

Reviewing Innovation Fund Proposals

Vietnam

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This paper discusses procedures for receiving and reviewing innovation fund proposals under the Vietnam Higher Education Project. These activities are carried out in the Proposals Assessment Unit of the project. Specific criteria are used in the assessment process.

I. Regulations for the Quality Improvement Grants

1.1. About universities

Component II of the Higher Education Project, Vietnam [1] provides financial support, on a competitive basis, for quality improvements in teaching, learning, and research at Higher Education Institutions (HEI) through Quality Improvement Grants (QIG).

QIGs are awarded only to those HEIs that meet the eligibility criteria on a competitive basis. Purposes of QIG :

- To encourage the consolidation and merger of HEIs into multidisciplinary universities;
- To adapt and update courses material, modernize teaching and learning methods, and curriculum to meet labor market needs;
- To improve and update knowledge and skills of academic and administrative staff to enhance quality and efficiency;
- To increase the flexibility and responsiveness of HEIs with the needs of society.

Level of QIG : (i) grant A : eligible HEIs seeking a grant must first apply for a first-level grant. HEIs may not receive more than one QIG A, US\$ 500.000; (ii) Any HEI that has been awarded QIG A and can demonstrate that implementation is on schedule and funds have been

properly used can apply for a second level, QIG B, US\$ 750.000; (iii) HEIs with QIG B may submit an application for one or more QIG C. The maximum total cumulative amount of all QIGs awarded to a single HEI at three levels A, B, C may not exceed either the value US\$ 800 times the number of students, or US\$ 10.000.000.

General eligibility criteria :

- The HEI must provide degree level training (at bachelor's, master's or doctoral level) and have a legal status with its own single consolidated administrative and academic structure;
- The HEI must be publicly owned;
- The HEI must already have participated in component I of the project;
- The HEI's enrollment at the time of the most recent Higher Education Institutional Monitoring Survey must equal or exceed 2.000 students;
- The QIG application must be endorsed by the institution's Rector.

1.2. Organizing the evaluation, selection and awarding of QIGs

A steering committee is established with members (< 15 members) appointed by the Minister of Education and Training. It is responsible for the review of QIG based on the recommendations of the PAU and for the selection of proposals to be submitted to the Minister of Education and Training for final decisions on QIG awards.

A PAU comprises (i) a manager; (ii) an information officer; (iii) a program officer; (iv) a bilingual secretary; and (v) five or more part-time academic advisers. It is responsible for:

- Checking that institutions submitting proposals meet all QIG eligibility criteria;
- Evaluating the proposals on the basis of agreed criteria;
- Grading the proposals in terms of the agreed criteria and overall merit;

- Ranking proposals within three award type categories A, B, C;
- Drafting a short report on each ranked proposal and submitting the ranked proposals to the Steering Committee through the National Project Director with all required supporting documentation.

All proposals are subject to the following five stages of review :

1. Eligibility screening;
2. Specialist reviews;
3. Grading of proposals;
4. Defense of proposals by HEI representatives;
5. Ranking of proposals.

1.3. Criteria for evaluation of QIGs applications

Each eligible proposal is evaluated and judged on the basis of three following groups of criteria :

1. Clarity and relevance. Clarity and relevance of QIG is assessed in terms of:
 - Clarity and appropriateness of program objectives; and these objectives should be measurable;
 - Consistency of the program objectives with the overall objectives of the higher education development and with the HEI's medium-term plan;
 - Academic and technical merit (as judged by the academic panel and specialist reviewers);
 - For overall, the proposed program should demonstrate appropriate balance between staff development, facilities improvement and curriculum revision;
2. Influence/ impact

The influence/impact of proposals is judged on the basis of

expected benefits of the program measured by performance indicators such as: student/ teacher ratio, unit cost per student progression and drop-out rates, employment of graduates.

3. Feasibility. The feasibility of the proposals are assessed in terms of :

- Management and implementation capacity;
- Availability of qualified academic and technical staff, buildings and physical resources necessary to ensure effective implementation of the project; and
- Financial sustainability through the contribution of the institution to the project.

II. Innovation Fund Proposals

Institutions prepare a document for the application process, including: (i) application form; (ii) declaration of eligibility for QIG award; (iii) format for QIG proposals.

Number of proposals awarded		Funds awarded (US\$ 1000s)		%
Quality Improvement Grant, level A	Number of universities	36	17,559	21
Round 1	12			
Round 2	14			
Round 3	5			
Round 4	5			
Quality Improvement Grant, level B	Number of universities	26	18,973	23
Round 1	7			
Round 2	4			
Round 3	6			
Round 4	3			
Round 5	6			
Quality Improvement Grant, level C	Number of proposals	16	46,930	56
Round 1	7			
Round 2	3			
Round 3	6			
Total		78	83,462	100

Table 1. QIG proposals (4/ 2004)

All QIG proposals are subject to a two-stage review by PAU :

1. Eligibility screening;
2. Evaluating, grading and ranking of proposals.

After proposals are evaluated, the academic panel completes the graded and ranked proposals, making recommendations on awards to the Steering Committee, together with a short report giving detailed comments on each proposal. The Steering Committee reviews and makes the final decisions on the awarding of QIGs.

