourage, facilitate and support health and medical research to inform health policies, improve population health, strengthen the health system, enhance healthcare practices, advance standard and quality of care, and promote clinical excellence, through generation and application of evidence-based scientific knowledge derived from local research in health and medicine. It also provides funding support to evidence-based health promotion projects that help people adopt healthier lifestyles by enhancing awareness, changing adverse health behaviours or creating a conducive environment that supports good health practices.

1.2 Scope

The HMRF will consider funding health and medical research/projects in the following areas –

- (a) public health, human health and health services (e.g. primary care, non-communicable diseases, Chinese medicine, etc.);
- (b) prevention, treatment and control of infectious diseases, in particular emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases;
- (c) advanced medical research which applies advanced technologies including but not limited to biotechnology in medicine, use of drugs and treatments, clinical trials, virtual health such as telemedicine, etc., to facilitate the translation of knowledge generated from health and health services or infectious diseases studies into clinical practice and to inform health policy; and
- (d) health promotion that facilitates mobilisation of local resources to promote good health and prevention of illness in the community.

1.3 Funding

The HMRF will support research/projects initiated by individual investigators, in addition to those commissioned by the Food and Health Bureau (FHB), to address health problems, fill scientific gaps and respond to public threats or needs. The normal grant ceiling for an investigator-initiated research project and a health promotion project is HK\$1,500,000 while that for a research fellowship award is HK\$1,200,000. Higher grants may be awarded where justified.

1.4 Thematic priorities

The HMRF will establish a focused research/health promotion agenda in which thematic priorities are formulated to guide the decision on fund allocations.

2. ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

2.1 Introduction

The Research Council chaired by the Secretary for Food and Health is responsible for providing strategic steer for funding health and medical research projects and health promotion projects, and overseeing the administration of the HMRF including the allocation of funds for approved grants. The Research Council is supported by two arms – Expert Advisory Panels as the advisory arm, and the Referee Panel, Grant Review Board and Grant Review Board Executive as the technical arm. The Research Fund Secretariat provides administrative and logistic support to the Research Council and its constituent boards and panels.

2.2 Research Council

2.2.1 **Role and Responsibilities:** The Research Council (RC) assumes fiduciary responsibility for all aspects of the administration of the HMRF and the allocation of funds for approved grants. The RC appoints members to the Expert Advisory Panels and the Grant Review Board. The funding decision of the RC is final.

2.2.2 **Composition:** The Secretary for Food and Health (SFH)/Permanent Secretary for Food and Health appoints the RC members normally for a two-year term.

2.2.3 **Terms of Reference:** The terms of reference for the RC are –

- (a) Determine research agenda and funding control mechanism of the HMRF;
- (b) Approve procedures for inviting, and criteria for vetting grant applications;
- (c) Approve standard terms and conditions for grant holders;
- (d) Approve funding allocation after peer review process;
- (e) Approve processes for the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of approved research/projects;
- (f) Establish Grant Review Board to carry out the technical work of the RC;
- (g) Disseminate key findings of funded projects; and
- (h) Supervise the management and investment of the Fund.

2.3 Expert Advisory Panels

2.3.1 **Role and Responsibilities:** The Expert Advisory Panels (EAPs) advise the RC on research policy and foci with respect to their specific areas of expertise, make recommendations to the RC on the thematic priorities for investigator-initiated studies/projects and advise the RC on strategies in promoting the adoption and integration of research findings and evidence into healthcare practice and policy.

2.3.2 **Composition:** EAP members are appointed by the RC and are expected to be local academics and experts well versed in health and medical research/health promotion research. The term of service of appointed members is normally two years.

- 2.3.3 **Terms of Reference:** The terms of reference of the EAPs are –
- (a) Advise the RC on research policy and foci under their areas of expertise; and
 - (b) Make recommendations to the RC on thematic priorities for investigator-initiated studies/projects.

2.4 Grant Review Board

2.4.1 **Role and Responsibilities:** Through the Grant Review Board (GRB) all applications to the HMRF open calls, final and dissemination reports for funded grants are subject to peer review for their scientific merit and compliance with the scope of funding. The GRB acts as the technical advisor to the RC and makes recommendations with regard to initial funding, requests for additional funds and assesses the outcomes of funded research/projects.

2.4.2 **Composition:** Members are appointed by the RC and are drawn from a wide spectrum of medical, health, social and analytical sciences. Potential members are identified through established network, publications, scientific roles and committee meetings or collaborative work. SFH nominates and appoints the GRB Chairpersons.

- 2.4.3 **Terms of Reference:** The GRB's terms of reference are –
- (a) Advise Standard Operating Procedures for the grant submission and review process, and the assessment and dissemination of final reports;
 - (b) Review and assess applications and recommend projects for funding;
 - (c) Review and assess final and dissemination reports;
 - (d) Promote the development of research in the areas of health and health services, controlling infectious diseases, advanced medicine and health promotion in the wider community;
 - (e) Monitor the progress of approved projects; and
 - (f) Monitor the financial performance of approved projects.

