

## **Guidelines for Research Project Proposals on Sustainable Development and Social Well-Being**

*Issued by*

**Indian Centre for Social Science and Management Research (ICSSMR)**

**(भारतीय सामाजिक विज्ञान एवं प्रबंधन अनुसंधान केन्द्र)**

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### **1. Introduction**

1.1 The concept of *Sustainable Development* has gained unprecedented importance across the globe in recent decades as nations grapple with challenges of climate change, social inequalities, resource depletion, and economic instability. Sustainable development is not merely an environmental or economic agenda; it is a **multi-dimensional paradigm** that integrates values, ethics, and long-term responsibilities towards present and future generations. In the Indian context, sustainability draws from both **ancient wisdom and contemporary innovation**—rooted in indigenous practices of conservation, community-based living, and socio-cultural values that emphasize balance and harmony with nature.

1.2 Recognizing the significance of this discourse, the **Indian Centre for Social Science and Management Research (ICSSMR)** invites research proposals under the broad theme “*Sustainable Development in India.*” This call seeks to encourage rigorous and innovative research that generates **empirical evidence, conceptual clarity, and policy-relevant insights** to address India’s unique sustainability challenges and opportunities. The initiative aims to build a platform for scholars, practitioners, and institutions to engage in collaborative inquiry for societal transformation.

1.3 The thematic areas for this call cover diverse yet interconnected domains that influence the path to sustainability. These include, but are not restricted to:

- **Value Systems and Ethical Foundations of Sustainability:** Exploring indigenous knowledge systems, moral frameworks, spiritual traditions, and community values that promote sustainable living and responsible consumption.

- **Social Well-Being and Human Development:** Examining health, education, gender justice, mental well-being, and community solidarity as integral dimensions of sustainability.
- **Financial Inclusion and Microfinance:** Investigating the role of inclusive financial systems, digital banking, self-help groups (SHGs), and cooperative models in reducing poverty, empowering marginalized groups, and fostering equitable growth.
- **Green Tourism:** Assessing sustainable tourism models that preserve ecosystems, protect cultural heritage, generate eco-friendly livelihoods, and reduce environmental footprints.
- **Waste Management and Circular Economy:** Developing strategies for waste reduction, recycling, segregation, and reuse, along with innovative approaches to minimize urban and industrial waste through circular economy practices.
- **Blue Economy:** Exploring sustainable utilization of marine and aquatic resources, fisheries, and coastal development, with an emphasis on ecological protection and livelihood generation.
- **Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development:** Evaluating agro-ecological practices, organic farming, food security, and farmer-centric innovations that strengthen rural resilience.
- **Urban Sustainability and Smart Cities:** Investigating inclusive urban planning, green housing, renewable energy solutions, sustainable mobility, water conservation, and resilient infrastructure in growing cities.

1.4 The research programme is designed with the following key objectives:

- To generate **evidence-based policy frameworks** that support sustainable growth and equitable development in India.
- To encourage **interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and transdisciplinary approaches** that integrate perspectives from social sciences, management studies, economics, environment, law, and technology.
- To support **community-driven and locally adaptable models** that link grassroots innovations with national and global sustainability goals.
- To bridge the gap between **academic research and practical implementation**, ensuring that research outcomes contribute meaningfully to policymaking and real-world problem solving.

1.5 ICSSMR places special emphasis on **research that combines qualitative and quantitative methodologies**, draws from both **indigenous wisdom and scientific advancements**, and provides **replicable and scalable solutions**. Comparative studies across regions, communities, or countries, as well as projects that demonstrate methodological innovation, will be strongly encouraged.

1.6 The overall vision of this research programme is to align academic research with the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, India's **Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)**, and national policy priorities such as **financial inclusion, Swachh Bharat Mission, Atmanirbhar Bharat, and climate resilience frameworks**. By integrating values, ethics, and science, this initiative seeks to create a knowledge base that strengthens India's journey towards inclusive, equitable, and environmentally responsible development.

## **2. Eligibility**

### **2.1 Eligible Institutions and Faculty Members**

- Faculty members and researchers who are **permanently employed** in Indian Universities, Deemed Universities, Colleges, and Institutions recognized under Sections 2(f) of the UGC Act are eligible to apply.
- Applicants must have demonstrable **research experience**, evidenced through published books, peer-reviewed journal articles, or project reports.
- The **Project Director (PD)** and **Co-Project Director (Co-PD)** must hold a Ph.D. degree in a relevant discipline.
- The Project Director (PD) or the Co-Project Director (Co-PD) must hold valid **faculty membership of ICSSMR** at the time of application.

