



Ministry of Planning,
Development & Special
Initiatives



RASTA – PIDE & PLANNING COMMISSION COMPETITIVE RESEARCH GRANTS

Pakistan Institute of Development Economics,
Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives

rasta.pide.org.pk

CGP 9.0 CALL FOR RESEARCH IDEAS



The '*RASTA – PIDE & Planning Commission Competitive Research Grants*' is an extensive economics and public policy research funding programme in Pakistan. Its mission is to develop an extensive research network of academia and think tanks across Pakistan, producing high-quality, evidence-based policy research to inform Pakistan's public policy process. The objectives of the RASTA programme are to:

- i. Reduce the research-policy gap by stimulating economic and social science research and debate across Pakistan.
- ii. Provide a knowledge-sharing/generating platform where different actors can present and share evidence based research to inform decision-making in the government.
- iii. Revisit the public policy agenda in line with the evidence produced in this programme.
- iv. Build capacity and improve policymaking and implementation by involving and engaging local universities, think tanks, policymakers, practitioners, and other stakeholders.

With these objectives, the programme seeks to develop local thought communities and generate knowledge. Substantial outputs will be completed in critical areas of public policy, producing insightful research that facilitates the achievement of the Government's goals in line with its vision. So far, RASTA has awarded 159 research projects in seven rounds of the Competitive Grants Programme (CGP) worth PKR 447 million. More information is available at rasta.pide.org.pk.

This is the *Ninth Call for the Competitive Grants Programme (CGP 9.0)*. CGP 9.0 directly translates the 11 National Economic Missions approved by the National Economic Council (NEC) under the URAAN Pakistan vision into evidence based reforms, strategic investment priorities, & actionable implementation roadmaps. Research Ideas are invited on these 11 broad themes: (1) Export Acceleration, (2) Resource Mobilisation & Tax Reform, (3) Produce in Pakistan, (4) Agriculture Value Chain, (5) Energy, Water & Environmental Resilience, (6) E-Pakistan & Artificial Intelligence, (7) Human Capital & Skills, (8) Housing, Construction & Real Estate Market, (9) Social Protection & Poverty Reduction, (10) Multimodal Connectivity & Logistics, and (11) Investment Facilitation.

The themes/topics of this call, the detailed grant description, the application guidelines, and the review process are presented in the following sections.



RASTA CGP 9.0 CALL FOR RESEARCH IDEAS

RASTA Competitive Grants Programme (CGP) 9.0 invites research ideas on the following themes/topics:



1. EXPORT ACCELERATION

Expand export competitiveness, product diversification, and global value chain integration across manufacturing, IT, services, minerals, and the blue economy.

- 1.1 **Competitiveness & Diversification:** Revealed comparative advantage and market diversification from low value textiles into engineering, pharma, defence, and speciality chemicals.
- 1.2 **Global Value Chains & Upgrading:** Productivity, quality certifications, Industry 4.0 adoption, gender-inclusive workforce strategies, and SME supply-chain integration.
- 1.3 **IT & Skilled Exports:** IT/BPO freelancing growth, digitally enabled service platforms, and high-skilled labour export strategies.
- 1.4 **Trade Policy & Logistics:** Tariff rationalisation, anti-export bias elimination, customs automation, export credit guarantees, FX rules, & port/border efficiency.
- 1.5 **Implementation Roadmap:** Sub-sector action plans, target matrices, & financing feasibility.



2. RESOURCE MOBILIZATION & TAX REFORM

Expand the tax base, improve compliance, and build an equitable, digital-first revenue system to generate sustainable fiscal space while strengthening fiscal federalism.

2.1 Tax Base Expansion & Equity: Capturing under-taxed sectors (retail/wholesale, real estate, agricultural income); distributional and gender-disaggregated impact assessments.

2.2 Tax Administration & Digitalisation: FBR & provincial revenue authority automation; mandatory digital invoicing, automated risk audits, and SRO/exemption rationalisation.

2.3 Inclusive Social Protection Systems: Rebalancing the National Finance Commission framework, harmonising tax assignments, and boosting provincial/local own-source revenues.

2.4 Political Economy & SOE Reform: Diagnostics of stalled tax/SOE reforms; political-economy-aware sequencing, debt sustainability modelling, and non-tax revenue strategies.

2.5 Fiscal Sustainability Roadmap: Medium-Term Revenue Strategy and quantified revenue KPIs.



3. PRODUCE IN PAKISTAN

Increase domestic value addition in manufacturing, strengthen industrial productivity, and reduce dependence on strategic imports.

