A Source Book and Guide

Management and Administration of IDRC-Funded Grant Projects

IDRC CRDI
International Development Research Centre
Centre de recherches pour le développement international

Canada

Foreword

IDRC has used different funding mechanisms since the 1970s to help achieve its program objectives. One innovative form of support has been the commitment of IDRC program funds to other institutions to allow them to manage their own grant-making projects. These projects have often been managed directly by the partner institutions. Grants and contributions have been given to both institutions and individuals. In these cases, IDRC recipients have been given funds to redistribute to other institutions or to individuals, either as pure grants or as contributions for research and research-related activities. (The differences between a grant and a contribution are discussed here.)

By using this approach IDRC has been able to devolve funding to institutions that have demonstrated their capabilities to administer pools of funds.

At present, IDRC has more than 30 active projects in which grant-making is carried-out by a direct recipient of IDRC funds (also known as a *project recipient*). In addition, six secretariats and large projects use a similar modality. These grant-making projects have been used most often to encourage recipients to:

- Enter an unfamiliar field;
- Explore new program initiatives; or
- Reach out to a new set of organizations or experts.

Both recipient institutions and IDRC have faced challenges in the management of these grant projects. Some of the challenges have included:

- Choosing the size and type of grant or contribution to fund;
- Identifying target audiences for the project funds;
- Establishing selection criteria;
- Setting up a selection committee;
- Providing clear unambiguous guidelines to prospective candidates;
- Developing primary screening procedures;
- Establishing conditions and modalities, including the establishment of grant contracts aligned with IDRC's standard terms and conditions;
- Establishing and applying a sound financial control framework (financial reporting from grantee to the administering institution and from the administering institution to IDRC);
- Monitoring the work of grantees and ensuring the quality of the research that is undertaken;
- Aggregating the results in progress reports to IDRC;
- Disseminating research results and facilitating the utilization of these results; and
- Obtaining government clearance for externally funded research projects.

IDRC staffs often need to spend considerable time working with recipients to develop and implement appropriate procedures and project-specific grant-making rules. We believe there is a need for IDRC to bring more clarity to such grant-making processes.

The purpose of this guide book is to summarize the experiences of IDRC as well as those of its partners who have been managing grant projects. Among its purposes is to:

- Present an inventory of best practices in grant projects;
- Define typical donor expectations in both grant administration and project management;
- Strengthen the skills of managers of research grants and grant-making projects; and
- Provide an opportunity for exchange, learning, and networking among managers of programs that are making grants and contributions to support research activities.

The discussion and examples are drawn from IDRC's experiences as well as from the experiences of some of its partner organizations. This information was obtained during interviews with IDRC staff, reviews of project management manuals prepared by other donor organizations, and inputs from a selection of IDRC-supported grant-managing organizations in Southeast Asia.

This source book and guide includes discussions of programmatic as well as administrative issues because decisions made with regard to any one aspect of a grant project affect all other areas of the project. Therefore, the issues and concerns, whether they be administrative or programmatic, cannot be addressed in isolation. We hope that this on-line resource will be useful to those charged with responsibility for the development as well as management and administration of grant projects.

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Grant Projects in IDRC

Since its inception, IDRC has used grant projects to help achieve its program objectives. These projects have been used for a variety of strategic reasons, among which some of the more important have been to:

- Build individual and institutional research capacity;
- Encourage research in a particular topic or thematic area;
- Help define new program directions and respond to changing research priorities; and
- Create synergies by establishing linkages and networks among like-minded individuals and institutions.

Through these experiences, IDRC and its partner organizations have developed close working relationships and established procedures and project-specific rules to ensure that such grant projects have reached their objectives. However, these experiences have not been recorded in a single document that would allow project partners and IDRC staff to share the learning that has taken place over the last three decades.

What is a grant project?

Within IDRC a number of grant-project mechanisms have evolved over the years. Each of these has addressed specific program objectives and been given different names. These grant mechanisms have been called such things as small grants, training awards, competitive grants, and research and development awards. In this source book and guide, the term " grant project" is applied as an inclusive term to cover all of these grant types.