### **2.2 Independent and Early-Career Researchers**

- In exceptional cases, independent researchers with a Ph.D. and significant publications (at least **one sole-authored books** with reputed publishers and/or **five research articles** in refereed journals) may also apply as Co-Project Directors, provided they collaborate with a faculty member from an eligible institution listed in Clause 2.1.
- Early-career researchers with a Ph.D. and at least one peer-reviewed publication may apply as Co-Investigators in collaboration with senior faculty member. This provision aims to encourage the participation of emerging scholars in sustainability research.

### 2.3 Contractual/Visiting Faculty

- Researchers with Ph.D. degrees working in **contractual, temporary, or visiting faculty positions** at recognized universities or research institutes are eligible to apply as Co-Project Directors, provided they have at least two sole-authored publications in reputed outlets.
- In cases where the researcher's contractual appointment ends during the project tenure, they may continue as Co-Project Director with institutional approval until project completion.

### 2.4 Retired Academics and Professionals

- Senior and retired faculty members from universities, research institutes, and government organizations who hold a Ph.D. and have a proven record of scholarship (at least two sole-authored books or five refereed articles) may apply, either independently or in collaboration with serving faculty.
- Retired government, corporate, or defence officers with relevant expertise in areas such as environmental management, financial inclusion, rural development, or social welfare may also apply as Co-PDs, in collaboration with academic institutions.

### 2.5 Interdisciplinary and Practitioner Collaborations

- Since sustainable development is inherently interdisciplinary, **multi-institutional and multi-disciplinary collaborations** are strongly encouraged. Teams may include researchers from diverse fields such as economics, sociology, anthropology, management, law, political science, environmental studies, geography, and public policy.
- Practitioner-researchers working in **non-governmental organizations (NGOs), think tanks, cooperatives, or social enterprises** with a track record of documented field experience may participate as Co-Investigators in collaboration with academic institutions.

### 2.6 Number of Applications

- Each applicant can apply for only **one project at a time** (either as Project Director or Co-Project Director). Multiple applications under different titles by the same applicant will lead to disqualification.

- ICSSMR strongly encourages applications from **women researchers, scholars from marginalized communities (SC/ST/OBC/EWS), differently-abled researchers, and scholars from remote or aspirational districts** of India.
- Every project team must consist of five members, including the Project Director and Co-Project Director(s). The team composition should reflect interdisciplinary expertise wherever possible. To ensure diversity and inclusion, it is mandatory that at least one female researcher be included in the five-member team. Proposals not fulfilling this requirement will not be considered.

### **3. How to Apply**

#### **3.1 Application Submission**

- Applicants are required to download the prescribed **application formats** from the **ICSSMR website** (<https://icssmr.in/>) and submit the duly completed application form along with all relevant documents to **info@icssmr.in** on or before **30th June, 2026**.
- The application must be filled in the **prescribed format only**. Any deviation from the given format will result in rejection.
- Applications must be forwarded and duly approved by the **competent authority of the affiliating institution** (such as the Registrar, Principal, Director, or Head of the Institution).

#### **3.2 Language and Formatting**

- Proposals should be written in **English**.
- Applicants must use **Times New Roman** font, **font size 12** and **line spacing 1.5**.
- The proposal should be clear, precise, and well-structured, with a logical flow from objectives to methodology and expected outcomes.

#### **3.3 Proposal Components**

The research proposal must include the following elements in the prescribed structure:

1. **Title of the Research Project** (concise and reflective of the theme).
2. **Abstract/Concept Note** (up to 1,000 words).
3. **Introduction and Rationale** of the study (background, context, and significance).

4. **Review of Literature** (theoretical foundations, empirical studies, and knowledge gaps).
5. **Objectives of the Study** (clearly stated, specific, and measurable).
6. **Research Questions/Hypotheses** (as applicable).
7. **Methodology** (design, sampling, tools of data collection, and methods of analysis – qualitative, quantitative, or mixed).
8. **Work Plan and Timelines** (phased plan of 6, 12, or 18 months, depending on project category).
9. **Expected Outcomes and Policy Relevance** (academic contributions, societal benefits, and possible policy linkages).
10. **Team Composition** (details of the five-member team, ensuring one female researcher as per eligibility).
11. **Budget Estimate** (with detailed justification under specified heads).
12. **References/Bibliography** (as per APA 7 format).