3.1 Competitiveness & Import Substitution: Total factor productivity, cost-of-doing-business analysis, Effective Protection Rate (EPR) rationalisation, and raw/intermediate input import substitution.

3.2 SME Scaling & SEZs: Credit access, formalisation incentives, & diagnostic evaluations/revival blueprints for SEZs and industrial estates.

3.3 Technology Adoption & De-Sludging: Manufacturing automation & regulatory audits to eliminate licensing, permit, and inspection "sludge."

3.4 Industrial Policy Governance: Governance models for dynamic cluster management, SEZ administration, and evaluation of donor/government industrial schemes.

3.5 Industrial Transformation Roadmap: Sector investment plans, domestic value-addition targets, and execution timetables.



4. AGRICULTURE VALUE CHAIN

Modernise agriculture into a climate- smart, water-efficient agribusiness sector, boosting yields, post-harvest processing, and high-value exports (horticulture, livestock, dairy, fisheries).

4.1 Productivity & Technology: Yield gap remediation, farm mechanisation, digital/precision agriculture, & modern extension services.

4.2 Water Efficiency & Climate Adaptation: Agricultural water productivity, drip/sprinkler adoption, groundwater management, & climate resilience.

4.3 Agro-Processing & Cold Chains: Cold-chain networks, processing facilities, & post-harvest loss reduction strategies.

4.4 Markets, Land & Credit: Mandatory deregulation, price realisation, land fragmentation remedies, gender barriers to land ownership, & agri-credit/insurance.

4.5 Agri-Export & Provincial Roadmap: Export supply chains meeting international SPS/Halal standards; region specific commodity roadmaps with provincial co-financing.



5. ENERGY, WATER & ENVIRONMENTAL RESILIENCE

Secure energy and water systems while eliminating circular debt and climate vulnerabilities.

5.1 Power Sector Restructuring: Addressing circular debt drivers, tariffs, T&D losses, CTBCM market implementation, and PPA restructuring.

5.2 Renewables & Efficiency: Cost-effective renewable energy, grid modernisation, storage, and energy efficiency.

5.3 Water Security & Governance: Water allocation, groundwater management, irrigation efficiency, and river basin governance.

5.4 Climate & Environmental Resilience: Addressing floods, droughts, air pollution/smog, urban heat stress, waste, and environmental risks.

5.5 Resilience Roadmap: Mobilising public/private finance for integrated energy, water, and environmental resilience.



6. E-PAKISTAN & ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Scale ICT/freelancing exports & operationalise AI to drive digital public infrastructure, public service delivery, and enterprise growth.

6.1 Digital Infrastructure & DPI: High-speed broadband, national fiberization, Digital Public Infrastructure, ecommerce integration, fintech payments, and cybersecurity.

- 6.2 **AI for Growth & Governance:** Commercial AI adoption in enterprises/SMEs; AI in public administration, regulatory oversight, predictive policymaking, and Quantum Valley readiness.
- 6.3 **Digital Skills & Freelance Scaling:** Digital literacy, advanced AI training, gig worker protections, international payment gateways, IP protection, and venture capital deregulation.
- 6.4 **Policy Evaluation:** Empirical evaluation of federal, provincial, and donor-funded digital economy initiatives.
- 6.5 **Digital Skills & Freelance Scaling:** Infrastructure investment sequencing, regulatory reform schedules, adoption metrics, and financing plans.



7. HUMAN CAPITAL & SKILLS

Convert demographic potential into productive human capital by reducing Out-of-School Children (OOSC), aligning TVET with market demand, and raising female labour force participation.

- 7.1 **Foundational Learning & Governance:** Tackling learning poverty, teacher accountability, OOSC re-entry models, and education governance.
- 7.2 **Market-Oriented TVET:** Restructuring TVET curricula for local Industry 4.0 demand and foreign labour export markets.
- 7.3 **Youth Employability & Female Participation:** School-to-work transitions, formal apprenticeships, youth entrepreneurship, & addressing legal, transport, and care-economy barriers to women's employment.

- 7.4 **Health, Nutrition & Population:** Capturing under-taxed sectors (retail/wholesale, real estate, agricultural income); distributional and gender-disaggregated impact assessments.

- 7.5 **Human Capital Roadmap:** Skill demand mapping, provincial delivery plans, quantified targets, and medium term financing models.