Purpose and Audience

It is the purpose of this source book and guide to be a practical review of the programmatic, administrative, and financial questions that need to be addressed to develop and manage a grants project. The material in this guide is designed to present the user with management and administrative options from which to pick and choose. The choices that are made will be largely dictated by the program objectives around which the grant project has been designed.

This guide is not intended to be a recipe or list of instructions on how to develop a set of management and administrative procedures. There is too much variation in the types of projects that are supported to make that feasible. However, by reviewing the options that are presented throughout this source book, informed decisions can be made to ensure that project objectives are supported by the financial and administrative structures that are put in place.

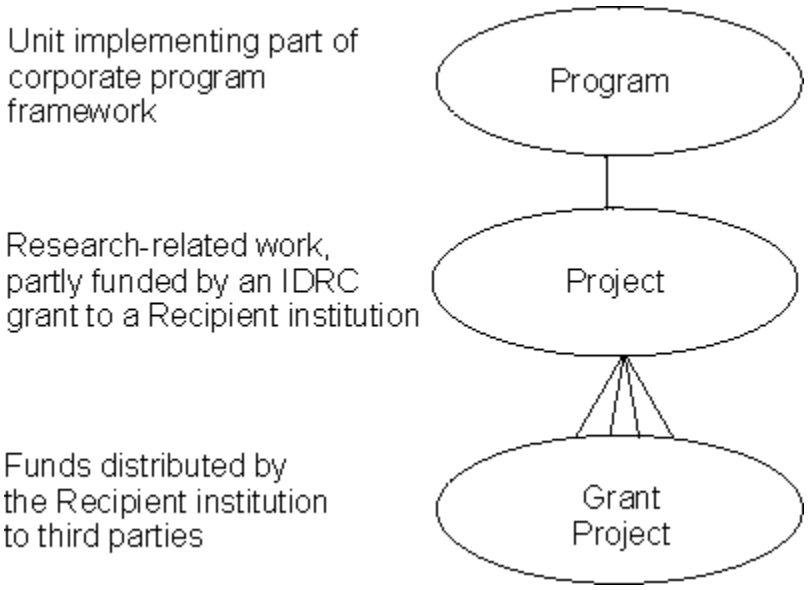

Figure 1: Grant projects redistribute project funds to support IDRC program objectives.

The guide is targeted at those who have program management and administrative responsibilities within grants projects funded by IDRC. Staff within IDRC-supported projects as well as IDRC program and administrative staff should find that the material will be useful addition to the tools they have available for their work.

This guide is being written at a time when IDRC is seeking to encourage more of its grants projects to be administered by its recipients rather than internally by IDRC. Figure 1 shows how a grants project is used to support IDRC program activities.

Donors often decide to seek third-parties to manage grant projects on their behalf to reinforce local management capabilities and, as a byproduct, to reduce the amount of administrative work the donor has to undertake. Adequate provision must be make within the design of the project to provide the resources needed to manage the program in the third-party organization. Determining how you calculate the costs that should be covered to have a third party manage a grants project on your behalf raises two common questions:

- Should the cost be calculated on a percentage basis and is there some sort of formula that could be adopted to determine this percentage? Many organizations have developed internal ratios to monitor their costs. The use of a percentage of the awarded grants is likely most appropriate for streamlined, well-defined competitive processes. In all cases, recipient institutions that manage grant projects contribute personnel and services to the administration of the competition and grants. Therefore, the ratios covered by the IDRC grant and the institution's contribution would vary. The total cost of managing a streamlined program, with a critical mass of funds for grant payments, can be as low as 20% of the value of the grants.
- Should the managing organization cover part of the cost to manage the grant project or should the donor be prepared to cover all of the additional management costs incurred? IDRC policy states that there must be a contribution by the recipient. However, this policy must be interpreted wisely. For example, there could be large projects in which the grant-making activities account for only a small portion of the entire project. It is conceivable that the recipient might contributes heavily toward the

non-grant parts of the project and propose that IDRC absorb the full cost of managing the grants. Such an arrangement would be acceptable because the spirit of the policy has been respected: the recipient is contributing to the project.

