

American University of Beirut – University Research Board (URB)

Faculty Research Grants Program (FRGP): Guidelines for 2024-25 Cycle

The University Research Board (URB) encourages and enhances research across all disciplines in accordance with the mission of the University. The URB promotes basic, innovative and applied research; interdisciplinary research; and production of scholarly and creative works. The URB recognizes the crucial importance of freedom of thought and expression to research excellence and the advancement of knowledge, and serves as an advocate for adherence to high standards of research ethics, integrity and conduct.

The URB advises the Provost on the implementation of policies pertaining to research and research funding, and recommends to the Provost the allocation of research funds from available University sources via the Faculty Research Grants Program (FRGP).

I. Objectives

The main objective of the FRGP is to enhance research across the University in terms of publications, creative work, intellectual property, and external funding by providing grant support on a competitive basis for novel research projects submitted by full-time faculty members holding professorial titles.

The FRGP acts as a research growth driver for the University via an outcome-driven review and funding model, whereby a major weight in the evaluation process is based on the outcomes of previous awarded URB grants. This model brings multiple benefits that include: i. enhancing the impact from awarded URB grants in terms of publications, creative work, intellectual property, outreach, and external funding from local, regional, and international sources; ii. reducing the review process overhead as it eliminates the requirement to have external international reviewers for all submitted proposals; iii. giving Faculties/Schools through Faculty Research Committees (FRCs) a broader role, e.g., by assigning higher priority to junior faculty members, providing research mentorship to faculty members, and encouraging research directions or forms of scholarship that fit within their strategic planning goals.

FRGP funding may also be awarded to complement funding for on-going projects (i.e., gap funding), as well as for projects involving new technology development that are close to commercialization (i.e., close to proof of concept). Scholarly outcomes from URB grants should acknowledge the support from the University Research Board.

II. General Guidelines

The URB manages one cycle of the FRGP annually. The URB works closely with FRCs on the implementation of the funding guidelines.

For this cycle, a grant can be up to \$18,000 in annual funding for a research project period of one or two years, with funding approved on a yearly basis. Awards may be lower than requested based on funding availability and expenditure eligibility. If a group project includes scholars from outside AUB, the URB funds can only be used to support research activities at AUB.

Eligibility: Full-time faculty members at any professorial rank (assistant, associate, and full professors) are eligible to apply. Faculty members who are on a leave without pay for more than one semester during the grant's award period will not be eligible for funding. Visiting faculty members, faculty members in the non-professorial ranks, and faculty members in their terminal year at the University are not eligible for funding.

Principal Investigator (PI) and Co-PIs: A faculty member may be PI for only one grant during a funding cycle. A grant can have only one PI. However, Co-PIs from AUB can be added by the PI in collaborative projects. Co-PIs are expected to make a notable contribution to the project, and should contribute to the proposal and indicate their willingness to serve by signing the proposal submittal form. Members of the URB and the FRCs may submit proposals but must recuse themselves when their proposals are evaluated.

Reporting, Publications, and External Grant Submission: Recipients of FRGP funding are expected to generate scholarly output and/or apply to other funding sources based on the projects' research findings. These outcomes will form the basis for evaluating future submitted proposals.

Faculty members are required to submit final reports for awarded research proposals; the FRC Chair, URB Chair and OGC Director will have access to these reports. The final report should include a summary of the following: achievement level of the various specific aims, overall accomplishments and contributions, encountered challenges, and *outcomes* (publications, papers under review, creative work, presentations, theses, dissemination and outreach, etc.). The URB suggests using the following statement in the publications' acknowledgments section "This work was (fully or partially) supported by the University Research Board (Grant number: *URB award number*) at the American University of Beirut (AUB)."

Grant Renewals for Two-Year Projects: The renewal of grants that were approved for two years in the previous funding cycle will be subject to review and recommendation by the FRC based on a progress report. The progress report should summarize the following: work progress on the various specific aims, accomplishments to date, encountered challenges, and remaining activities with a revised timeline and revised budget for the second year; the budget amount and restrictions should follow the guidelines of the previous funding cycle. Renewals will not be permitted for grants that were not originally approved for two years.

Budget Categories and Restrictions: The approved budget must be used as stated in the proposal. All expenditures must follow AUB stated policies and procedures (e.g., for personnel hiring, purchasing, etc.).

Unless explicit authorization is permitted in the award letter, grants cannot be used for the following expenditures: registration fees for conferences, workshops, or training courses; computers, tablets, smartphones, and accessories; books and publication costs; professional society membership fees; dissemination of research findings; faculty member salaries.

