Code of Practice for application and review

1.1 Code of Practice for Consideration of Research Proposals

This Code of Practice describes the standards of transparency by which Qatar National Research Fund (QNRF) abides in administering applications for research awards and other proposals for support, and embodies the principles of equity, integrity and confidentiality for all who are involved in the assessment of proposals. The Code is also intended to act as guidance to peer reviewers in discharging the responsibilities placed on them in assessing proposals, and sets out the proper conduct expected of them.

1.2 Information for applicants

1.2.1 Application procedures for each of its schemes for research awards, QNRF issues guidelines on the information to be supplied by applicants in support of bids for funds, details of the criteria against which applications will be assessed, and the process and timescale for assessment of the application. Any other details of the program may be clarified in publicly posted Questions and Answers on the QNRF website.

1.2.2 Data Protection

Applicants are required to sign the application to indicate that the information provided therein is, to the best of their knowledge, complete and accurate. Applicants should be aware that information they provide would be stored and circulated as necessary in order for assessment procedures to be followed. Successful applicants should be aware that the information they provide on the application form may be copied to the relevant authorized officer in their employing institution as necessary for award procedures to be followed, and information on the status of their award may be made available to the relevant authorized officer in their employing institution by QNRF as necessary for the conditions of award to be fulfilled. Application forms will be retained for ten years in the case of successful applications, and five years in the case of unsuccessful applications, and may be consulted by QNRF in the event of future applications being submitted.

1.2.3 Details of award holders (including name, institution, project details and amount of award) will be used to compile published lists of award-holders that will be made available on the Internet, and to produce statistical and historical information on QNRF awards. Signing the application form constitutes the applicant's agreement to all terms, conditions, and notices contained in the Notes for Applicants. Once QNRF has received final applications, it will respect the integrity of those applications and not alter them in any way.
1.2.4 Equal opportunity
QNRF is committed to a policy of equal opportunity in that applicants will receive equal treatment regardless of race, color, religion, gender, age, nationality (except where the conditions of the scheme specify otherwise) or disability.

1.2.5 Ethics policy
QNRF requires that all research funded through its programs and awards be conducted in an ethical manner. The following considerations apply to all proposals:

1.2.5.1 Accurate reporting of findings and a commitment to enabling others to replicate results where possible;
1.2.5.2 Fair dealing in respect of other researchers and their intellectual property;
1.2.5.3 Proper employment conditions for research staff, having respect for the provisions of the "Concordat for Contract Research Staff";
1.2.5.4 Honesty to research staff and students about the purpose, methods and intended and possible use of the research and any risks involved;
1.2.5.5 Confidentiality of information supplied by research subjects and anonymity of respondents (unless otherwise agreed with research subjects and respondents);
1.2.5.6 Independence and impartiality of researchers to the subject of the research. Additionally, proposals may raise one or more of the following considerations: the involvement of human participants; the involvement of human remains (e.g. traceable to living descendants); the use of nonhuman animals; destructive analysis of historic artifacts; research that may result in damage to the natural or historic environment; and the use of sensitive social, economic or political data. Wherever necessary, appropriate consent should be obtained from or on behalf of participants or others affected by the research. Applicants should indicate whether their proposed research raises any special ethical issues, and whether the relevant authority has approved their application. Independent researchers without access to formal ethical scrutiny and approval should briefly describe any special ethical issues, and explain how they will be addressed.

1.2.6 Data monitoring
Personal information provided by applicants will be used for monitoring and statistical purposes only, and at no stage will it form any part of the assessment process.

1.2.7 Assessment process
Appropriate experts will judge all applications on their academic merit through a stringent process of peer review. Recommendations are passed to the relevant awarding committee for final decision on awards. QNRF will respect the integrity of the reviews and not alter them in any way.

1.2.8 Outcome of applications
Applicants will be informed by letter regarding the outcome of their application. Feedback in the form of anonymous comments from external peer reviewers will be provided for applicants. QNRF is regretfully unable to enter into correspondence concerning the decision of the awarding committee. Applicants are informed in the Notes of guidance whether feedback can be expected as a feature of the scheme.

1.2.9 Conditions of awards

Recipients of awards are made aware of the regulations governing the scheme in which they have been successful and are required to adhere to those regulations.

1.2.10 Appeals

The competition for research awards is intense and many high quality applications may not receive support. All applications receive careful scrutiny by the peer reviewers in the context of competing claims on available funding. Appeals may not therefore be made against the academic judgment of the QNRF's peer reviewers, panels, or Committees. The sole ground on which an appeal may be made is one of improper procedure. Anyone wishing to make an appeal against a decision should write to the Executive Director of QNRF no later than two months after the result of the competition is announced, citing the specific decision and setting out clearly the substantive basis of the appeal. Only applicants themselves may appeal, though they may include supporting letters as relevant. The Executive Director will respond in writing within 30 days. There are two possible grounds for one further stage of appeal: either improper procedure in the investigation of the original appeal; or the availability of substantial relevant information that for good reason was not made known to the Executive Director at the time of the investigation.

1.3 Information for Peer Reviewers

1.3.1 Confidentiality

Those who undertake the assessment of applications are required to give assurance that all information which they acquire in the discharge of their duties be kept confidential and not be transmitted to any persons other than in accordance with the prescribed procedures for the selection process. All reasonable steps must be taken to ensure that such information is kept in a secure place and in due course disposed of in a secure fashion (or returned to QNRF). Information provided to peer reviewers in an application for funding must only be used for the purposes of evaluating the proposal in accordance with QNRF’s guidelines.

1.3.2 Conflict of Interest

Those who undertake the responsibility of assessing applications for funds, either in writing or through membership of awards committees, are required to declare actual or potential conflicts of interest and observe the following guidelines:
1.3.2 References

Peer reviewers, including members of awards committees, shall not act as referees for individual candidates in any of QNRF's grant-giving schemes in which they are involved in any capacity.

1.3.3 Institutional affiliation

Peer reviewers shall not participate in the evaluation of any proposal emanating from their own institution.

1.3.4 Other connections

Where an application involves a former pupil, close colleague or co-researcher, a family member, or a person with whom there is or has been a current or prior relationship, peer reviewers are required to declare any conflict of interest to the relevant QNRF officer so that the proposal can be redirected (in the case of research and conference grants), and peer reviewers, including those involved in the assessment of research posts, shall abstain from participating in the evaluation of that particular proposal.

1.3.5 Peer reviewers as applicants

Fellows who wish to apply for QNRF support during the period in which they are serving in any capacity as peer reviewers must abstain from any involvement in the competition to which they are applying, that is, they may not assess or comment or vote on any application in that round of the competition. If peer reviewers are unsure whether their ability to assess a proposal is compromised in any way, they should inform QNRF of the relevant circumstances so that guidance can be sought on individual cases. A log of such incidents shall be retained for the regular scrutiny of the QNRF's Steering Committee and/or Governing Board.

1.3.6 Fair evaluation

Peer reviewers are normally drawn from subject-specific experts within the international academic community, and it is expected that they will be able to evaluate the proposals sent to them. In cases where individual peer reviewers feel unable to offer an informed view on a proposal, they may request that proposals be sent confidentially to other members of QNRF so that they may consult about the merits of the proposal. In all cases, peer reviewers must submit the request for additional assessment through the office to ensure that the chosen advisers receive the necessary instructions about assessment criteria particular to the relevant scheme, and a copy of this Code of Practice. Any supplementary advisers are required to abide by its provisions.

This Code of Practice is adapted for QNRF's use from The British Academy's Code of Practice. QNRF expresses gratitude to The British Academy for its permission to do so.