The discussion and examples in this guide are drawn from IDRC's experiences as well as from the experiences of some of its partner organizations. The materials presented here have been gathered from interviews with IDRC staff, reviews of project management manuals prepared by other donor organizations, and inputs from a selection of IDRC-supported grant-managing organizations in Southeast Asia. Those who are interested in more general reviews of grant-making processes should consult the materials listed in the bibliography.

Grant Projects as a Programming Tool

Several types of grant projects are used by IDRC program staff, which makes a single definition of what exactly a grant project is quite challenging. The key element is that all funds are appropriated within a "standard" project (called a grant project in this document) from within the program budget of an IDRC program unit. These funds are then redistributed or disbursed as separate individual grants or contributions based on carefully predefined criteria. There is considerable diversity within these grants (see Table 1). The recipients can either be individuals (as is the case with training awards) or institutions (as is the case of research grants); the grants can be made on the basis of an open competition or be selected from a group of preselected organizations that are requested to submit proposals; and the grants can be small (CAD 5,000 or less) or quite large (more than CAD 100,000). These variations in how a grant project is designed reflect differences in the program objectives that are behind the decision to embark on a grant project.

Table 1: Basic typology of grant projects.

Audience	Focus	Clients	Grant Value	Selection
Open (wide)	Research	Individuals	Micro (less than CAD 2000) Small (CAD 2000-5000)	Criteria-based (very simple, quick, and objective)
On Invitation (narrow)	Training/Capacity Building	Organizations	Medium (CAD 5000-20,000) Large (more than CAD 20,000)	Peer-Reviewed (more labour intensive and require very clear guidelines for evaluation and review)

If the grant project is to be managed by a recipient organization, it is critical that this organization can handle both the administration of the program and the provision of intellectual leadership and critical thinking about the future directions of the program. From the donor's point of view, identifying such an organization can be a very time-consuming process because the process of capacity-building requires a number of carefully-balanced interventions.

From an IDRC point of view, grant projects offer several program advantages. They can:

- Allow development of local capacity in a participatory way (particularly of individuals);
- Expand the range of contacts (individuals and institutions) and "scout" for talent;
- Uncover new areas for research support that are responsive to the needs of a particular "community" (allows for decentralized setting of the research agenda);
- Focus research on a particular topic or theme;
- Lower the risk associated with working with a new organization (since financial exposure is lower) and could pave the way to larger projects in the future;
- Offer transparency in decision-making (e.g., public calls for proposals, clear objectives, published selection criteria, independent review committee, and public announcement of winners);
- Create the potential to establish networks among similar-minded organizations and individuals;
- Provide a mechanism that helps "embed" specific programs or ideas within organizations;
- Allow administrative agility in allocating funds to worthy recipients; and
- Provide a powerful mechanism to give small timely amounts of money to local actors (particularly NGOs and grass-root organizations).

A program decision must be made about the advantages and disadvantages of devolving responsibility for a grant project to another organization. There are organizations with the will or the potential to take on grant projects, it is a matter of the level of time and effort needed to identify such an organization and to design a multi-year intervention that will result in the establishment of the necessary local capabilities. Such capacity building is an important objective of IDRC program activities that should be balanced against other program objectives that might be achieved through grant-making projects. As IDRC has gained experience with externally managed grant-making projects, it is clear that such activities can be managed effectively by IDRC's partners.

The balance of this source book and guide discusses IDRC's experiences and those of its partners as they have sought to develop systems to manage grant projects. Although the suggestions that are made are specific to IDRC-supported projects and IDRC's own administrative, financial, and program regulations, these guidelines should help others who are involved in the development and administration of grant projects.

Designing a Grant Project

The process of developing a grant project is not linear. The decisions made during project development affect other components within the project as well the financial and administrative procedures that are most appropriate to help achieve project goals. Therefore, it is always necessary to consider what impact program decisions will have on the financial and administrative aspects of the project, and to consider how financial and administrative decisions might affect program implementation.

IDRC has published brochures to help grant applicants with project formulation. Please see the Funding Opportunities for details).