### 3.4 Ethical Standards and Integrity

- Applicants must ensure the highest standards of **research integrity and ethics**.
- All proposals will be subjected to **plagiarism and AI-content detection checks**. Any proposal found plagiarised or containing unacknowledged AI-generated content will be **outrightly rejected**.
- The Project Director must submit an **Undertaking on Research Integrity**, certifying originality of the work and adherence to ethical standards.
- A **Plagiarism and AI Detection Report** issued by the **Ethical Committee / Research Development Cell / Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC)** of the affiliating institution must be attached.

### 3.5 Mandatory Documents to be Submitted

Applicants must upload the following documents along with the proposal (in PDF format):

1. **Research Proposal** (in the prescribed format).
2. **Forwarding Letter** from the affiliating institution.
3. **UGC Certificate of Recognition** under Sections 2(f)/12(B) (applicable for institutions).
4. **Employment Certificate** of the Project Director (if employed).
5. **Ph.D. Certificates** of Project Director and Co-Project Director(s).

6. **Comprehensive Curriculum Vitae (CV)** of Project Director (highlighting research experience, publications, and previous projects).
7. **Bio-data of Co-Project Director(s) and team members.**
8. **SC/ST/OBC/EWS/PwD Certificate** (if applicable, for preference in selection).
9. **Undertaking on Research Integrity** (signed by the Project Director).
10. **Plagiarism & AI Detection Report** (issued by the affiliating institution's Ethics/Research Cell).

### 3.6 Number of Applications per Institution

- Each institution may forward a maximum of **three proposals** in response to a single Call for Proposals.
- In case of multiple applications from the same institution, the institution must provide a **ranking/endorsement** to indicate its prioritization.

## 4. Duration and Budget

### 4.1 Project Duration

- The maximum duration of research projects under this scheme will be **18 months** (including time for data collection, analysis, report writing, and submission).
- Extension of duration will not be ordinarily granted. However, in exceptional cases, based on progress and justification, a **no-cost extension of up to 3 months** may be considered by ICSSMR.

### 4.2 Budget Allocation

- Each approved project will receive a maximum grant of **₹5,00,000 (Rupees Five Lakhs only)**.
- The grant will be released in instalments linked to project milestones, progress reports, and financial utilization certificates.

### 4.3 Heads of Expenditure

The sanctioned budget must be utilized strictly under the following expenditure heads:

S. No.	Head of Expenditure	Limit/Guidelines
1.	<b>Research Staff (Assistants/Field Investigators)</b>	Not exceeding <b>40% of total budget</b> . Staff may be full-time or part-time as per project needs.

2.	<b>Fieldwork &amp; Travel</b> (data collection, logistics, survey preparation, boarding/lodging)	Not exceeding <b>30% of total budget</b> . Economy travel norms and actual field needs must be followed.
3.	<b>Research Equipment, Software &amp; Study Material</b> (books, journals, datasets, analytical tools, printing, etc.)	Not exceeding <b>15% of total budget</b> . Assets purchased shall remain property of the affiliating institution.
4.	<b>Workshops / Dissemination / Publications</b>	Up to <b>10% of total budget</b> , for organizing seminars, stakeholder consultations, or publishing outputs.
5.	<b>Contingency</b> (stationery, data entry, computer typing, unforeseen minor expenses)	Up to <b>5% of total budget</b> .

**Total: ₹5,00,000 (100%)**

#### 4.4 Engagement of Project Staff

- The Project Director may engage **Research Assistants/Field Investigators** as per project requirements.
- Selection must follow due process approved by the affiliating institution (advertisement, interview, or selection committee).

#### 4.5 Re-appropriation of Budget

- The Project Director may re-allocate expenditure from one head to another up to a maximum of **10% of the approved budget head**, with approval of the affiliating institution.
- Re-appropriation beyond 10% will require prior approval from ICSSMR.

#### 4.6 Institutional Overheads

- ICSSMR will **not provide overhead charges** to affiliating institutions.
- However, the institution is expected to provide necessary administrative support, infrastructure, and facilities for smooth execution of the project.