The budget categories are subject to the following restrictions:

- The total annual budget per proposal cannot exceed \$18,000.
- Personnel: graduate research assistant, research assistant, casual labor, or field worker. Total amount cannot exceed \$14,000.
- Testing services at AUB and external laboratories. For technical services at external labs, the PIs should present a well-justified case and should make sure that the service is not available at the University.
- Laboratory supplies and materials.
- Short term travel may be allowed (such as for the purpose of visiting special archival libraries or for the purpose of data collection), including per diem and access fees based on clear justification in line with the research goals of the proposal. Total amount cannot exceed

\$3,000, and guidelines will be based on AUB's Short Term Faculty Development Grants policy¹.

- On-line access to specialized archives.
- Software that is well justified and for which AUB does not have license may be approved on exceptional basis; the PI should provide a confirmation from the IT faculty officer that no such license exists in the faculty/school or at AUB.
- Minor equipment that is well justified may be approved on exceptional basis.
- Office supplies. Total amount cannot exceed \$300.
- Any leftover budget can't be transferred to the consecutive year.
- Any request to shift funds between different categories is approved on a case-by-case basis.

All items purchased using URB funding remain the property of AUB. Moreover, projects, which are proprietary in nature, are subject to AUB's Intellectual Property Policy².

Publication Fees: The URB will allocate a separate budget to support mandatory publication fees for high quality journals, in case the faculty member does not have an external grant or internal designated account that can be used for this purpose, with a maximum limit of \$2,000 per paper and a limit of one to two papers per fiscal year. This includes journals ranked in the top 25% quartile (Q1) in their field. The URB approval process will be on a case-by-case basis taking into account recommendation from the FRC, in addition to eligibility guidelines and budget availability.

No-Cost Extensions: URB may approve on a case-by-case basis no-cost extensions for active grants. A request for no-cost extension must be made by the PI in writing *at least one month* prior to the end of the grant period, and must include a budget showing the remaining amount, and a justification including the progress of the project and the reason behind requesting a no-cost extension. Requests for no-cost extension will normally be approved for one-year projects or at the end of the second year for two-year projects. A no-cost extension may be approved at the end of the first year for two-year projects only on an exceptional basis with strong justification and for a maximum period of three months. Faculty members who receive a no-cost extension longer than three months on their active grant cannot receive a new grant during the same year.

Maternity and Sick Leaves: In case of a university approved maternity or sick leave, a no-cost extension may be approved on a case-by-case basis for a 6 month period or to the equivalent university approved period. A request for no-cost extension must be made by the PI in writing at least one month prior to the end of the grant period (1st or 2nd year). The approval will be dependent on the project and whether such an extension is necessary to ensure that all deliverables will be met. A PI can apply for a new grant for the following year even if the approved no-cost extension is more than 3 months.

III. Proposals Submission Process

Faculty members are required to adhere to the following guidelines when submitting their grant applications:

- Proposals can only be submitted through the Online Grants Proposal Submission System [<https://grants.aub.edu.lb>]. PIs should then click the "New" button in the top menu and

¹ <https://aub.policytech.eu/dotNet/documents/?docid=156&public=true>

² <https://website.aub.edu.lb/pnp/Pages/default.aspx>

choose the “URB” option to initiate the submission process. After the proposal is submitted, all required signatures will be collected electronically

- As part of the proposal submission process, faculty members who have received URB funding in the last four years (from one or multiple grants) should provide evidence of the following: i. external funding applications (university, local, regional, and international sources) regardless of the outcome (positive, negative, or pending), as applicable, where records of submission may be subject to review; ii. resulting research outcomes with URB funding acknowledgment, as applicable. The review process will take into account cases corresponding to new faculty members or faculty members who did not receive funding in the last four years.
- Proposals should be submitted before the deadline posted by the URB. FRCs can set earlier deadlines for proposal submissions in their Faculty/School.
- The FRC Chairs will have online access to all submitted proposals in their Faculty/School and, thus, will manage the review process using the URB Research Grants Review System.
- If the proposal involves human subjects, the PIs should declare so during submission and should apply to the Institutional Research Board (IRB) [<http://www.aub.edu.lb/irb>] for project approval preferably before submitting the proposal in order to ensure timely IRB processing. If the proposal is funded, only personnel budget will be released until the needed IRB approval is secured.