In general, a proposal for a grant project should have the following components:

- Problem and justification: What is the problem your researcher seeks to address, and why is it important?
- Objectives: What are the objectives against which the project's success or failure could be assessed?
- Methodology: How will each of these objectives be achieved?
- Results and dissemination: What are the expected outputs of the research, and how will these be disseminated? What possible development impacts can reasonably be anticipated?
- Institution and personnel: Who will carry out the work and administer grant funds, what are their qualifications for doing so, and what are the financial implications of the human resources that are needed to handle the administration of grant funds?
- Timetable and budget: What resources and time are required to achieve the project's objectives?
- Evaluation: How will the project's achievements be evaluated?

As you go through the steps in developing a project proposal, it may be useful to keep in mind the ultimate objective of the project. This is, what changes in behaviour, relationships, actions, and activities would you like to see in the people, groups, and organizations that the project will work with directly? Therefore, you might ask yourself:

- Who are your target audiences?
- What changes do you want to induce in these people?
- How are you going to be able to induce these changes?
- How will you know that these changes have taken place?

Articulate the most important program objective

Grant projects can be used to achieve many broader program objectives (see Table 2). It is important to clearly define these objectives during the design stage of the project. A project that seeks to identify and fund graduate students to pursue studies in a specific area of research will be designed quite differently from a project that is seeking to fund senior researchers studying an issue with regional policy implications.

Table 2: Some examples of the types of objectives that IDRC has sought to address in grant projects.

- Provide training opportunities for Canadian and Third World scholars to further their education and expand their interests and capacity in development work.
- Identify individuals and organizations interested in working in a specific field of study.
- Help set an institution's agenda for research support by soliciting proposals from a broad range of partner organizations.
- Focus research efforts on new or emerging issues that are receiving inadequate regional or international attention or funding.
- Establish and sustain networks among researchers working on similar research problems in different countries, especially those who, because of language or geographic isolation, are not connected to international research networks and thus have limited access to references and best practices that have been developed elsewhere.

A clear understanding of the anticipated outcomes of the project is the first step in project design. After these outcomes are defined, specific project activities and supportive financial and administrative procedures and processes can be set in place.

Governance

Governance defines how responsibility and accountability is shared for the program and administrative decisions that must be made during the life of the project. Clear guidelines are needed so that all parties are aware of who makes project-related decisions, who establishes rules and procedures, and who approves and pays the bills.

Governance issues must be clearly articulated and transparent to all project participants. Most critical is to be clear about who is responsible for overall project management (usually the project leader and a management committee) and what their day-to-day authority and responsibilities will include. There are two general models of governance. One is very simple and concentrates decision making in the hands of one or two people. In this case, IDRC would tend to play the role of a watchdog because there are no checks and balances within the project (i.e., there is no management committee). The other is based on a more structured approach that includes committees with specific roles and responsibilities.

A management committee is a central feature of a grant project, and the composition and working arrangements established for such a committee are fundamental to project success.

If the project is designed to award only a few grants per year, the project leader (usually in collaboration with the IDRC program officer) may be able to handle all governance issues. With larger grant projects, the establishment of a well-constituted committee with specialized functions is central to success (see Figure 2).