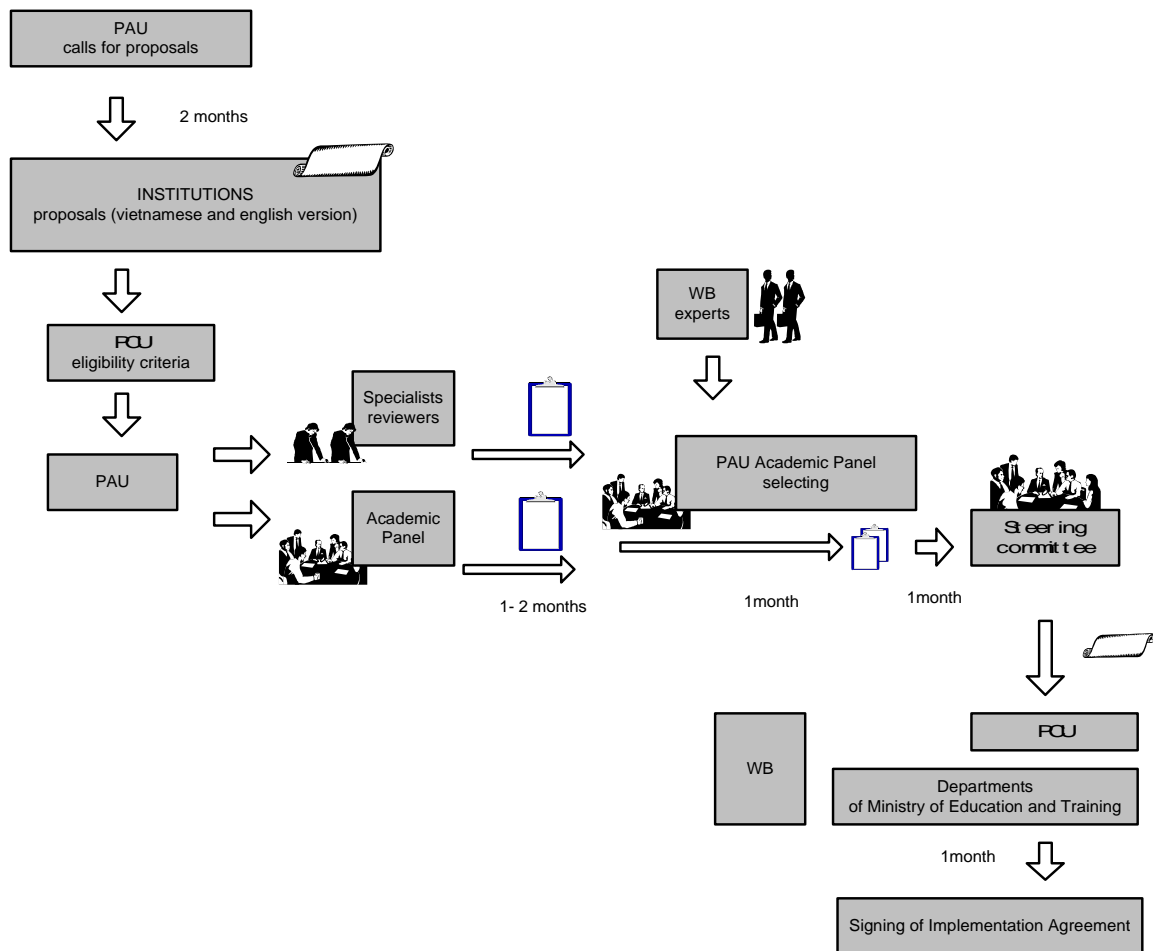


Figure 1. Proposal submission process and necessary duration

The Steering Committee decides, at each award meeting, the number of awards. An assumption is made that approximately 90% of institutions will be assessed for A awards, 66% for B, and 50% for C.

All successful proposals are transferred to the PCU for processing :

- Developing implementation plans for grant agreement annexes;
- Signing grant agreement;
- Implementing sub-project.

PCU provides technical support and supervises implementation for proper, effective and timely use of the funds.

Purchase of goods and equipment: HEIs follow the World Bank Goods Guidelines, 8/ 1996 and the Development Credit Agreement. The required goods procurement method depends on the size of each procurement package, as (i) packages valued at more than US\$ 100.000 follow international competitive bidding procedures, using the World Bank Standard Bidding Documents (SBD); (ii) package US\$ 25.000 to US\$ 100.000 follow national competitive bidding procedures, using the agrees model SBD; (iii) packages below US\$ 25.000 follow either international or national prudent shopping procedures.

III. Remarks and Conclusion

The selecting criteria are qualitative. The assessment needs quantitative criteria. A system of marks is used for evaluating proposals together with eligibility criteria by the academic panel of PAU. Each of the following criteria carries 100 marks: (i) clarity and relevance; (ii) influence/ impact; and (iii) feasibility. The weight of each criterion is 0.43, 0.33, 0.24 respectively.

Reducing the time needed for selecting proposals plays a role in disbursement. Review time can be decreased; but the time needed for organizing Steering Committee meetings is difficult to reduce. Further delays may occur when HEIs modify their sub-project proposal as the result of expert advice.

HEIs' proposal writing capabilities and funds disbursement capacity improved as they moved through the various QIG levels.

Information technology is a domain that figures in many HEI proposals: (i) digital library; (ii) digital infrastructure; and (iii) modern class rooms.

REFERENCES

[1] Regulation for the implementation of the Quality improvement grants higher education project, Ministry of education and training, Hanoi, Vietnam, 2002

[2] Education review, review of Ministry of education and training, Hanoi, Vietnam, 12/ 2002