

**Competitive Grant Program of the NATP**U. C. Sharma¹, Suresh Pal² and P. L. Gautam¹

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What is CGP?

The Competitive Grant Program (CGP) is a new mode of supporting research under the NATP. The purpose is to attract short-term, demand-driven, and result-oriented agricultural research projects on competitive basis. All research institutions in the country can compete for the funds to undertake research on the identified priority areas. In particular, institutions from outside the ICAR/SAU system such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private research institutions and non-agricultural public research institutions are encouraged. The key concern of the program is to improve research efficiency through interdisciplinary and inter-institutional approach. Collaborative research programs between public and private sector to fill critical research gaps, scaling up of research outputs and pilot testing of technologies are accorded high priority.

Eligibility and Funding

All scientists, below the age of 57 years, working in the public and private (profit and non-profit) research organizations can compete for the funding. International agricultural research organizations like CGIAR Centres can also apply for funds through joint research program with the Indian institution(s). But such collaboration must have specific advantage and the international institution must co-finance the program. The programs on basic, applied and adaptive research for agricultural and rural development are eligible for funding. The proposals for pilot testing of technologies and methodologies for the transfer of technologies are encouraged. However, training of research and extension personnel is not funded. Research programs targeting marginal, inaccessible and backward areas, poverty alleviation and welfare of women are given high priority.

The grant supports all research expenses, except salary and works. The grant covers expenses for equipment, research staff on contract basis, travel and other operating expenses, institutional overheads, etc. depending upon the needs of the project. There is a maximum limit of rupees fifty lakhs for research grant. Usually, research projects for the duration of three years are supported.

Management System

The Project Management Committee of the NATP governs the CGP. For day-to-day management of the program, there is a full-time national coordinator working closely with the National Director—who is responsible for overall management of the CGP, as well as NATP. The Research Program Committee (RPC) comprising eminent scientists is responsible for identification of research priorities, approval of grants and monitoring of research projects. To support the RPC for evaluation of research proposals, there are Proposal Screening Committees (PSCs) of leading scientists for various research themes. For better coordination, the national coordinator and one member is common to both the committees.

Box 1. The CGP at a glance

- Support for short-term, demand-driven research on competitive basis
- Encourage partners outside ICAR/SAU system, including NGOs and private sector
- Multistage, objective and transparent screening process by experts of eminence
- Support for all expenses, except salary and works
- Conformity with ICAR/NATP financial procedures
- Half-yearly monitoring of research progress
- Research themes:
 - Natural resource management
 - Improvement and protection of crops
 - Productivity of livestock, poultry and fishery
 - Agricultural engineering
 - Post-harvest technologies
 - Horticulture
 - Agricultural economics, statistics and extension
- So far 269 research projects with an outlay of Rs 65 crores are funded in two rounds

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PME is a major theme of the NATP. PME Notes are meant to disseminate concepts and information regarding this activity. Please address comments, questions and contributions to Director, NCAP.

Modalities

The proposals are invited on identified research priorities through wide advertisement (website (<http://natp.org>), newspapers, letter to individual institutions, etc.) in the prescribed format before the closing date. Initially, a brief synopsis indicating research problem, rationale, objectives, technical program, duration, budget, researcher's background, etc. is sought. These synopses are screened by the respective PSCs. For the successful cases at this stage, detailed proposals in the prescribed format are invited. These are again re-evaluated by the PSCs, which recommend their approval to the RPC for funding or otherwise. The principal researcher and institution (outside ICAR system) of the winning proposals are required to sign a memorandum of understanding for abiding prescribed norms and rules of ICAR for financial assistance.

Evaluation of Proposals

First, the proposals are subjected to administrative pre-screening for their completeness, conformity with the CGP requirements and classification into appropriate theme by the national coordinator. The proposals meeting these requirements are evaluated by the PSCs using the following criteria:

Primary criteria: These are applied for assessing relevance and scientific strength of the proposal. A successful proposal must satisfy the following criteria.

1. **Relevance:** This is assessed based on consistency of the proposal with the identified priorities, and expected contribution to the advancement of science or to research objectives (for instance, yield increase or cost reduction, sustainability of production systems including conservation of natural resources, benefits accruing to marginal areas and poor people, welfare of women, etc).
2. **Scientific strength:** The problem, hypotheses, critical review of past studies, technical program and expected output of the proposal should be clear, consistent and technically sound.
3. **Competence of the investigator(s) and advantage of the host institution in undertaking the proposed work** are accorded due weightage.
4. **Probability of research success** should be reasonably high, i.e. the chances of accomplishing research targets in stipulated time are high.
5. The proposal should not lead to any duplication of ongoing research programs, but must bridge the gaps as identified through critical review of past studies.
6. The proposal should justify the public expenditure (i.e. the proposed research will not be done by the private sector).

Secondary criteria: These criteria examine expected contribution of the proposal to the thrust areas of the NATP. The proposals meeting these criteria will get additional weight.

1. An evidence of system perspective in identification of research problem.
2. Research implementation in a multidisciplinary and inter-institutional framework.
3. Research institutions from outside ICAR/SAU system; private research institutions and NGOs, are encouraged.
4. The proposal submitted by a newly established institution or institution located in the north-east region.
5. Either principal investigator is a woman scientist or proposed research is expected to improve welfare of women.

Since a large number of proposals are received at the synopsis stage, a checklist of the above criteria is used for their screening. For screening the detailed proposals, the scoring approach is used. All the proposals are assessed against the above mentioned criteria using a scale of 1 to 10 (1 least important; 10 most important). The proposals are ranked based on a composite score obtained using an appropriate weighting scheme (e.g., 0.4 for relevance; 0.3 scientific strength of the proposal, including comparative advantage of the researcher(s) and host institution; 0.3 concerns of equity and NATP philosophy). It is important to note that the secondary criteria are considered only when the proposal meets all the primary criteria (score >6).

Monitoring

The National Coordinator reviews the research projects through quarterly, half-yearly and annual reports, indicating utilization of funds and technical progress. The RPC and the Site Committee (of the host institution) also review the targets and quality of research. Need-based review workshops are also organized for this purpose.

Box 2. Tips for writing a winning proposal

- Focused research proposal on a priority problem
- Clarity and consistency in objectives, hypotheses and technical program
- Clearly identify activity milestones and research output
- Realistic timeframe and budget
- Evidence of comparative advantage of host institution and researcher(s)