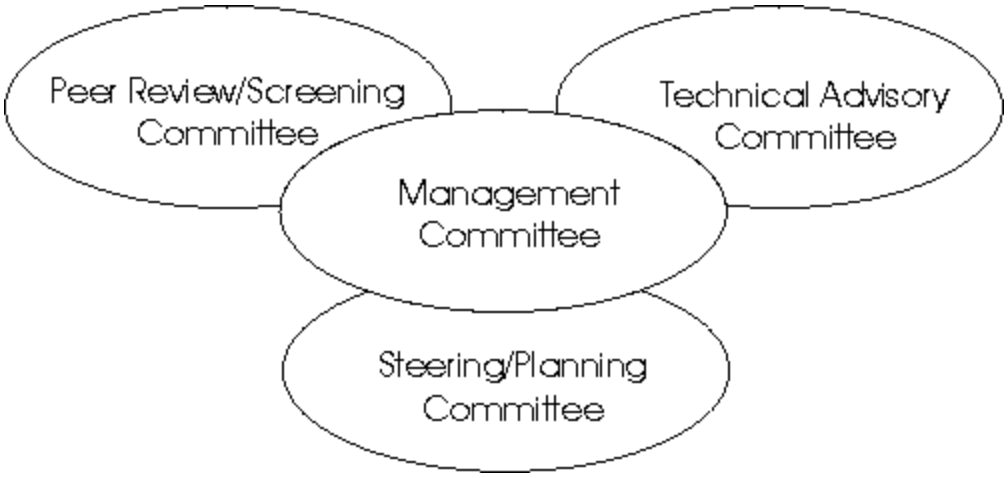

Figure 2: The governance structure needs to ensure that management, peer review, technical advice and direction, and planning are undertaken -- either by separate subcommittees or by a single management committee.

A single management committee, or a combination of committees with special roles, must assume responsibility for all aspects of the management and administration of the grant project. These responsibilities include:

- Setting rules and procedures;
- Screening applicants;
- Establishing the scope of the program;
- Determining the criteria for judging proposals or candidates;
- Providing technical expertise to awardees;
- Reviewing reports and submissions; and
- Providing feedback to applicants and project recipients.

If multiple donors are contributing to a grant project, it must also be made clear to all recipients that it is the management committee that should be consulting regarding program and administrative matters and not any one of the donor groups — in this regard, clear reporting lines must be established and the responsibilities of all parties must be made clear from the outset of the project. It is also desirable that all donors agree on a common reporting process to minimize administrative stress for the recipient organization.

Agreement needs to be reached on how many people will be in each committee and on the regional, organizational, or subject matter expertise of committee members. Each committee should have a range of subject matter specialists (most IDRC projects seem to have between five and seven committee members) who are aware of the regional issues and concerns, have experience in assessing and reviewing research proposals, can provide guidance to research projects, and have experience in management and administration. In most cases (but not all), IDRC representatives sit on at least one of the committees to represent IDRC's interests and to provide input on policy and program interests. The mandate of each committee should be clear to all members of the other committees, and the terms of reference for each committee should be agreed upon in writing (see examples of Terms of Reference for such committees). When there are multiple committees, the Management Committee (see Figure 2) should have overall responsibility for coordination among the other committees and be the final arbiter for

decision-making. IDRC retains the right to approve the terms of reference and the members who are appointed to the various committees in the projects it funds.

For each committee, several basic operating principles need to be established:

- A schedule should be established for when the committee will meet;
- Agreement is needed on what will constitute a quorum,
- Dates must be established for the submission for all material to be discussed or considered at each meeting;
- Agreement needs to be arrived at with regard to how decisions will be made; and
- The minutes of all committee meetings should be written and circulated.

Given the critical nature of these committees to the effective planning, implementation, and monitoring of projects, project proposals submitted to IDRC should either have these details worked out ahead of time or allow sufficient time in the project schedule to do this upfront. IDRC will make the establishment of such committees, agreement on their membership, and clarification of their mandate early deliverables and a condition for continuation of the project.

If more than one donor is contributing funds to the same grant project, it is critical that they share the same program objectives and agree on the criteria for funding projects — in some cases, donors have insisted on funding only specific project types and have not wanted to commit funds until they are sure that proposals meeting their specific program priorities are received.

Purpose and Scope

To achieve the most important objective (s) of the grant project, the purpose and scope of the project must be established and communicated to the intended audience. Several samples of requests for proposals are provided. Each of these examples specifies the purpose and scope of the grant project, as well as other details such as how to apply, eligibility, number of awards, amount of award, and deadlines for submissions.

If the management committee has already been constituted, the purpose and scope of the project should be developed on the basis of input from all members of the management committee (as well as any other committees that are part of the governance structure of the project) and might also include input from a wider selection of subject-matter specialists. It is important to define exactly what the grant project intends to do, and equally importantly what it will not attempt to do. In cases in which the committee(s) have not been constituted when the proposal is submitted, a time allowance must be made within the project schedule to allow the newly created committees to review of the purpose and scope of the project.