2.5 Grant Review Board Executive

2.5.1 **Role and Responsibilities:** The Grant Review Board Executive (GRBE) is established to assist the GRB on an *ad hoc* basis, to consider/suggest amendments to Standard Operating Procedures, deal with matters arising for funded grants, monitor grant activity, requests for additional funding or changes to the study proposal.

- 2.5.2 **Composition:**
- Grant Review Board Chairpersons
 - Members of the Grant Review Board (Optional)
 - Key Secretariat personnel

- 2.5.3 **Terms of Reference:** The terms of reference for the GRBE are –
- (a) Assess and recommend action (on behalf of the GRB) on requests for additional funds, budget revision and/or reallocation, changes to study

- design or methods, and changes to the principal applicant or administering institution;
- (b) Monitor the quality of the peer review including the assignment of referees to grants for review;
 - (c) Monitor the response of grant applicants and grant holders to requests by the GRB;
 - (d) Evaluate and advise the GRB regarding changes to the grant or final report review process; and
 - (e) Advise the Research Fund Secretariat on the monitoring of the progress of current research/projects.

2.6 Referee Panel

- 2.6.1 **Role and Responsibilities:** Individual members of the Referee Panel, according to their specific field of expertise, are selected to review grant applications for funding on the basis of scientific merit and to assess the outcomes of funded projects.
- 2.6.2 **Composition:** Local and overseas referees are identified through a variety of sources: recommendation of the GRB members, bibliographic sources such as Medline, nomination by principal applicant, the reference section of the grant proposal or through internet contacts particularly in evidence-based literature.
- 2.6.3 **Terms of Reference:** The terms of reference for the Referee Panel are –
- (a) Assess the scientific merit of submitted grant proposals in terms of
 - originality
 - scientific content
 - design and methods
 - statistical analysis
 - outcome measures
 - research ethics
 - (b) Assess the relevance of the proposal to the thematic priorities and the applicability of the research/project to the local context; and
 - (c) Assess the ‘value for money’ of the research/project as presented in the final and dissemination reports.

2.7 Research Fund Secretariat

- 2.7.1 **Role and Responsibilities:** The Research Fund Secretariat (the Secretariat) supports all the activities of the RC including executing the grant application review process, monitoring the progress and financial status of funded grants, assessing and processing requests for amendments, and disseminating final reports.
- 2.7.2 **Composition:**
- Consultant (Research Office)
 - Scientific review professionals
 - Grant management professionals

- Secretariat executives
- Other executives and supporting staff

- 2.7.3 **Terms of Reference:** The terms of reference of the Secretariat are –
- (a) Support the operations of the RC, EAPs, GRB, GRBE and Referee Panel;
and
 - (b) Maintain administrative information systems needed to support the work of the RC, GRB and GRBE.

3. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

3.1 Definition

A conflict of interest arises when a person's judgement concerning a primary interest, such as scientific knowledge, could be unduly influenced by a secondary interest, such as personal advancement or financial gain.

3.2 Disclosure or Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Financial or academic conflict of interest should be disclosed to the appropriate body (RC, GRB and the Secretariat) in a timely and transparent manner. A 2-tier reporting system is adopted –

- (a) **1st tier** – member to register interest upon appointment;
- (b) **2nd tier** – member to report to Chairperson when an actual or potential conflict of interest in any matter under consideration by the committee. Declarations of conflict interest should be made verbally during a meeting or in writing to the Chairperson. Failure to disclose conflicts of interest will result in the person's track record with the Fund being adversely affected.

3.3 Conflict of Interest and the Grant Review Board

GRB members when named as an applicant must leave the meeting and not take part in the discussion or review process. GRB members who are colleagues or associates of an applicant (e.g. head or senior member of the same department) are not normally asked to leave the meeting. However, they would not be asked to participate in the discussion but might be asked for points of clarification. This approach has been found to be acceptable and practicable.

4. CONFIDENTIALITY

- 4.1 The RC, GRB, GRBE and Secretariat will abide by internationally recognised standards of personal information in medical research and complying with the local requirements of the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance (Cap 486).
- 4.2 It is the principal applicant and administering institution's responsibility to ensure that any conditions relating to data protection in Hong Kong are observed.

5. ALLEGATION OF SCIENTIFIC MISCONDUCT

5.1 Definition

Scientific misconduct means fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, or other practices that seriously deviate from those that are commonly accepted within the scientific community for proposing, conducting, or reporting research. It does not include honest error or honest differences in interpretations or judgements of data.