8. HOUSING, CONSTRUCTION & REAL ESTATE MARKET

Expand affordable housing, formalise real estate markets, & modernise urban I& policy to make construction a driver of employment & investment.

- 8.1 **Affordable Housing & Mortgages:** Low-income housing models, rental market frameworks, long-term mortgage liquidity, and Islamic credit guarantees.
- 8.2 **Land Titling & Urban Planning:** Digital cadastral mapping, clean land titling, land valuation, vertical zoning deregulation, Transit-Oriented Development, and municipal approval de-sludging.
- 8.3 **Construction Productivity & Green Standards:** Alternative low-cost materials, green building standards, climate-resilient construction, and formalising broker/developer markets.
- 8.4 **Real Estate Governance & Public Land PPPs:** Streamlining approvals, unlocking public land for private development, and evaluating public housing programs.

- 8.5 SME Scaling & SEZs:** City-specific housing supply plans, private capital sourcing, and urban land utilisation strategies.



9. SOCIAL PROTECTION & POVERTY REDUCTION

Reduce chronic and transient poverty through an integrated, shock-responsive social safety net that creates pathways to productive livelihoods.

- 9.1 Poverty Measurement & Targeting:** District-level chronic vs transient poverty mapping, multidimensional poverty analysis, and empirical evaluations of cash transfer programs (e.g., BISP).
- 9.2 Shock-Responsive Safety Nets:** Systems & social registries to respond rapidly to climate disasters, food inflation spikes, and economic shocks.
- 9.3 Productive Inclusion & Graduation:** Connecting safety net recipients to skills training, micro-grants, gender focused livelihood support, and formal jobs.
- 9.4 Digital Safety Nets & Consolidation:** Digital wallet payments, data integration, resolving federal-provincial overlaps, and consolidating duplicative welfare schemes.
- 9.5 Poverty Reduction Roadmap:** Quantified poverty trajectories, unified safety net architecture, and long-term fiscal plans.



10. MULTIMODAL CONNECTIVITY & LOGISTICS

Lower supply chain logistics costs & transit times to strengthen domestic commerce, regional corridors, & export competitiveness by rebalancing freight toward rail.

- 10.1 Logistics Competitiveness:** Logistics cost benchmarking, supply chain bottleneck identification, cargo tracking, and technology adoption.
- 10.2 Freight Rebalancing & Transport Integration:** Shifting long-haul freight from road to rail, mass transit sustainability, and multimodal corridor planning.
- 10.3 Ports, Blue Economy & Corridors:** Port modernisation, blue economy activation, CPEC trade corridor optimisation, and maritime connectivity.
- 10.4 Border Facilitation & Customs:** Modernising border-crossing infrastructure, single-window systems, and digital cargo documentation.
- 10.5 Connectivity Roadmap:** Priority corridor mapping, investment sequencing, institutional coordination, PPP models, and financial viability plans.



11. INVESTMENT FACILITATION

Mobilise domestic private capital & attract quality Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into export-oriented, high-value sectors by creating a predictable, competitive business climate.

- 11.1 Investment Climate & SIFC Optimisation:** Reducing administrative burdens, streamlining one-window clearance, policy predictability, and institutional evaluation of the Special Investment Facilitation Council model.
- 11.2 Capital Mobilisation & FDI Linkages:** Addressing constraints to private domestic savings conversion, targeting FDI that generates technology transfer, and maximising supplier spillovers.

- 11.3 **Investor Protection & Dispute Resolution:** Alternative Dispute Resolution, specialised commercial courts, legal capital protections, and insulating commercial policies from political volatility.
- 11.4 **Policy Evaluations:** Empirical evaluations of past & present investment promotion regimes, tax credits, and donor-supported programs.
- 11.5 **Investment Facilitation Roadmap:** Strategic reform matrices, SIFC investment pipeline execution plans, target metrics, and implementation KPIs.