Value

Early in the planning process, the value that will be attached to the individual grants should must be determined. Most grant projects establish either an exact amount that will be provided for every project (e.g., CAD 20,000) or a maximum amount that is available to each grantee (e.g., up to CAD 30,000). However, a few projects have simply stated that a specific pool of funds is available and will be distributed on the basis of the merit and resources required for individual submissions (this means that not all of the available funds may be allocated and that there is no upper or lower limit to the level of funding of individual

projects). A variant of this approach is to give a range for the number of awards and only the total amount of funding that is available (for example, the project will distribute CAD 300,000 in 50 to 60 awards).

Over IDRC's experience with grant projects, the values of individual grants have varied quite considerably. Some projects are small grants (CAD 2,000-5,000); whereas, others include provision for substantial amounts (in excess of CAD 100,000). The choice of funding limit depends both of the resources available and the primary objectives of the program. The choice of whether the grant is for a fixed amount or up to a maximum is generally determined by the nature of the activity that is being funded. Most often, contributions to support training and post-graduate studies are based on fixed amounts; however, some smaller research activities are also based on the commitment of fixed sums. Projects with a larger dollar value are usually funded up to a maximum value and based on the submission of detailed budgets and work plans.

IDRC's priority is to ensure that a sufficient proportion of funds in the total grant envelope are made available for disbursement to grantees, but recognizes that there are costs involved in managing a grant-making project. Although IDRC has no definite policies on project size, experience suggests that a grant project should have at least CAD 300,000 for disbursement over 2-3 years to ensure that the costs for management are kept at a reasonable level. Several factors will affect the total value of IDRC funding for a grant-making project:

- The absorptive capacity of the target audience;
- The objectives of the grant project;
- The management capabilities of the team managing the grant project; and
- The availability of funds from the recipient and the donor.

A common issue with regard to the overall value of a project (which is often small) is the need to find a way to effectively manage the number of payments that must be made on each project when you are dealing with a number of different recipients within the grant project. Here there is a dilemma to some extent. From a finance and administrative point of view, it can save effort to have a fixed amount and make as few payments as possible, but from a program point of view, many program staff value the rigour that recipients must apply to their activities to plan their research, prepare appropriate budgets, and manage both the research and the resources available for that activity.

Procedures for Submission of Proposals

Irrespective of the value of the grant that is to be awarded, procedures must be developed for the submission of proposals and a timetable created for their submission. Some of the questions to be addressed at this stage are:

- Are proposals to be received only in hard copy?
- How many copies of the proposal are required?
- Can proposals be submitted electronically and, if so, what file types are acceptable and how can the authenticity of the submission be guaranteed?
- How many pages (single or double spaced) should a proposal include?
- Should the initial submission be a full proposal or an idea?

- Who should the proposal be sent to and what will this person do with it upon receipt?

After these procedural decisions are made, a realistic schedule for receipt of proposals must be established to:

- Allow sufficient time to review all submissions;
- Make selections (either of successful applicants or of selected for further development of their project proposals);
- Notify the successful candidates; and
- Disburse the funds to launch the individual projects on schedule.

As a minimum, these steps will take 4 months. Experience also suggests that applications are nearly always submitted just before the deadline no matter how much lead time is provided to applicants. This suggests that when activities are scheduled, provision should be made to accommodate this last minute rush of applicants. Some grant projects have tried to minimize this bunching of submissions by accepting applications throughout the year. Figure 3 provides an estimate of the time required to develop and initiate a project. Proposal Development and Assessment (Due Diligence) provides more information on the elements that a complete third-party proposal should include.

Criteria for Selection

In preparation for the receipt of proposals, all members of the management committee (or the peer review/screening committee, see Figure 2) must have a clear set of criteria upon which proposals will be assessed and evaluated. These criteria should include specific points against which the proposal can be judged and "graded". The specific criteria that are chosen will depend on the overall purpose of the grant project, but would normally include such criteria as:

- A clear statement of research (or training) objectives;
- An explanation of how completion of the work would contribute to research in this area or advance the career of the trainee;
- Details of the methodology that will be used;
- Some indication of the expected outputs;
- An explanation of how these outputs are linked to policy or application;
- A strategy for disseminating research results and facilitating the application of research outputs;
- Details on the background and expertise of the researchers;
- A discussion of the ethical considerations that are anticipated in the research design (see IDRC's guidelines in Section A4 of its research grant agreement);
- A review of the gender implications of the project, and
- An explanation of how young researchers will be involved in the project.

