**Implementation Guidelines for the Royal University of Bhutan Research Endowment Fund**

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| ***Status:*** * *Initially approved by the 4th REF Board meeting in August 2019*
* *Revised version endorsed by the 10th REF Board meeting October 2023*
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**Background**

1. The Royal Charter of the RUB sets down an objective of the university as *‘to promote and conduct research, to contribute to the creation of knowledge in an international context and to promote the transfer to knowledge of relevance to Bhutan’.* Dedicated and assured funding for advancement of research and enquiry will support the Royal University of Bhutan in fulfilling this objective.
2. The Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) Research Endowment Fund (REF) was instituted through the following instruments:
	1. 119th Lhengye Zhungtshog on 22nd November 2016 issued an order to establish an interim Secretariat of National Research Fund under the RUB. This was conveyed to RUB through the Cabinet Secretariat letter C-3/119/542 dated 22nd December 2016.
	2. On 21st June 2018, the Ministry of Finance transferred an initial capital fund of Nu. 10 million to RUB’s CD Account 20151268 as seed money for RUB REF. The transaction is referenced by the Ministry of Finance’s letter MoF/PPD/RUB/2018/2179 of 21 June 2018. RUB was therein identified as the ‘designated agency’ for the management and operation of the RUB REF.
	3. The overall management and operation of RUB REF will be governed by the Ministry of Finance’s Operational Guidelines for Endowment Funds (2017).
3. Amongst others, the 2017 Operational Guidelines:
	1. define an 'Endowment Fund' as *‘an investment fund established for designated purposes as deemed necessary by the Government to provide funding for certain essential programmes’.*
	2. stipulate that the *‘Fund may be invested appropriately in secured and safe instruments in money markets to earn reasonable returns to finance identified activities*.’ The REF Board is tasked to *‘develop investment guidelines and plans’*.
	3. require that *‘The capital of the Fund shall not be expended in entirety. In the initial stage of implementing the Fund, the Ministry/Agency, on the approval of the Board, may utilize up to 30% of the capital fund to implement the planned and approved activity project/program for which the Fund is created. The Ministry/Agency shall ensure that 70% of the initial capital fund is maintained at all times.’*
	4. prescribe that *‘The Ministry/Agency shall develop Implementation Guidelines or Operational Modality to guide the implementation of the Endowment Fund. The Implementation Guidelines or Operational Modality shall clearly specify the institution of Governing Board, Committees, their composition, authority, and functions*.’
4. This Implementation Guidelines for RUB REF is based on MoF’s Operational Guidelines for Endowment Funds (2017) and as captured under paragraph [3, d], the guidelines specify details of fund management, structures of decision making and definitions of roles and functions of various entities engaged in the RUB REF implementation.

**Objectives**

1. The implementation guidelines for RUB REF will:
	1. ensure transparency and accountability in the management of the RUB REF towards advancing research at RUB.
	2. specify the scope of the RUB REF, including its governance structures, funding and reporting processes, evaluation criteria for research proposals, and eligibility for fund utilization..
	3. set out the responsibilities for considered investment of the RUB REF capital fund to ensure regular and assured funds in perpetuity to support the advancement of research at RUB.

