

Saudi Innovation Grant Program (SIGP): Application Guidelines

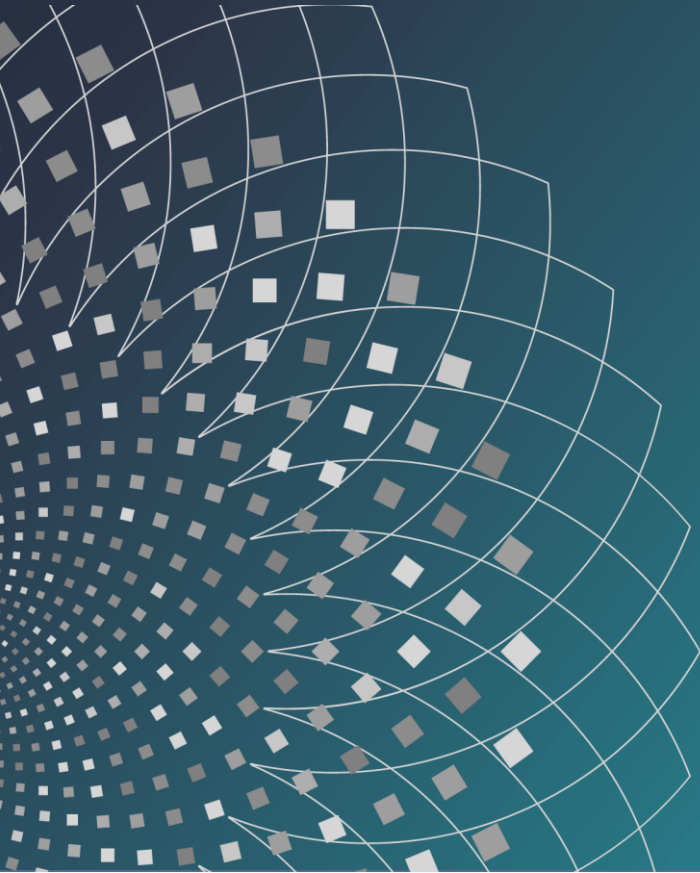


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1. Program Overview

1. Introduction:

The Saudi Innovation Grant Program (SIGP) is a program designed to help fund your company's growth.

It is an integral part of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's strategic vision to become a global leader in innovation. This program is designed to support the Kingdom's small and medium enterprises (SMEs) by providing them with funding to carry out high-impact research, development, and innovation projects. By offering targeted financial support, the program will help close the funding gap often encountered by early to mid-stage startups, enabling them to transform their innovative ideas into commercially viable products or services. This grant program provides non-dilutive funding, which does not require your company to give up equity. This approach not only supports the growth of your company and other SMEs, but also ensures that the intellectual property and potential revenue generated from successful projects remain with the original creators.

2. Focus Areas:

The grant program focuses on projects that fall within key strategic areas, which have been identified as priorities for the long-term development of KSA's national RDI sector to tackle the most pressing challenges and capitalize on the most attractive opportunities. To be eligible, your work must be within one of these focus areas. The four focus areas are detailed below:

- **Health and Wellness:** Solve KSA's prevalent medical and behavioral health challenges, achieve early prevention of diseases through personalized wellness and healthcare services and disrupt digital healthcare to ensure health equity across the Kingdom
- **Sustainability and Essential Needs:** Sustainably secure supply of water, food and power to the population and industry, become a global exporter of advanced water & food tech and establish KSA as a global paradigm on environmental conservation
- **Energy and Industrials:** Maintain & extend KSA's global leadership position in energy supply, establish KSA as a regional hub for specialty chemical derivatives, and ensure hydrocarbon demand sustainability through advanced non-metallic products and blue hydrogen
- **Economies of the Future:** Reimagine the future of urban living through hyper-connected cognitive cities, become a global space/deep sea champion and foster digital technology frontiers in priority sectors to build a regional/ global edge

Ambitions of the focus areas are translated into challenges, which are defined as starting points for the SIGP. Challenges aim for solving a specific element of the focus areas. Challenges will be published, and applicants need to showcase during the application process how they can contribute to solving the respective challenge.

3. Purpose of the Program:

The primary objective of the SIGP is to foster a vibrant innovation ecosystem within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. By providing financial support to SMEs engaged in RDI, the program aims to help companies:

- **Accelerate Innovation:** By offering financial resources, the program enables SMEs to explore cutting-edge technologies and develop new products that can compete in the local and global markets
- **Enhance Commercialization:** The program focuses not only on the development of new technologies but also prime them for commercialization
- **Promote Collaboration:** The program encourages collaboration between SMEs, academic institutions and research organizations, and the public sector
- **Support Economic Diversification:** Aligned with Vision 2030, the program contributes to the diversification of the Saudi economy and promotes the growth of knowledge-based industries

4. Target Beneficiaries:

The program is designed to support three groups of eligible beneficiaries:

