THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT APPLIED RESEARCH FUND (WDARF) GRANT CALL - 2022

BEST PRACTICES RESEARCH GUIDE

1.   Introduction

1.1   The Workforce Development Applied Research Fund (WDARF) has awarded S$14.6m to 33 projects across 7 institutions through grant calls during its first five-year tranche in 2020 and is currently in the second five-year tranche to fund S$10m by 2025. From the past submissions received, we observed that some applications that did not meet the basic requirements of the grant and/or did not include critical information needed to assess the merits of the application for funding under the grant. Therefore, this Best Practice Guide is developed to assist applicants put together proposal in line with the grant requirements.

1.2   The guide highlights the general requirements of applications to be eligible for consideration - the proposed research falls within the scope of grant call and is an applied research. It also highlights that the type of application that will be given priority in consideration - research that is original, collaborative and engaged stakeholders in its formulation.

2.   Basic General Requirements

2.1   **Scope of Grant Call**
Every grant call has research themes and/or 'Challenge Statements' which applications are expected to follow.

Proposals submitted to the WDARF 2022 Grant Call must be in at least one of the three key research themes listed below and/or address the 'Challenge Statements'.

- **Theme A: Developing Effective Adult Learning Pedagogies & Skills Development Strategies**
  This research theme focuses on enhancing the effectiveness and impact of adult learning and skills development approaches, via technology, improved andragogy and innovations in both learning and practice. Given that training and learning are also situated within the evolving needs of

industry and the economy, research under this thrust should also consider the role of enterprises and their partnerships with training providers in developing and contextualising teaching and learning approaches.

- **Theme B: Facilitating Learning & Career Choices among Adult Learners**

  This research theme identifies the key factors influencing CET decisions and those related to career and employment, including the understanding of cognition, emotion and behaviours of all stakeholders concerned (i.e. individuals, employers, educators, career facilitators, policymakers). Cultural and socio-environmental factors, and the varying needs and differences among different adult learner groups (such as mature and vulnerable adult learners) including aspects of accessibility, adaptability and appropriateness should also be considered.

- **Theme C: Enhancing Employment Outcomes through Adult Learning & Skills Development**

  This research theme aims to generate insights and provide recommendations for sustaining Singapore's competitive advantage in the global economy through adult learning and skills development that enables Singaporeans to access good jobs, earn good wages and stay employable. Research should be directed at examining emerging jobs and skills, returns and other benefits of skills development strategies, and exploring interventions (e.g. behavioural insights, financial and non-financial incentives) to guide locals towards better leveraging of learning and better employment outcomes.

  For more details on the Research Themes, please refer to the WDARF Research Focus.

Challenge Statements:

Challenge Statement #1: Overcoming barriers to participation.

How can we better understand barriers and motivations faced by specific learner groups, i.e. mature workers, non-degree holders, low-wage workers, persons with disabilities in participating in CET? Are there more learner groups facing significant barriers to participation in lifelong learning? How can we better support and encourage/nudge these groups to advance their skills/training development journey through signposting, incentives and government programmes, and/or enhanced education and career guidance or any other proposed means? What are some inventive ways we can adopt to overcome any barriers to participation in lifelong learning?

Challenge Statement #2: Don't PET the CET

What are the differences in learning and training approach between that for working adults and pre-employment training? What principles of learning and training apply well to working adults but not pre-employment students? Conversely, what pedagogical/andragogical principles can apply well to both demographics? What relevant pedagogical/andragogical approaches are we able to create which focus on honing the learning of working adults?

Challenge Statement #3: Digitalising adult learning.

How do we define and measure "good" use of the digital medium for adult learning? What modes – synchronous/asynchronous; hybrid/single-mode; gamified etc. – are most effective under what circumstances? How may we best harness the digital means to strengthen adult learning?

Challenge Statement #4: Every workplace a learning workplace.

What companies succeed in building a learning workplace for themselves? How can the rest be helped? What modes of workplace learning (e.g. OJT, WSP) work best under what circumstances? How may we best enhance workplace learning opportunities – formal, informal and non-formal – to make workforce learning a norm for all?

2.2 **Applied Research**

Only proposal focusing on applied research will be considered.

Applied research refers to original investigation undertaken to acquire new knowledge with the primary aim of solving an existing problem or improving a current practice. It is therefore critical that the application explains how the targeted research findings and insights can be scaled and translated into policy and practice in the area of skills development and adult learning in Singapore.

The applicability and translatability of the project will be reviewed by a technical expert review panel appointed by SSG, which may be informed and supplemented by peer reviews by experts in the specific fields, to make an informed evaluation. Inputs from potential users of the research may also be sought. The proposals and input will be submitted to SSG Research Committee which comprises representatives from SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG), Workforce Singapore (WSG), Ministry of Education (MOE), Ministry of Manpower (MOM) and Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) for selection and approval.

2.3 **Originality of Proposed Research**

WDARF has funded numerous covering a diverse range of topics and sectors since its first grant call.

With that, any new projects to be considered will need to stand up to scrutiny for its originality, addressing gaps which have not been covered in existing WDARF-approved projects, in addition to remaining distinct from relevant up-to-date published research literature. Reference to relevant up-to-date literature and the existing WDARF-approved projects should be made in the application to highlight the similarities and differences of your proposed research from the literature and projects.

2.4 Collaborative Research

Proposals are encouraged to involve domestic multi-institutional cooperation, inter-sectoral cooperation and high-level international partners. In cases of existing collaboration, supporting evidence (for example, MOUs) should be submitted together with the application. Please note that evaluation of internal programme within an organization will not be accepted.

2.5 Stakeholders Engagement

Priority consideration will be given to proposals that engaged stakeholders during project conceptualisation/preparation and include stakeholders' input on strategic relevance technical merit, project team, execution plan, project translation and applicability value in application. Stakeholders can include ministries, government agencies, educational/training providers and practitioners (e.g. adult educators).

2.6 Impact Measurement

The impact of an applied research project is measured by its success in reaching its objective of solving/improving an existing problem/practice. With that, it is important to provide the measurable indicators for evaluating success for your proposed project. Examples of indicators can include quality and quantity of scientific outputs, the relationship with the partner(s), relevance and connectedness of the research, accessibility and availability of outputs to users, provision of outputs that are digestible and usable by different audiences, training and capacity building.

2.7 Realistic Budgets

Budget plan is a key element of a grant application. It is important to read the Administration Guide carefully to know exactly what are fundable and non-fundable.

The budget should be sufficiently detailed and accurate to assure reviewers that the investigators have a realistic sense of what it will cost to complete the

work proposed. While a slight overestimation in budget may help buffer against price increases, excess overestimation may imply that the applicants are inexperienced, unrealistic and had not performed the necessary due diligence. Underestimation, on the other hand, may imply that the investigators are inexperienced and not confident. In particular, excessive manpower request will lead reviewers to question the applicants' efficiency.

For multi-year projects, consider the time and administrative constraints you may face throughout the project that may hinder budget utilisation. For example, have you considered the time required for research ethics review, collaboration agreements formulation, procurement and hiring processes?

2.8　**Timely Submission**

Lastly, for the proposal to be considered, it needs to be submitted to WDARF Secretariat before deadline. The submission deadlines for WDARF Grant Call 2022 are as follows:

Submission deadline for EOI: 20 July 2022
Submission deadline for Full proposal (for shortlisted EOIs only): Mid-September 2022
Please note that late submissions will not be accepted.