



RASTA NOTES #02(2021)

RASTA Round 1: Review Process & Updates

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Response to RASTA First Call

In response to our first call, the RASTA secretariate received over 200 applications from all parts of the country and from foreign institutes as well. Figures 1 & 2 below present the location and theme-wise distribution of applications received. Highest number of applications were received from Islamabad (36%), followed by Sindh (22%) and Punjab (20%). Similarly, highest number of applications were received under the theme 'Governance, public policy making and aid dependence' (32%), followed by 'Growth and development' (19%), 'Persisting energy problems of Pakistan' (16%) and 'Cities governance and development' (16%).

Figure 1. Location-wise applications received

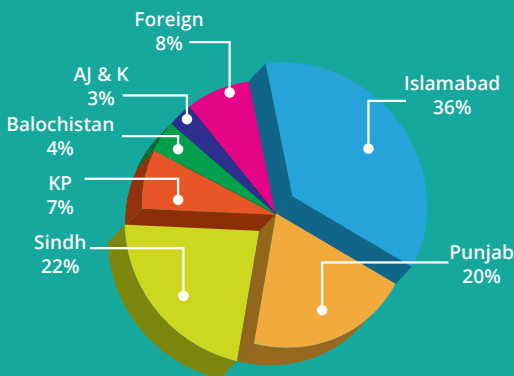
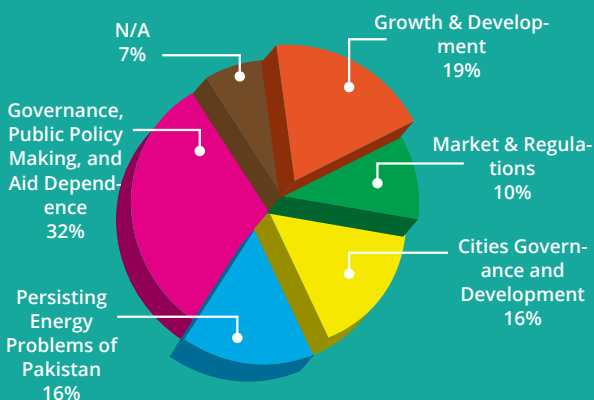


Figure 2. Theme-wise applications received



Gender-wise distribution shows that 26% research proposals were submitted by female applicants as 'Principal Applicant' and 16% of the total applications received were submitted by 'graduate/postgraduate students'. In light of the RASTA objectives and inclusion policy, we defined three Tiers so as to give equal opportunity to the applicants from less developed areas. Tier 1 includes applicants/institutes in the North of Punjab, Karachi and all foreign institutes; Tier 2 includes applicants/institutes in the South Punjab, interior Sindh and KP province; while Tier 3 includes applicants/ institutes in Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu & Kashmir. The Tier-wise distribution shows that 10% applications were received from Tier 3, around 7% from Tier 2, and remaining 83% applications were from Tier 1.



The Review Process

Keeping in view the large number of applications, transparency, and providing equal opportunity to all, the RASTA Research Advisory Committee (RAC) decided to conduct double blind reviews of all applications. It was also decided to conduct two rounds of review: Initial Review and Detailed Review. In each review stage, two reviewers would review each research proposal without knowing the names and institutes of the applicants. All reviewers evaluated proposals strictly in accordance with the evaluation criteria set forth by the RASTA (<https://pide.org.pk/rasta/1st-call-for-research-proposals/>). They were asked to score each criterion on the scale of 1 to 5 (1=poor; 2=fair; 3=good; 4=very good; and 5=excellent). On the basis of their evaluation, they were also asked to provide us an overall score.

Table 1. Initial Review Results (Stage 1)

	Total	Tier 1 (Local)	Tier 1 (Foreign)	Tier 2	Tier 3
Initial Review	202	154	16	14	18
Unsuccessful Applications	130	106	8	9	7
	64%	69%	50%	64%	39%
Recommended for 2nd Stage Review	72	48	8	5	11
	36%	31%	50%	36%	61%
Average review score to qualify stage 2		avg 3.5	avg 3.5	avg 3.0	avg 2.5

In the initial review stage (results shown in Table 1 above), 202 research proposals went through a double-blind review out of which 72 (36%) were successful for the second stage review. A research proposal was considered successful if the average score of two reviews was 3.5, 3.0 and 2.5 for Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3, respectively. Unsuccessful applicants were informed about the outcome at this stage. The RAC was consulted at this stage and detailed review (stage 2) was conducted in which 72 shortlisted research proposals were thoroughly evaluated by the reviewers.

In the second review stage, 72 successful research proposals from the initial review again went through another shuffled double-blind review. As a result, out of the total, 31 (43%) were recommended for the Review Workshop. Figure 2 shows the results of the detailed review stage below. This time, besides assigning a score on the scale of 1 to 5 against all criteria and an overall score, the reviewers were also requested to suggest (a) 'Not Recommended for the Review Workshop', or (b) 'Conditionally Recommended for the Review Workshop', or (c) 'Highly Recommended for the Review Workshop' based on their overall evaluation. Out of the 31 successful applications, 07 were marked as 'Highly Recommended' by both reviewers, 14 were recommended as 'Highly Recommended' & 'Conditional Recommended', while 05 were suggested 'Conditionally Recommended' by both reviewers. 10 research proposals went into a third blind review since there was a conflict in the reviewers' recommendations, i.e., the first reviewer rejected the proposal while the second reviewer highly recommended the proposal for the Workshop. As a result of the third review, 05 proposals got selected for the Review Workshop. The Tier-wise distribution of successful and unsuccessful applications in both review stages are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 2. Detailed Review Results (Stage 2)

	Total	Tier 1 (Local)	Tier 1 (Foreign)	Tier 2	Tier 3
Initial Review	72	48	8	5	11
Unsuccessful Applications	41	27	6	2	6
	57%	56%	75%	40%	55%
Recommended for 2nd Stage Review	31	21	2	3	5
	43%	44%	25%	60%	45%

Review Workshop invitations to 31 successful applicants of this round have been sent. The applicants will meet the RAC members with their research team and present their technical and detailed financial proposals in the (online) Workshop that is scheduled in the last week of January and first week of February 2021. In the Workshop, the RAC will discuss the shortlisted applications in light of the presentation, reviewers' comments and shall decide the awards.

The RASTA Round 1 Awards will be announced in the month of February 2021. Contracts will be signed between the awardees and RASTA. The progress of all RASTA research projects will be regularly monitored from the 'RASTA M&E Desk' and mentoring will be provided to research teams if required.



RASTA Reviewers' Roundtable Discussion

The RASTA Management Team is planning to hold a Reviewers' Roundtable Discussion. The objective of this event is to discuss common weaknesses in research proposals (submitted to RASTA Round 1) and the way to address those deficiencies. This event will enable unsuccessful and potentially new applicants to learn from the mistakes so as to improve the chances of acceptance in the upcoming rounds. Keep following RASTA on Twitter and Web for more updates.



RASTA Round 2

The RASTA Management Team is working on the 'Second Round of RASTA Call for Research Proposals'. Tentatively, we are planning to send out the Call in the month of February 2021 with a deadline for submissions in 06-08 weeks. So, do not get discouraged if your application was unsuccessful in the first round. Keep following RASTA on Twitter and Web for more updates.

Note: All information related to RASTA Response & Review Process has been provided in the spirit of transparency.