### 5. Procedure for Awards

#### 5.1 Screening of Applications

- All applications submitted to ICSSMR will first undergo **preliminary screening** to verify eligibility, completeness of documents, and adherence to prescribed format.
- Incomplete applications or those not fulfilling the eligibility criteria will be rejected at this stage without further consideration.

## 5.2 Evaluation by Expert Committee

- Eligible proposals will be evaluated by a panel of subject experts through a **blind peer review process**.
- The evaluation will be based on:
  - Relevance of the proposal to the theme of **Sustainable Development**.
  - Originality, conceptual clarity, and theoretical contribution.
  - Methodological rigor and feasibility within 18 months.
  - Policy relevance, societal impact, and alignment with national/global priorities (e.g., SDGs, India's sustainability initiatives).
  - Qualification and track record of the research team.
  - Interdisciplinary approach and inclusion of female researchers (mandatory as per eligibility).

## 5.3 Shortlisting and Presentations

- Based on expert evaluation, shortlisted applicants may be invited to present their proposals **before the Expert Committee** (in-person or virtual).
- The Committee may recommend modifications to research design, methodology, or budget, which applicants must incorporate before final approval.

## 5.4 Decision on Awards

- The Expert Committee will recommend projects for funding to ICSSMR, which will take the **final decision** on awards.
- ICSSMR reserves the right to:
  - Convert a proposal into a smaller/larger category if found appropriate.
  - Reduce or reallocate the proposed budget based on expert recommendations.
  - Reject any proposal without assigning reasons.

## 5.5 Publication of Merit List

- A **merit list of selected proposals** will be published on the ICSSMR website.
- Only the selected applicants and their affiliating institutions will also be informed individually through a **Provisional Award Letter**, specifying required formalities and documents for joining.

## 5.6 Conditions of Award

- Canvassing, or influence of any kind will lead to disqualification.

- Decisions of ICSSMR and the Expert Committee will be final and binding.
- Queries related to status of proposals will not be entertained until the official announcement of results.

#### **6.4 Engagement of Project Staff**

The Project Director (PD) may engage **Research Staff** such as Research Assistants and Field Investigators depending on the needs of the project. All appointments must follow a **transparent process** approved by the affiliating institution. This should normally include:

- A short public **advertisement/notification** on the institution's website or notice board.
- Selection through a **committee** consisting of:
  1. Project Director (Chair)
  2. One external subject expert (from outside the institution)
  3. Head of the Department / Dean / Principal / Director of the affiliating institution
- **Desired Qualification for Research Staffs:**
  - **Research Assistant:** Postgraduate in relevant discipline with minimum 55%, preferably with NET/M.Phil./Ph.D.
  - **Field Investigator:** Postgraduate in relevant discipline with minimum 55%.
- Engagement of staff must be **time-bound**, not exceeding the approved project duration.
- Staff shall be engaged **only for the tasks directly related to the project** (data collection, analysis, documentation, field surveys, report writing, etc.).
- **Remuneration must be paid on a consolidated basis**; no allowances such as HRA, medical, or leave encashment are permissible from the grant.
- In case of discontinuation or resignation of project staff, the PD may recruit replacements with approval of the institution, ensuring the same level of qualifications.
- All project staff will work under the **direct supervision of the Project Director** and their services will automatically end with the project's completion.

## **7. Monitoring of Research Projects**

### **7.1 Progress Reports**

- Research progress will be monitored through the submission of **periodic progress reports** (every six months) in the prescribed format.
- The report should detail the work completed, data collected, preliminary findings, and budget utilization.

### **7.2 Review and Evaluation**

- The Expert Committee of ICSSMR will review progress reports and may suggest modifications or improvements.
- If progress is found unsatisfactory or rules are violated, ICSSMR reserves the right to **terminate the project** and demand refund of the released grant with penal interest.

### **7.3 Acknowledgement of Support**

- All publications, reports, and presentations resulting from the project must **acknowledge the support of ICSSMR**.
- Copies of research papers, book chapters, or other outputs must be submitted to ICSSMR during or after the project tenure.

### **7.4 Inspection and Verification**

- ICSSMR may at any time request verification of **accounts, data, or fieldwork records**.
- The affiliating institution is obliged to provide full cooperation in such reviews.

### **7.5 Responsibility of Project Director**

- The Project Director is personally responsible for ensuring timely progress and completion of the project.
- Any delays, staff issues, or institutional problems must be communicated to ICSSMR immediately.