**Scope**

1. RUB REF is expected to promote systematic investigation of issues and themes identified and announced annually by the REF Board. Research themes will be reflective of topical issues and challenges the Bhutanese society is facing and the research outputs should address such issues through evidence-based and pragmatic recommendations.
2. RUB REF grant will encourage researchers at RUB for larger competitive funding as compared to RUB’s Annual University Research Grant (AURG) which primarily supports capacity building of researchers at the University.
3. The Ministry of Finance’s Operational Guidelines for Endowment Funds (2017) requires RUB to ‘*ensure that 70% of the initial capital fund is maintained at all times.’* Therefore, the RUB REF account shall maintain at least 7 million Ngultrum in its account at all times.
4. Every year, the RUB REF Board will determine the quantum of funds for the year’s grant by maintaining at least 7 million Ngultrum in the RUB REF account. The number of research projects to be funded for the year will be ascertained by the funding quantum set by the RUB REF Board. The RUB REF will not fund a research proposal beyond the ceiling of Nu. 500,000 per proposal. However, colleges may provide top-up grants, if the research project requires it for a more impactful project.
5. RUB REF will also fund activities to disseminate research outputs resulting from research studies funded by REF. Dissemination events will be organized centrally by the Office of the Vice Chancellor (OVC) and can fund activities such as presentations to stakeholders, seminars, conferences, symposiums and publications.
6. Any staff (regular or on fixed term) from a RUB college (constituent or affiliate) are eligible to apply for funding from RUB REF. However, the college management (President and the Dean of Research & Industrial Linkages for constituent and Research Coordinator for Affiliate College) will attest the viability of proposals from their staff and ensure to monitor the successful completion of research studies funded by RUB REF.-
7. RUB REF will not pay for:
	1. the operation of the Board and its Secretariat & allied entities (committees and task forces) that support the implementation of REF. Such expenditure will be met from DeAR’s annual budget appropriation for *‘Building Research Capability’*.
	2. purchase of properties such as vehicle and land, ex-country travels, personnel emoluments payment or personnel emoluments as laid down in the Ministry of Finance’s Operational Guidelines for Endowment Funds (2017).
8. The records of utilisation of RUB REF should be maintained in the respective college and will be audited as per the prevailing norms of RGoB.

**Governance**

1. The RUB REF Board will oversee the management of fund and research activities supported by the fund. It will be the final decision-making body on RUB REF while respecting the MoF’s Operational Guidelines on Endowment Fund (2017).
2. The Board will comprise the following **members**:
	1. Chairperson: Vice Chancellor
	2. Members:
		1. Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic & Research)
		2. Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Planning and Resources)
		3. A senior academic staff from one of the colleges with experience in the conduct of research and its management. This representation will be for a term of 3 years and may be extended for another term.
	3. Secretary: Chief (Research & Development), DeAR
3. The specific **remit** of the RUB REF Board is:
	1. Approve investment guidelines, periodic investment plans and associated strategies to make RUB REF a sustainable and assured source of fund for advancing research and enquiry at RUB.
	2. Consider proposals for mobilization of fund to augment RUB REF capital grant and recommend such proposals to the MoF for approval.
	3. Approve annual theme for research and the quantum of allocation for research grants
	4. Award research grants to proponents based on the recommendations of the RUB REF Review Committee.
	5. Approve the following regular reports for unhindered operation and oversight of the RUB REF activities:
		1. Annual performance report and expenditure report.
		2. Mid-term progress and completion reports of all RUB REF funded studies.
		3. Annual implementation plan for REB REF funded activities.
		4. Approve the revised RUB REF Implementation Guidelines from time to time.
4. The RUB REF Board will meet at **least 4 times a year** as determined by the research project management activities funded by REF. The meeting quorum will be the simple majority.
5. The following organizational divisions and committees will support the Board in the discharge of its remit:
	1. Research and Development (R&D) at DeAR, spearheaded by the Chief, will be the Secretariat to the Board. The division will fulfill the following functions for a smooth operation of the Board and its remit;
		1. Schedule and organize Board’s meetings: Send out notice of every meeting at least a fortnight in advance of the meeting to all members along with an invitation for submissions; Prepare agenda for meetings with detailed papers for discussion and distribute to all members at least a week ahead of the meeting date.
		2. Record deliberations of the meeting accurately and share a draft of meeting minutes no later than 7 days from the date of the meeting.
		3. Maintain a repository of documents- research proposals, research reports (mid-progress and completion) and statements of expenditure.
		4. Monitor RUB REF funded research studies.
		5. Support and organize tasks of the RUB REF Review Committee.
		6. Propose changes to the RUB REF Implementation Guidelines as and when required to the Board.
	2. A RUB REF Review Committee will be constituted annually to ensure and enhance the quality of research and its outputs. The Committee will comprise people with experience in the conduct of research and research management and will oversee the full gamut of research studies for the year funded through RUB REF, starting from the evaluation of research proposals to the review of completion reports of research studies. RUB REF Review Committee members will be compensated for their engagement as Expert 1 as per the Compensation for Expert Services Policy and the allied decisions of the 51 Academic Board & 42 University Council meetings.The salient functions of the committee are to :
		1. Ensure that research proposals submitted by principal investigators meet the highest scientific and ethical standards.
		2. Provide feedback on research plans and actions along with the budget.
		3. Monitor the progress of research studies through scrutiny and feedback on mid-term progress reports.
		4. Assess the successful completion of research studies based on the completion report and the initial research proposal.