It is an institutional requirement that researchers who plan to conduct research studies involving human subjects complete the designated web-based courses Offered by the CITI Program [<http://www.aub.edu.lb/IRB/Pages/certification.aspx>]. Social and Behavioral Science investigators should complete the CITI Social Behavioral Research Basic Course, whereas biomedical investigators should complete the CITI Biomedical Research Basic Course.

- If the proposed research involves experimental animals, the PIs should declare so during submission and should apply to the Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) [<http://www.aub.edu.lb/fm/medicalresearch/Pages/AnimalCareFacility.aspx>] for project approval preferably before submitting the proposal in order to insure timely IACUC processing. If the proposal is funded, only personnel budget will be released until the needed IACUC approval is secured.
- If the proposed research involves the use of radioactive or bio hazardous material, the PIs should declare so during submission and should apply to the Health Physics Services Unit [<https://www.aub.edu.lb/facilities/ehsrn/Pages/radiation.aspx>] for a license preferably before submitting the proposal order to insure timely processing. If the proposal is funded, only personnel budget will be released until the needed license is secured.

IV. Proposals Preparation Guidelines

The following is a list of sections that should be included in the research proposal, and the recommended length of each section. Overall, it is recommended that Sections 3 to 7 do not exceed 10 pages, based on a template with specific formatting instructions.

1. Cover page including title, duration, and research team with affiliations (PI and Co-PIs).
2. Abstract (up to 350 words): Briefly state the background, rationale, aims, and significance of the project.

3. Motivation and background (up to 2 pages): Describe the background to the proposal critically evaluating the existing state-of-the-art, and specifically discuss the gaps in knowledge the project intends to fill.
4. Specific aims and novel contributions (up to 2 page): Enumerate and describe concisely the specific research aims/goals of the project. State the importance and relevance of each proposed goal and highlight its novel aspects, as applicable.
5. Methods of inquiry and analysis (up to 3 pages): Describe the research methodology that will be used to investigate each specific aim, with critical discussion and in depth details.
6. Preliminary studies and results, as applicable (up to 2 pages): Report any preliminary pertinent studies or information that can help in appraising the experience and competence of the investigators in relation to the proposed work.
7. Expected outcomes and impact (up to 1 page): Include an *itemized list* of all expected deliverables in terms of publications, creative works, intellectual property, outreach, partnerships, and external grant submissions, as applicable, with brief description of importance and impact including the potential for knowledge translation. Be as specific as possible as these will be used as indicators for evaluating the final outcomes from the project.
8. Timeline: Include a description of the role of the PI and co-PIs, as applicable, towards the accomplishment of the proposed specific aims, in addition to the allocation of research tasks to personnel who will be paid from the project. Proposals requesting two years of funding should contain a schedule for the research activities and deliverables per year; moreover, they should include a strong justification for requesting a two year grant instead of one year based on the project's specific aims and methods of inquiry.
9. Budget: Include an itemized budget in US dollars per year with *clear justification* for each budget item in line with the budget categories and restrictions listed in the previous section. This should be detailed enough to allow judgment of appropriateness based on the description of the research design and methods.
10. References: Include the list of bibliographic references used in the proposal.

In addition, the PI will be required to upload the following documents/information as part of the online proposal submission process, as applicable:

- Curriculum vitae of the PI and Co-PIs.
- URB funded grants from the last four cycles (2023-2024, 2022-2023, 2021-2022, 2020-2021); for each grant, the PI should include title and duration. This information should be uploaded in the online proposal submission system directly from FMIS (Faculty Management Information System).
- Publications resulting from URB funded grants with URB acknowledgement in the last four years (2023, 2022, 2021, 2020); for each publication, the PI should include type, status, title, authors, date, venue, online link, in addition to uploading a pdf copy. This information should be uploaded in the URB online proposal submission system directly from FMIS. Up to five publications can be uploaded.
- Other submitted grants (university other than URB, national, regional, and international sources) in the last four years (2023, 2022, 2021, 2020). For each grant, the PI should include title, funding agency/program, type, role, duration, and status. This information should be

uploaded in the URB online proposal submission system directly from FMIS. Up to five grants can be uploaded.

- A list containing the names of three recommended reviewers with contact details; the recommended reviewers should not be current or previous collaborators with any of the PI or Co-PIs.
- Optionally, a list of scholars that the PI does not want to be invited to review the proposal.

V. Proposals Review Process

The FRGP allocates funds to projects on a competitive basis. The overall review and evaluation process takes place in two phases: The first phase is managed by the FRCs whereas the second phase is managed by the URB based on evaluation reports submitted by FRCs, University wide evaluation metrics, and budget availability.