5.2 Allegation of Scientific Misconduct

Allegations of scientific misconduct are, fortunately, rare but the RC takes them very seriously as part of its responsibility to the public and the scientific community. In the event of research misconduct found during the course of funded research/projects, the RC will withdraw funding support immediately.

The administering institution should have in place adequate systems to ensure the quality of research that is carried out by their staff. Effective mechanisms for identifying scientific misconduct and agreed procedures for investigating allegations of such misconduct should be clearly publicised by the administering institution.

5.3 Preparation of Grant Applications

- 5.3.1 The Principal Applicant is responsible for ensuring that the submitted grant application and all supplementary materials (where applicable) comprise **original work** and are not plagiarised (or self-plagiarised) from other sources according to the definitions in 5.3.2 and 5.3.3. Plagiarism, including self-plagiarism, is not tolerated and is considered as a type of serious misconduct.
- 5.3.2 Plagiarism is the appropriation or use of the work of others for example, copying sentences, paragraphs, sections or whole articles from other publications without acknowledgement or credit. Apart from words, figures, tables, images and software, etc., can also be considered plagiarism if the source is not acknowledged.
- 5.3.3 Self-plagiarism occurs when researchers reuse their own data or previously published work without appropriate acknowledgement that the material had previously been published.

6. ADMINISTRATIVE GUIDELINES

6.1 Grant Application

The HMRF will support studies/projects initiated by individual investigators as well as those commissioned by the FHB to build research capacity, fill knowledge gaps, support policy formulation, address specific issues, assess needs and threats, health promotion, etc.

For commissioned studies/projects, only institutions specially invited by the FHB will be eligible to submit a portfolio of research/projects for consideration.

An annual funding round will normally be issued in the fourth quarter of the year for the HMRF investigator-initiated research and health promotion projects. The Secretariat maintains an updated database of all funded grants.

6.2 Grant Review Process

6.2.1 Research applications are assessed in two stages, first by external referees, and then by the GRB according to the criteria set out below. The identity of the external referees will not be revealed to the grant applicants to protect confidentiality.

Grant review criteria –

- originality of the research topic
- relevance to the scope of funding and thematic priorities
- significance of the research question
- quality of scientific content
- credibility for study design and method
- feasibility of the intended project
- research ethics
- translational potential/value

The GRB will also take into account the past performance and track records of the grant applicant(s), research capability of the administering institution, and the proposal's value for money when considering the funding recommendation. The RC will review and endorse the funding recommendations of the GRB. The GRB will provide specific feedback for each application.

6.2.2 Health promotion applications are assessed in two stages, first by external referees, and then by the GRB according to the criteria set out below –

- relevance to the scope of funding and thematic priorities
- scientific evidence of effectiveness, impact and sustainability of the proposed health promotion activities
- impact and sustainability of the programme
- cross-sector collaboration

- potential to build community capacity in health promotion
- feasibility and justification of requested budget

The GRB will also take into account the past performance and track records of the grant applicant(s), capability of the administering institution, and the proposal's value for money when considering the funding recommendation. The RC will review and endorse the funding recommendations of the GRB. The GRB will provide specific feedback for each application.

6.3 Financial Arrangement

Commissioned Projects

Release of funds will be tied to the attainment of interim objectives of the activities and the project timelines accepted by the RC.

Investigator-initiated Research Projects and Health Promotion Projects

The RC shall pay claims of up to 80% (or 90% for grant amount of HK\$100,000 or below) of the approved grant and the balance when a final report, a dissemination report and an audited account are submitted to the satisfaction of the RC.

Only the direct costs attributable to the project will be covered by the grant allocation. The costs of premises, salaries for established academic or service staff (e.g. those funded by University Grants Committee/Research Grants Council), or overhead charges will not be supported. Limited conference expenses of up to HK\$10,000 may be included in the grant application. Approval for release of this grant has to be sought prior to making arrangement to participate in the conference.

6.4 Monitoring of Research/Project Progress

To minimise the potential failure to meet targeted aims, the GRB will implement a process for the ongoing review of funded grants. Interim reports with financial summary will be submitted yearly and reviewed by the GRB and the Secretariat.

All requests for amendments to the study/project design or methods will be subject to peer review.

The RC reserves the right to withhold funds or terminate the award at any time if the grant fails to show satisfactory performance or if the applicants are in breach of the terms and conditions of the grant stipulated in the Agreement.

6.5 Dissemination of Research/Project Results

On completion of approved projects, all grant holders must submit a final report and dissemination report to the Secretariat. The final and dissemination reports will be assessed and graded by the GRB. The RC will disseminate the outcomes of research/project funded by the HMRF. From time to time, principal applicants may be required to conduct press conferences, attend the FHB Journal Club meetings, or participate in other activities to publicise or disseminate findings from projects supported by the HMRF.