**Investment & Management of Fund**

1. The Department of Planning and Resources (DPR) at the OVC will be responsible for the maintenance, investment and regular reporting of the fund’s status to the Board and to the government (Ministry of Finance).
2. In line with the Operational Guidelines for Endowment Funds, DPR will invest the RUB REF *‘in publicly traded stocks, mutual funds, and fixed-income securities (including fixed deposits, corporate bonds, and money market instruments) and also other products of financial institutions’*. Such investment should aim to enhance the annual RUB REF grant allocation so that more projects are funded through this avenue at the University every year.
3. DPR will propose to the RUB REF Board:
	1. investment guidelines and plans along with annual report on the status of the RUB REF.
	2. plans and actions for fund mobilization from internal and external sources to augment the RUB REF. Upon consideration and recommendation by the Board, DPR will seek approval from the Ministry of Finance and execute fund mobilization drives.
	3. periodic reports of audits on the RUB REF to the RUB REF Board.
4. The quantum of annual allocation for research activities will be decided by the RUB REF Board based on the fund availability, provided by DPR, by 15th November every year.
5. As required by the MoF’s Operational Guidelines (2017), DPR at OVC will ‘*submit annual financial reports to the Ministry of Finance within three months from the end of the financial year and other progress report as and when required’*. Inputs to such reports associated with research management and outputs will be provided by the Department of Academic and Research (DeAR) of the RUB.

