

QATAR NATIONAL RESEARCH FUND INITIATIVE RECEIVES 376 RESEARCH PROPOSALS

Written by Intiqab Rawoof

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The National Priorities Research Program (NPRP), the flagship funding program of Qatar National Research Fund (QNRF), has attracted 376 proposals for its current cycle.

The NPRP, now in its 10th annual edition, has recently been re-engineered to place greater focus on research projects that demonstrate the potential to make both a societal and a tangible economic impact on Qatar without sacrificing either scientific excellence or the advancement of knowledge.

The 376 research proposals received have come from 16 local submitting institutions, with 343 passing administrative screening to go on to QNRF's two-tier review process.

Taking into account Qatar's capacity for local research and development, QNRF, a member of Qatar Foundation Research and Development (QF R&D), has revamped the NPRP by introducing the concept of co-funding, stimulating the creation of partnerships between the academic sector and the commercial end-users of research, and promoting a culture of public-private partnership in Qatar.

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Dr. Abdul Sattar Al-Taie, Executive Director, QNRF, said: “Even while the NPRP continues to build on the success of the previous 10 years, we are constantly striving to innovate faster, cheaper, and smarter. In its updated format, the NPRP is an innovation engine, assessing, developing, and building Qatar’s capabilities to support research with the potential to make a substantial contribution to the economy. A promising indication of the strong interest shown by the commercial stakeholders, industry and government is that 57% of the proposals generated by this fresh approach are supported by a mixture of both local and international co-funding.”

During the first tier of the review process, the technical and scientific merits of each proposal are assessed by up to three international peer reviewers with strong track records in research and an appropriate mix of scientific and industrial expertise related to the theme of the proposal, generating 1,029 evaluations. A total of 200 top-quality proposals were then judged to be of sufficient merit to be shortlisted and are currently undergoing a programmatic review; the second tier of evaluation. Of those shortlisted, 40% were in the field of energy and the environment; 29% in health; 19% in information and communication technologies; and 12% in social sciences, arts, and humanities. Review panel members, who were drawn predominately from local industrial stakeholders, QF R&D specialists and international experts, will now have the task of selecting the best research projects to be funded.

“The success of the NPRP depends on the caliber of the proposals submitted, and, in its new phase, the capacity of projects to address Qatar’s national research priorities, taking partnerships with end-users and the co-funding element into consideration,” said Noor Al-Merekhi, Director of Programs, QNRF.

“QNRF has placed great emphasis on ensuring Qatar’s research community is fully aware of both why and how the NPRP has been re-engineered, in order to engage with its goals and align proposals accordingly. We are therefore extremely heartened to see the extent to which these criteria have been embraced by researchers in Qatar, and how they have focused their

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efforts on key priorities, forming collaborations, and securing expressions of co-funding interest, with no compromise on the quality of research that is the hallmark of the NPRP.”

Designed to have a wider scope of assessment in terms of the strength of a proposal’s alignment with the country’s priorities, the programmatic review also takes into account the quality of the collaboration and the co-funding commitment, the potential for a broader impact on Qatar’s commercial market, technology readiness levels, and the past performance and composition of the local research teams.

“To avoid any conflict of interest and to ensure a balanced and equitable outcome, the programmatic review follows international best practice. The final results will be announced at QNRF’s 9th Annual Forum and streamed online at a date to be confirmed during mid-June,” added Dr. Al-Taie.