- **Independent SMEs:** SMEs and startups that possess the capability to conduct RDI independently. They are typically businesses with strong internal research teams and the ability to develop and commercialize innovative technologies without external support
- **Collaborative SMEs:** SMEs that, while having innovative ideas, require the specialized knowledge, facilities, or existing intellectual property (IP) of academic institutions to fully realize their projects
- **Academic Entrepreneurs:** University professors, researchers, and PhD students who have developed innovative IPs or are engaged in ongoing research with significant commercial potential. They often need the commercial expertise and market access that SMEs can provide

5. Program tracks:

The program offers two distinct tracks, each tailored to different types of projects and partnerships:

- **SEIR (Small Enterprise Innovation Research) Track:** This track is ideal for SMEs that have the internal resources and expertise to conduct RDI independently. Companies applying under this track do not need to partner with academic institutions. The intellectual property (IP) generated through the funded research belongs entirely to the SME, enabling them to capitalize fully on their innovations
- **SETP (Small Enterprise Technology Partnership) Track:** The SETP track is designed for projects that would benefit from the specialized expertise or existing IP of academic or research institutions. Applicants under this track must partner with an academic institution, with the IP generated through the project shared between the SME and the academic institution according to the terms of their partnership agreement. This track fosters collaboration between the private sector and academia, driving innovation that leverages the strengths of both



2. Eligibility Criteria

1. General Eligibility:

The eligibility criteria for the SIGP are designed to ensure that the support is directed towards companies that are well-positioned to contribute significantly to the innovation landscape. To qualify for the grant, applicants must meet

- All 5 applicable criteria for SEIR track (#1 - #5)
- All 6 applicable criteria for SETP track (#1 - #6)

Detailed list of eligibility criteria:

1. **Company Size:** The company must have fewer than 250 employees
2. **Revenue Threshold:** The company's annual revenue must be less than SAR 200 million
3. **Location:** The company must be headquartered in Saudi Arabia
4. **R&D location:** The beneficiaries must conduct at least 75% of planned RDI activities within the Kingdom as detailed in the work plan.
5. **Company:** Applicant must be a for-profit institution
6. **Academia partnership:** Applicant must co-apply with an academic/research institution – *Mandatory for SETP track*

These eligibility criteria reflect the program's commitment to nurturing homegrown innovation and ensuring that the benefits of RDI investments are retained within the country.



3. Application Process

The application to SIGP is a streamlined four-step process.

- **Submit research proposal:** The first step in the application process is the submission of a research proposal. This document serves as an initial expression of interest and provides a preliminary overview of the project. The proposal is submitted through the program's online portal and is used for the initial screening of applicants. This step is crucial in ensuring that only projects aligned with the program's goals and posted challenges move forward to the next stage.
- **Receive invitation for full application:** The research proposal is then reviewed by staff at the Research, Development, and Innovation Authority (RDIA) and if deemed eligible, applicants will be informed of their progress to the next stage and will be invited to submit a full application.
- **Submit full application:** This stage requires a more detailed submission, including comprehensive technical and commercial documents. The full application should provide a clear and detailed picture of the proposed project, including its innovation potential, feasibility, market readiness, and the capabilities of the project team.
- **Grant award and funds disbursement stage:** Once a project has been selected for funding and has fulfilled the conditions laid out by RDIA, a project agreement between RDIA and the project's applicant/lead partner is concluded. The project agreement establishes the rights and responsibilities of the lead partner and RDIA. The project agreement covers the implementation phase of the project and ensures a close follow-up throughout the implementation.

Required Documents:

The application requirements differ between the proposal stage application and the following full application. The following documents need to be submitted:

| Category | Documents | Content | Applicability | |
|----------------|---|---|-----------------------------|------------------|
| | | | Research proposal | Full application |
| | Company Profile | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Founders/Management team profile Business Traction (i.e. Pre-revenue/revenue generator/product dev./up-scaling) Existing product range | Required | Not Required |
| Administrative | Administrative information | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basic information form SME Certificate / Saudi Commercial Registration Declaration of government grants received / conflict of interest Eligibility criteria checklist Research institution partnership Letter of Intent – <i>SETP specific</i> | Required | Required |
| Technical | Proposed Product & unique value proposition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Problem Statement and Target Customers Product offering and its uniqueness/innovation How does it solve target customers' pain points | Required at high-level only | Required |
| | Technology/ Innovation to be developed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key technology involved and the development work that has been done Key technical hurdles to be overcome (incl. resources required) Key planned to work with to develop the technology | Required at high-level only | Required |
| | Project timeline / milestones | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program duration Key milestones | Not Required | Required |
| | Team composition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> High-level CVs of RDI team members, incl past RDI experiences | Not Required | Required |
| Commercial | Business roadmap | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Go-to-market strategy High-level Revenue Model Commercialization Plan | Required at high-level only | Required |
| | Competition and Competitive Advantage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing competitors (Direct or Indirect) Competitive advantage over existing competition | Not Required | Required |
| | Fund utilization plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Estimated funding amount required & proposed usage (break down by cost areas) | Not Required | Required |