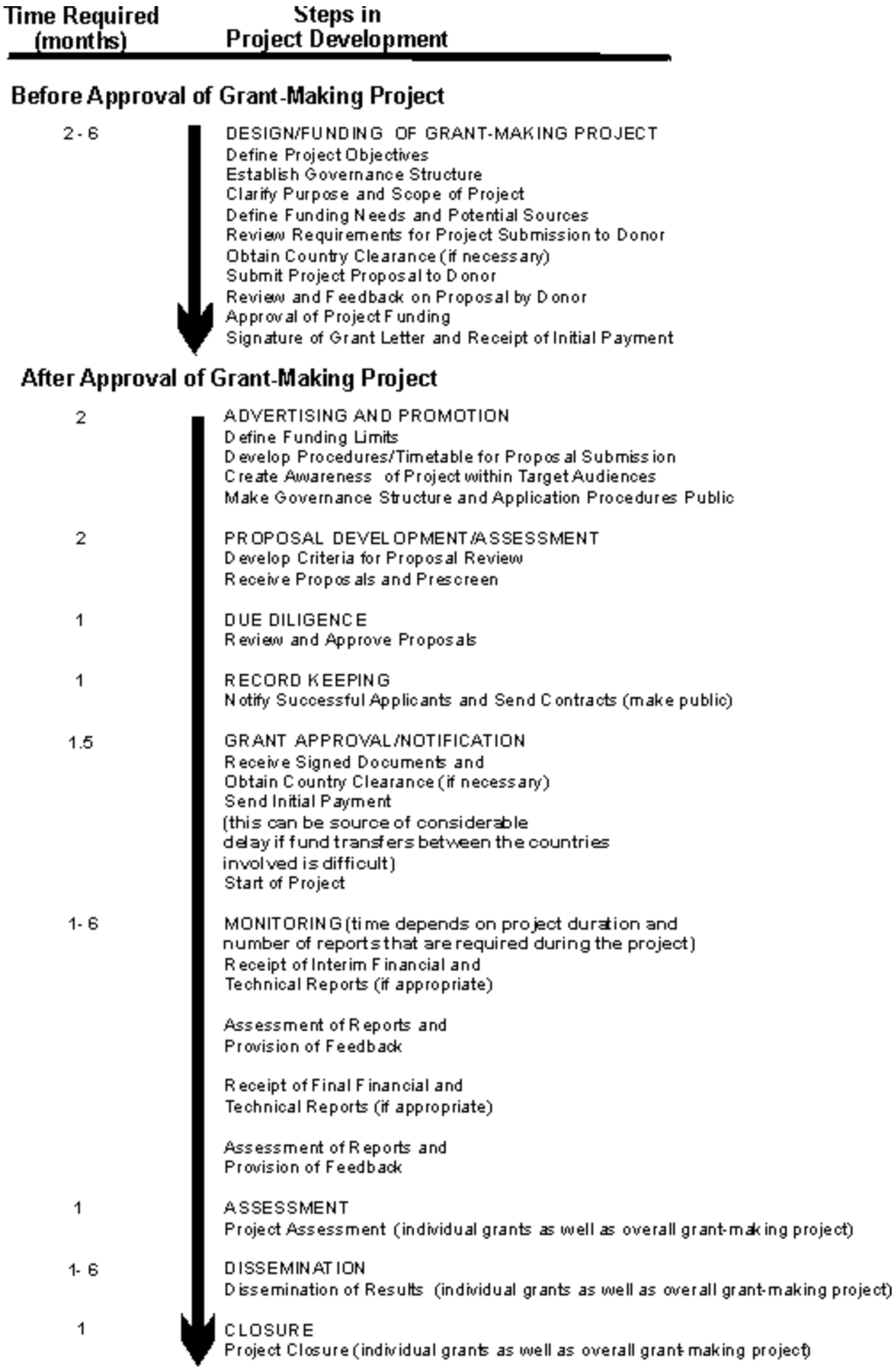

Figure 3. Estimate of the time (in months) required for the various steps in the development, funding, and monitoring of a project.