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: RASTA CGP 9.0 invites Research Ideas on the above-listed research topics. Proposed studies must identify key policy issues and public policy decisions in Pakistan, assess the empirical outcomes of those decisions, evaluate constraints to policy reform, and examine alternative policy recommendations to enhance their impact. The Research Idea (stage 1) submission is due by **October 10, 2026, midnight PST.**



CGP GRANT DESCRIPTION

This is the RASTA Competitive Grants Programme's (CGP) ninth call for research ideas. Submissions will be thoroughly reviewed, and the progress of awarded studies will be closely monitored by the 'Research Advisory Committee' (RAC) of RASTA. The following are the broad principles of the programme:

1. The maximum duration to complete a project will be 12 months. Shorter duration studies are encouraged.

2. The maximum grant available for a project is PKR 6.0 million; PKR 4.8 million for desk research.
3. Ideas/proposals will be evaluated by the choice of the problem and expected knowledge outcomes for countrywide or local development.
4. Research ideas will be thoroughly reviewed (stage 1 review) and discussed by the members of the RAC before inviting shortlisted applicants to attend a mandatory training course.
5. The successful applicants shall be invited for 2-3 days of online training, followed by instructions to submit the detailed research proposal.
6. Detailed research (technical) proposals will be thoroughly reviewed (stage 2 review) and discussed by the members of the RAC before inviting the shortlisted applicants to the CGP 9.0 Review Workshop (stage 3 review). This will be followed by the Award Decision Meeting of the RAC and announcement of awards.
7. Reviewers' comments on the research proposals (stage 2) will be shared with all shortlisted applicants regardless of the outcome. However, there will be no comments on the research ideas (stage 1).
8. Mentor(s) will be assigned to provide technical assistance on each award study, and the M&E Desk at RASTA will facilitate the research process.
9. All data collected and work produced under RASTA will have to be submitted for authenticity checks.
10. Multiple conferences/workshops/webinars will be organised, allowing all reviewers, award winners and sector specialists to see progress and develop network learning.

11. Evaluation of government initiatives, policies and processes, and assessment of institutions and their performance in broader socio-economic and development contexts are encouraged.
12. Female applicants, university students and researchers from less developed areas of Pakistan are encouraged to participate in the RASTA programme.

APPLICANTS' QUALIFICATIONS

Research ideas are solicited from qualified individuals (and/or groups) interested in Pakistan's economic development and public policy issues, including faculty members and staff at international and local universities, as well as research institutes both within and outside Pakistan. Freelancers, policy specialists and/or practitioners may also submit research ideas to win the CGP Awards. Research ideas are encouraged from Pakistani graduate students enrolled in PhD and other postgraduate degree programmes at Pakistani and foreign universities, as well as from faculty members, to support their research.

INCLUSION POLICY

In light of the RASTA objectives, three Tiers have been defined to provide equal opportunities for applicants from less-developed areas. **Tier 1** includes applicants/institutes in Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi, W-category universities, and all foreign institutes; **Tier 2** includes applicants/institutes in the Punjab (except Lahore), Sindh (except Karachi) and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (except Ex-FATA); while **Tier 3** includes applicants/institutes in Balochistan, Ex FATA, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Azad Jammu & Kashmir. Research ideas from each of the three tiers will be evaluated in separate competitive categories. Research ideas may be submitted by individual applicants or by teams of up to four investigators. Collaborative proposals from teams based at multiple institutions and/or involving practitioners from relevant policy sector organisations are encouraged.

Females and postgraduate students are strongly encouraged to apply. RASTA is an equal-opportunity programme committed to ensuring an inclusive and transparent selection process. All eligible applicants will receive fair consideration based solely on merit, regardless of gender, age, disability, religion, ethnicity, caste, geographic location, socioeconomic background, or any other status protected by law.



CGP APPLICATION GUIDELINES

ELEMENTS OF THE GRANT APPLICATION

English is the language to be used in the RASTA Competitive Grants Programme. However, applicants may articulate their research argument/problem in Urdu if someone finds it difficult to express it in English. All CGP applications must include the following:

1. RASTA Form A-1 (Cover Sheet)
2. RASTA Form A-2.1 (Research Idea – Stage 1)
3. RASTA Form A-2.2 (Research Proposal – Stage 2)
4. RASTA Form A-3 (Financial Proposal – Stage 2)
5. Additional Documents:
 - *For professional applicants: A brief curriculum vitae (1-3 pages) for Principal Investigator/Co-PI.*
 - *For university student applicants: (i) Official transcript of graduate coursework completed and a list of planned additional course enrolment, and (ii) A letter of recommendation from the applicant's research supervisor.*

SUBMISSION PROCESS AND DEADLINE:

To submit your application, access the RASTA Portal <https://rasta-portal.pide.org.pk/> and fill out your application online.

- Do NOT mention your name and/or organisation anywhere except in Form A-1 (Cover Sheet). The application will not be processed if there is non-compliance. There is no need to submit a hard copy of the application.
- The deadline for application submission is October 10, 2026, by midnight, Pakistan Standard Time (PKT). Incomplete applications and applications received after the deadline will not be considered.