For the fund utilization plan (last requirement highlighted in the table), a detailed list of potential usage of funds is provided to ensure the compliance with the aim of the SIGP program. The potential areas for fund utilization include:

- **Prototyping and testing:** Allocate funds for the development of prototypes and the necessary testing phases, including equipment rental or acquisition and materials
- **Software development and licensing:** Invest in necessary software tools, licenses, and custom software development that are essential for the project's progress and success
- **Materials and supplies:** Purchase raw materials, chemicals, and other essential supplies needed to develop and test new technologies or products
- **Market research and feasibility studies:** Allocate resources for conducting market research, feasibility studies, and business model development to ensure the commercial viability of the project
- **Collaborative R&D and partnerships:** Support partnerships with universities, research institutions, and other companies to leverage additional expertise and resources, including shared use of specialized facilities or labs as well as conference participation, cost for IP management and peer-reviewed publications
- **Regulatory compliance and certifications:** Use funds to meet regulatory requirements and obtain necessary certifications, ensuring that the product or technology is compliant with industry standards

Ineligible cost:

The following costs are not eligible for funding:

- Any none direct RDI expenditure (salary included)
- Gifts/giveaways
- Fines/financial penalties incl. expenses related to legal disputes and litigation
- Costs arising from foreign exchange rate fluctuations
- Interest on debt
- Costs related to awards and prizes (participation, application, etc.)



4. Size of Awards

1. Phases of Funding:

SIGP funding is deployed in two distinct phases, each tailored to the specific needs of different stages in the RDI process:

- **Phase 1: Proof of Concept (6 to 12 months award duration):** This phase is designed for projects that are in the early stages of development. The goal is to support the creation of prototypes or pilot projects that can demonstrate the technical viability and commercial potential of the proposed innovation. During this phase, companies can receive funding of up to SAR 1 million. This funding is intended to cover the costs associated with initial RDI activities, such as material procurement, prototyping, and preliminary testing.
- **Phase 2: Proof of Value (18 to 24 months award duration):** This phase is crucial for bridging the gap between concept and commercialization, ensuring that the innovation is fully developed and ready for market entry. In this phase, companies can receive up to SAR 4 million. The funding is intended to support activities such as advanced prototyping, market testing, regulatory compliance, and the development of a go-to-market strategy that has successfully completed the Proof of Concept studies (with or without prior participation in phase).

Note: Applicants could apply for either phase.

2. Funding Structure:

SIGP operates on a co-funding model, where the program funds up to 70% of the total RDI-related costs. The remaining 30% must be covered by the applicant. This structure ensures that both the program and the applicants are financially invested in the project's success, promoting greater accountability and encouraging companies to carefully plan their budgets and resource allocations.



5. Evaluation Criteria

After the applicant receives a positive confirmation of their research proposal related application, a more comprehensive and rigorous assessment is conducted for the full application. It is designed to ensure that only the most innovative and commercially viable projects receive funding. The evaluation focuses both on technical and commercial criteria:

Technical evaluation:

| Criteria | Sub-dimensions | Weight |
|---|---|--------|
| Innovation and technical merit | Novelty: Assess the uniqueness and originality of the proposed solution | 15% |
| | Technical Feasibility: Evaluate the practicality and viability of the technical approach | 10% |
| Project plan and execution | Clarity: Review the clarity and coherence of the project plan | 10% |
| Team capability | Milestones: Examine the defined milestones and their alignment with project goals | 15% |
| | Expertise: Assess the relevant skills and experience of the project team members | 10% |
| Impact & scalability | Track Record: Consider the team's past successes and achievements in similar projects | 5% |
| | Potential Impact: Assess potential impact of the project on its target user or sector | 15% |
| | Scalability: Evaluate the potential for scaling the project and its broader applicability | 5% |
| Strategic alignment & challenge relevance | Relevance to challenge: Assess how effectively the solution addresses a specific challenge defined by the program | 15% |

Commercial evaluation:

| Criteria | Sub-dimensions | Weight |
|-----------------------------|---|--------|
| Business model | Business model: Assess the clarity and feasibility of the business model | 25% |
| | Market fit: Evaluate how well business model aligns with market needs and demands | 20% |
| Commercialization potential | Go-to-market strategy: Assess the proposed go-to-market strategy and its feasibility | 20% |
| | High-level revenue projection: Evaluate reasonableness of the potential revenue RDI outcome generates | 20% |
| Funding source/ utilization | Fund utilization plan: Assess reasonableness of proposed plan to allocate program funding | 15% |

After a diligent review and a decision communicated by RDIA, successful applicants will be part of the SIGP program and eligible for the respective funds.

