

THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT APPLIED RESEARCH FUND (WDARF) GRANT CALL - 2024

BEST PRACTICE GUIDE TO WRITING FULL PROPOSAL

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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 from 2017 to 2020 and is currently in the second five-year tranche to fund S\$10m by 2025. From the past submissions received, we had observed that some applications fail to meet the basic requirements and/or did not include critical information needed to assess the application. Therefore, this Best Practice Guide was developed to assist applicants in developing a proposal that is in line with the grant requirements.
- 1.2 For applications to be eligible for consideration, the proposed research must be applied research that falls within the scope of the grant call. Research proposals that are original, collaborative/interdisciplinary and have engaged stakeholders in its formulation would be given priority.

2. Basic General Requirements

2.1 Scope of Grant Call

Proposals submitted to the WDARF 2024 Grant Call can address the Challenge Statements or align to the three Research Themes. For emerging topics related to CET, adult learning and workforce development, proposals may be considered on a case-by-case basis.

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?

Research Themes

- **Theme A: Developing Effective Adult Learning Pedagogies, Skills Development and Enterprise Engagement 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.

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 explain what the problem is and/or why improvements have to be made to current practice, and 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 (<https://www.ial.edu.sg/research/wdarf-grant-call/wdarf-grant-call-results/>), 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 Inter-Disciplinary/Collaborative Research

Proposals are encouraged to involve domestic multi-institutional cooperation, interdisciplinary research with 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

For the proposal to be considered, it needs to be submitted to WDARF Secretariat by the deadline. The submission deadlines for WDARF Grant Call 2024 are as follows:

Submission deadline for EOI: 30 Jul 2024

Submission deadline for Full proposal (for shortlisted EOIs only): End Sep 2024

Please note that late submissions will not be accepted.

3. Previous Review Comments

The below provides a summary of the top five review comments provided by the Expert Review Panel and the SSG Research Committee during their review of past proposals. Both the ERP and SSG Research Committee would note strengths of each proposal as well, but these are the comments most often made on qualities of the proposals to be enhanced.

3.1 Review Comments by Expert Review Panel

I. Clearer research questions and objectives

Research questions and objectives must be clear and their suitability to address the research problem need to be apparent.

II. Relevant research literature

Review of existing and up-to-date international literature relevant to the research problem and to demonstrate understanding of current knowledge in the area of proposed research. To include critical analysis of the literature on their methodologies, findings and limitations etc. to highlight the gap that the proposed research aimed to address. References on the literature cited in the proposal must be provided.

III. Clearly/strongly theoretically framed. Theory must be linked to research design and tools.

Proposal has the potential to further enhance its clarity by providing a comprehensive outline of the theoretical and conceptual framework to be used in the study. By fully explaining the main theories, concepts, and definitions, it can effectively guide the research direction and establish a logical relationship between the framework and the problem to be addressed.

IV. Method to be clearly explained.

Method needs to match with or linked to research questions.

The methodological approach must be sufficiently explained and argued to be appropriate to address the research questions/objectives. The approach should be supported by adequate discussion of current literature relevant to the proposed approach.

Rigor in determining sample sizes and incentive rate should be demonstrated.

V. Fitting the aim of WDARF grant call.

- Proposal must be relevant to the selected challenge statement/research theme.
- Proposal should prioritise the aim of WDARF grant call rather than seeking national funding for internal course evaluation or to look for new sources of students for internal courses.
- Proposal should prioritise the aim of WDARF grant call rather than development of product /system not connected to a research question.

3.2 Review Comments by SSG Research Committee

I. Transferability

Findings derived from proposed research need to be applicable beyond the specific context of the study. For example, a research study that demonstrates transferability to other sectors will be more strongly considered for support.

II. Scalability

Although the proposed research may yield positive results, its impact can be significantly enhanced by expanding or replicating it to benefit larger populations or address similar challenges in different settings.

III. Clear objective

Proposal can be further strengthened by providing greater clarity in the research questions and the proposed solutions.

IV. Study should be novel.

Proposed study can be enhanced by incorporating contemporary topics and methodologies that are at the forefront of current research, ensuring its relevance and impact in the field. Proposed research needs to address current needs or emerging trends.

V. Relevance to CET and implication to policy.

The proposed topic should have strong relevance or significance to CET at the present time. The proposed needs to have the potential to inform or enhance practice in the area of skills development and adult learning in Singapore.