BUDGET GUIDELINES

The maximum grant available for a project is 6.0 million. Remuneration of a maximum of Rs. 180,000 per month for a member of the research team; a maximum of 70% of the total announced grant, i.e., Rs. 4.8 million can be availed under RASTA CGP. A research team may comprise up to four members, including the PI. The CoPIs may not be paid more than the PI. Income tax on remuneration will be deducted at source. For field visits/data collection, TADA/accommodation costs can be included as per the Federal Govt. rules. A maximum of 03% contingency and 10% institutional overhead of the calculated budget are permissible and may be included within the grant's upper limit.

DISBURSEMENT OF FUNDS

The disbursement of award money will occur in three tranches linked to the deliverables:

- 30% upon selection of the proposal for an award and submission/clearance of the **Inception Report**
- 30% upon satisfactory acceptance by the review panel of an **Interim Report** & presentation at the Mid-Term Review Workshop; and finally,
- 40% upon satisfactory acceptance by the review panel of the project's final **Research Paper** & presentation at the RASTA-PIDE Conference.

NOTE: There is no provision for hardware/software purchases, including data, books, laptops, or equipment. The publishing, printing, and dissemination of the study are the responsibility of RASTA. All CGP Awardees (RASTA Fellows) shall provide duly verified receipts of all expenses. If there is any unspent balance, it will be adjusted in the 3rd instalment. Detailed accounting procedures of RASTA will be shared afterwards.



CGP PROCESS

SELECTION CRITERIA AND PROCESS

All complete grant applications will be reviewed by a scholarly review panel comprised of members of the Research Advisory Committee (RAC) and RASTA Review Panel. Research ideas/proposals will be evaluated based on (a) The importance of the topic and relevance to the

given research themes/sub themes/topics; (b) the cohesion and creativity of the proposed research; (c) the research design and technical feasibility of the proposed research approach and analysis; (d) value of expected research outcomes for public policy; and (e) qualifications

of the principal and co-principal investigator(s) for undertaking the proposed study. Only topranked proposals will be invited to present orally (in person or online) at the RASTA Review Workshop. The complete CGP process is illustrated below:



EXPECTED OUTPUTS & RESEARCH DISSEMINATION

RASTA Fellows are expected to present their papers at the RASTA Conference and other national and/or international conferences/research events. There will be two types of publications: (a) RASTA-PIDE Conference Papers, and (b) RASTA Local Research, Local Solutions Volumes. All Fellows will be asked to produce one or two RASTA Policy Briefs for wider research dissemination. The RASTA programme will organise multiple research conferences/workshops. RASTA Fellows are expected to make two presentations of their

work: (i) an Interim research report at the Mid-Term Review Workshop, and (ii) a presentation corresponding to their research paper at the RASTA Conference. Members of the RAC and other invitees from the public and private sectors will participate in these events.



RASTA RESEARCH ADVISORY COMMITTEE (RAC)

The RASTA is guided by a scholarly RAC, chaired by Dr Muhammad Nadeem Javaid (SI), Vice Chancellor, PIDE Islamabad. The members of the RAC are well-reputed national and international researchers, academics,

practitioners, and international scholars of economic development, as well as senior officials from federal and provincial governments. The role of RAC is critical from the call for applications to the final submission of the research paper. Each member of RAC critically reviews research proposals, participates in decisions on funding awards, monitors progress, and mentors some of the awarded research studies during the course.



RASTA PROJECT MANAGEMENT TEAM

The Project Management Team (PMT) is the operational arm of the RASTA programme at PIDE, Islamabad. The PMT manages all programme activities under the leadership of Dr Muhammad Nadeem Javaid (SI), Chairman RAC / Vice Chancellor, PIDE Islamabad and Dr Faheem Jehangir Khan, Project Director, RASTA / Dean (Policy), PIDE Islamabad. The PMT, stationed within an independent Project Management Unit, is responsible for administering the grant selection procedure established by the scholarly Research Advisory Committee (RAC), disbursing funds based on recipients' fulfilment of grant requirements, and handling other operational aspects of the programme.



EVENTS & KNOWLEDGE HUB

Visit the RASTA website to find out more about events, research videos, publications, and policy briefs. According to the RASTA Open Access policy, all research materials are freely available online. For more updates about the RASTA events and opportunities, follow us on our social media platforms.



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