**Funding Process**

1. R&D at DeAR will call for proposals, in English and Dzongkha language, for funding from RUB REF with the announcements posted on the OVC website and information shared with all colleges.
2. Researchers will submit their proposals to their DRIL for constituent colleges and College Research Coordinator/Chair of the Research Committee for the affiliated college in the prescribed RUB REF Application Form (Annexure A). The principal investigator for a research study should be a staff of the college and co-investigators may be from the relevant agencies with potential mutual benefit for such collaboration.
3. Research proposals will be reviewed by respective College Research Committees (CRC) based on Zhibtshol’s *Approval Process of Research Planning, Approval and Monitoring*. CRC of colleges will submit suitable proposals meeting the conditions of RUB REF and the evaluation criteria to R&D at DeAR. The evaluation criteria for RUB REF research proposals are in Annexure B.
4. R&D at DeAR will collate proposals and prepare them for blind review by the RUB REF Review Committee. The Review Committee will:
	1. evaluate all research proposals based on the conditions of RUB REF and the evaluation criteria.
	2. rank the evaluated proposals based on their quality as per the prescribed evaluation criteria. The Review Committee can make recommendations on every proposal to improve the study including the budget proposed.
5. R&D at DeAR will prepare a considered report on the evaluation of research proposals by the RUB REF Review Committee for submission to the Board. For potential awardees, the report should also incorporate the recommendations of the Review Committee and changes in budget after consulting with respective study proponents and their DRILs.
6. The Board will award RUB REF grants based on:
	1. The submission from the R&D at DeAR and Review Committee’s report.
	2. Recommendations of R&D at DeAR on the number of research studies to be funded as determined by the annual quantum set by the Board earlier.
7. The awardees of the annual RUB REF grant and their DRILs will be informed of their awards along with the timelines for their research and associated protocols. Proposals not selected for award of grant will also be informed of the Board’s decision along with justifications.
8. By the 1st week of the fiscal year, 50% of the research grant will be released to the college.
9. The remaining grant will be released as follows:
	1. 30% of the grant will be released to the college on a successful review of the study’s mid-term progress report by the Board.
	2. 20% of the grant will be released to the college on a successful review of the completion report by the Board.
10. RUB REF grant awardees will prepare a mid-progress report of their study as per the mid-progress Reporting Form (Annexure C). The report will be considered and reviewed for compliance by the DRIL before submitting it to the R&D at DeAR.
11. Mid-term progress reports will be scrutinized by the RUB REF Review Committee and evaluated as per the prescribed form (Annexure D). The R&D at DeAR will submit a consolidated evaluation report with recommendations to the Board. The Board will:
	1. Approve the continuation of the study with the release of the second tranche of their grant, or
	2. Ask the awardee to resubmit the report within 10 working days where the research progress and activities could be enhanced, or
	3. Discontinue the research study and stop further release of grant. In such situations, the respective college should be asked to account for their lapse in monitoring the research study and to refund the unspent fund and the fund used that is not justified through reasonable activities.
12. R&D at DeAR will inform colleges and grant awardees of the decisions of the Board.
13. Grant awardees will submit a completion report of their research studies to the DRIL. These reports will be reviewed by the CRC before submission to the R&D at DeAR, in the prescribed form (Annexure E). In extenuating circumstances, the CRC will submit a letter in lieu of the research completion report to the REF Board seeking an extension of the research study.
14. R&D at DeAR, through the Review Committee, will assess the Completion Report based on the Completion Report Assessment Form (Annexure F). The R&D at DeAR will submit a consolidated evaluation report with recommendations to the Board. The Board will:
	1. Approve the report and release of the final tranche of grant.
	2. Ask for resubmission of the report until the Review Committee is satisfied with the quality of research.
15. Failure to submit the completion report and unsuccessful completion of the research study as per the approved proposal will have the following sanctions:
	1. Forfeit 20% of the grant and refund previous payment that is not spent and those that cannot be justified as per the approved research proposal.
	2. Defaulting awardee (s)/ investigators will be barred from applying for RUB REF for the next 3 years.
16. Some of the important milestones for RUB REF are:

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| **Milestone** | **Deadline** |
| Finalization of the research theme and the quantum of research budget allocation for research activities for the next fiscal year | Mid of November |
| Call for proposal by R&D Division | End of November |
| Submission of proposal to DRIL Office of the College | End of February |
| Submission of proposals by the DRIL Office to R&D Division | End of March |
| Evaluation of proposal by Review Committee | Mid of April |
| Resubmission of Proposal after Incorporating Review Comments | Mid of May |
| Issuance of Award Letters | End of May |
| Fund Release of 1st tranche | Week 1 of July |
| Submission of Mid-Progress Report by DRIL office to R&D Division | By End of November |
| Evaluation of Mid-Progress Report by Review Committee and Endorsed by REF Board | Mid of December |
| Issuance of Letter (Accepted/Not Accepted) for Mid- Progress Report by R&D Division | End of December |
| Submission of Completion Report to the DRIL office of the College | Week 1 of May |
| Submission of Completion Report by DRIL office to R&D Division, OVC | Mid of May |
| Evaluation of Completion Report by Review Committee and Endorsed by REF Board. | Week 1 of June |
| Issuance of Letter (Accepted/Not Accepted) for Completion Report and Fund Release of 3rd tranche by R&D Division  | Mid-week of June |
| Dissemination of Research Findings to Relevant Stakeholders | End of August |

1. R&D at DeAR in collaboration with the Review Committee and awardees will organize research output dissemination event every year. Such an event could take the form of a conference, seminar, symposium, or presentation. The dissemination event will be an annual activity of the R&D at DeAR and the budget will be proposed and allocated in the annual DeAR budget.

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