Role of the Faculty Research Committees (FRCs)

- FRCs will evaluate proposals according to the general guidelines listed in this document. FRCs will manage the complete review process using the online Research Grants Review System.
- FRCs can also establish additional complementary guidelines specific to their Faculty/School. Before implementation, these guidelines must be shared in writing with the URB Chair and OGC Director. In addition, they should be communicated to the relevant faculty members.
- The FRC Chair should assign each proposal to at least one custodian from among the FRC members.
- The custodian's responsibilities include: identification of suitable reviewers, securing at least two confirmed reviewers per proposal (at least one external reviewer), following up with the reviewers to make sure reviews are submitted on time, and generating a concise written critique highlighting both strengths and weaknesses.
- Each proposal must have a minimum of two evaluation reports from qualified reviewers. A grant application with only one review would be disqualified for funding,
 - Reviewers cannot be current collaborators with the PI or Co-PIs.
 - Reviewers can be from AUB and/or from outside AUB (at least one external reviewer) and can include members of the FRC.
 - The FRC is responsible for ensuring the anonymity of the reviewers and the quality of the reviews.
- Each review report must include the reviewer's quantitative scoring and qualitative comments on the scientific merit of the proposal including general scope, potential impact in terms of outcomes, systematic methodology, feasibility, expertise of investigators, in addition to timeline and budget justification.
- The FRC members should discuss the submitted proposals and rank them based on their scientific merit score and fitness score, where the latter depends on the following metrics: PI's professorial rank (higher priority to junior faculty members), outcomes from previous URB grants (priority for more output), and submission of external grants (higher priority for more external grants submissions).
- FRCs can also include additional evaluation metrics that relate to the scientific impact of the proposals in relation to own Department or Faculty/School.

- All discussions in FRC meetings are confidential. FRC members are asked to refrain strictly from discussing matters related to the submitted proposals and their evaluations with the applicants or others.
- Any FRC member who is applying for a URB grant should excuse him/herself from the meeting during the discussion of his/her own application.
- The FRC should provide written justification with final scores to support its decisions for the final ranking and funding recommendations.
- The FRC Chair should submit all documentation, including the recommendations and justifications to the Dean of the Faculty/School for her/his consideration, comments and endorsement. The Dean should send her/his recommendations to the URB Chair and OGC by the deadline.

Role of the URB Committee

- The URB Committee coordinates the review process with all FRCs for consistency and fairness, taking into account the forms/rubrics/metrics used for calculating both the technical evaluation score and the fitness score.
- The URB Committee receives and studies the documentation submitted by the FRCs. The URB may require meeting with the FRC Chairs to discuss the evaluation and ranking of the proposals by the FRCs before making a final decision.
- The URB Committee selects the proposals to be funded based on the ranking and scores provided by the FRCs complemented with own analysis and holistic assessment taking into account the available total budget for the current funding cycle.
- All discussions in URB meetings related to the funding decisions are confidential. URB members are asked to refrain strictly from discussing matters related to the submitted proposals and their evaluations with the applicants or others.
- The URB with the support of OGC should ensure that proposals are compliant with University policies for internal grants in terms of budget expenditures.
- Proposals requesting two years of funding will be evaluated using the same process as one year projects. Depending on the evaluation results and available budget, the outcome can be to fund for two years, to fund for one year only, or not to fund.

Moreover, continued funding for two-year projects is contingent upon the submission to the FRC of a progress report on the outcomes and deliverables achieved during the previous year. The progress report must be evaluated by the FRC and approved prior to any further funding.

- Whenever made, the URB Committee's decisions are final. Funding will be allocated for the period July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025. The decisions including the reviewers' qualitative comments will be shared with the applicants.

VI. Grant Management

The Office of Grants and Contracts is responsible for administering URB awards. The URB Officer will monitor the projects for administrative and financial compliance with the award conditions.

VII. Timeline

The URB will strictly follow the timeline below for the FRGP 2024-25 Cycle.

Dates	Activity
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Friday December 8, 2023	URB funding cycle announcement
Wednesday February 14, 2024 noon	New proposals submission deadline
Wednesday March 13, 2024 noon	Renewal proposals submission deadline
Friday May 3, 2024	FRC evaluation reports submission deadline
Monday May 12, 2024	URB evaluation process
Wednesday June 5, 2024	Announce awards
Wednesday February 1, 2024	Final reports submission deadline (previous cycle)