## 8. Completion of the Study

### 8.1 Final Report Submission

On completion of the project, the Project Director must submit the following:

1. **Final Report** (minimum 150 pages, in both PDF and Word formats).
2. **Abstract** (up to 1,000 words).
3. **Executive Summary** (around 5,000 words, in both PDF and Word formats).
4. **Similarity Index/Plagiarism Report** (certified by the affiliating institution, not exceeding 10%).
5. **Soft copy of datasets** (if applicable), with proper documentation and metadata.

### 8.2 Evaluation of Final Report

- The final report will be evaluated by an **external expert** appointed by ICSSMR.
- If revisions are recommended, the Project Director must incorporate them and resubmit the revised report within the stipulated time.

### 8.3 Dissemination

- ICSSMR encourages dissemination of research findings through **seminars, workshops, or policy briefs**.
- Select final reports may be **published by ICSSMR** after expert approval.
- Copyright of the final report will remain with ICSSMR, while due credit will be given to the Project Director and team.

### 8.4 Unspent Balance

- Any unutilized portion of the grant must be **returned to ICSSMR** immediately after completion of the project, along with the final audited statement of accounts.

### 8.5 Penalties for Non-Compliance

- If the final report or required documents are not submitted within the stipulated period, the Project Director and affiliating institution will be **blacklisted from future ICSSMR grants**.
- Legal action may be initiated to recover the released funds with **10% penal interest per annum** in case of willful default.

### 9. Responsibilities of the Host Institution

- a. The host institution shall **administer and manage the ICSSMR grant** as per prescribed rules and provide all necessary administrative and infrastructural support to the Project Director and research team.
- b. A **dedicated bank account** must be maintained exclusively for the grant, and all financial transactions must be duly recorded. At the time of completion, the institution must submit an **audited statement of accounts** along with a **utilization certificate** in the prescribed format.
- c. The institution should ensure access to essential **research facilities** such as libraries, laboratories, data centres, IT resources, and administrative support to facilitate the project.
- d. All primary records and data (filled-in questionnaires, raw data, tabulation sheets, manuscripts, and reports) must be **preserved for future reference**. ICSSMR reserves the right to request such material at any stage for verification or archival.
- e. In case the **Project Director discontinues or leaves** the institution before project completion, the host institution must immediately inform ICSSMR. A substitute Project Director may be nominated with ICSSMR's approval, or else the institution must refund the unutilized funds.
- f. In the unfortunate event of the **death of the Project Director**, the institution must promptly settle accounts and return the unspent balance of the grant.
- g. The host institution must ensure strict **compliance with ethical research standards**, including plagiarism and AI-content checks, to be certified through the **Ethics Committee/Research Development Cell/IQAC**.
- h. Institutions failing to meet these responsibilities will be **blacklisted** from future ICSSMR funding opportunities, and unutilized or misused funds may be **recovered with penal interest**.

### 10. Other Conditions

- The approved **duration of 18 months** includes the time for final report writing and submission. A **no-cost extension of up to 3 months** may be granted in exceptional cases, based on satisfactory progress and justification. Retrospective extensions will not be permitted.
- The grant sanctioned must be **utilized strictly within the project duration**. Any unspent balance at the end of the project must be refunded to ICSSMR immediately along with an audited utilization certificate.
- **Foreign travel** is not permissible under the grant. However, data collection from international sources (secondary material, databases, online surveys) may be undertaken if justified in the proposal.
- No additional financial support will be provided beyond the **sanctioned budget of ₹5 lakh**. Requests for revision of grant after sanction will not be entertained.
- The **research design and objectives** of the project, once approved, cannot be significantly altered without prior approval of ICSSMR.
- If a Project Director is unable to continue, a **Substitute Project Director** may be appointed by the host institution with prior approval from ICSSMR. In cases where substitution is not feasible, the project may be terminated and unspent funds must be returned.
- Researchers must not use project outcomes for **award of a degree or diploma**. However, data generated may be utilized for future academic work, provided due acknowledgment to ICSSMR is given.
- All publications, reports, or dissemination arising from the project must **acknowledge ICSSMR support**. Copyright of the final report and outcomes will remain with ICSSMR, though due credit will be given to the research team.
- ICSSMR reserves the right to **reject any proposal without assigning reasons**. Its decision regarding the interpretation of guidelines or any matter not covered herein will be **final and binding**.