These examples of requests for proposals include different types of selection criteria developed for a variety of IDRC-funded grants projects.

In some cases, projects may identify groups of individuals or countries that are considered to be a high priority. These priorities should be included in the guidelines for submission of proposals and included as part of the evaluation criteria used to select successful proposals.

Checklist for Design

- Define project objectives.
- Establish the governance structure.
- Clarify the purpose and scope of the grant project.
- Define the funding limits for individual grants.
- Develop procedures for submission of proposals.
- Establish the criteria that will be used to assess proposals.
- Develop a schedule for the submission, review, and approval processes.
- Develop a system to monitor the projects that are funded.

Preparatory Activities and Call for Proposals

After the design considerations have been tackled in the overall project-proposal document, and that proposal has received funding from IDRC (and possibly other sources), the specific public that the grants project is seeking to target must be made aware of the existence of these grants. This information will need to provide comprehensive information on:

- The purpose and scope of the program;
- The application guidelines;
- The criteria for eligibility;
- The duration and size of grants that are to be made available; and
- The deadline for submission.

Publicity

Many vehicles can be used to publicize grant projects; however, it is important to target the promotional campaign to ensure that the primary audience for the grants are most likely to see the announcements. If the call for proposals is too general and/or the guidelines for application are not specific, a very large number of diverse proposals can be expected. As a result, the work involved in screening and reviewing proposals will be increased and the number of applicants who are disappointed will be much higher. Given the importance of the development of appropriate publicity and an "advertising" campaign, some projects have hired public relations companies to help them with this aspect of a grant project's implementation, particularly when the process is intended to not only be competitive but also wide-open.

An escalation in the number of grant applications can be expected as a grant project becomes better known — this raises at least two issues: first, the amount of work required to receive, screen, and assess applications rises quickly, and second, the number of applicants who are "disappointed" by not getting a grant or contribution increases.

The management committee (as well as the other project-related committees — see Figure 2) should be good sources of suggestions of professional publications (journals and newsletters) that might carry announcements of the establishment of the grant project. Other potential outlets for information are subject-specific listservs, websites, and brochures mailed to well targeted audiences. Experience suggests that for open competitions, professional billboards, announcements within universities, listservs, and advertisements in learned publications are effective in attracting good candidates. For closed (on-invitation) competitions, the approach is usually more personalized. The most effective methods include e-mail, presentations and workshops to a captive audience, and proposal writing courses. These personalized approaches are often used in conjunction with some sort of pre-selection process.

Tracking

In preparation for the receipt of proposals, it is essential to have a system established in advance to track the receipt of proposals and to record the actions that are taken with each proposal. Such a system can be paper-based or computerized. The tracking system should include guidelines for acknowledging receipt of proposals -- both those that are rejected immediately as outside program guidelines and those that will be further reviewed and evaluated.

Because of the amount of work involved in administering a grant project, it is critical to set up management systems properly at the start of the project — this will greatly reduce the amount of work (and problems) later on in the process. Good management systems established at the start of the project also help both the recipient and the donor to conduct periodic audits and reviews of project activities.

When replies are sent to those whose proposals will receive further consideration, it is important to indicate the date on which the review process will be completed. Standard letters (or emails) can be prepared in advance to speed the process of informing applicants of the status of their proposals.

The objective of the tracking system is to ensure that all information and action taken during the review process is logged. This information can be extremely helpful in the streamlining of operations, and the system provides accurate data that can be used to make better management decisions.

The system should record the following information and actions:

- Name of proponent;
- Title of proposal;
- Organizational affiliation;
- Contact information;
- Dates on which the proposal is received, acknowledged, and reviewed;
- Person responsible for each stage of review and acknowledgement;
- Comments made on the proposal;
- Recommendations for funding, revision, or rejection;
- Checklist for necessary components in the proposal (e.g., description of activity, official request, budget, timetable of activities, information on proponent organization, project leader, and other project staff).

Bellanet has developed a web-based system for tracking and processing grant applications; however, many other manual or computerized systems could be used. The key point is to maintain on file a routing and handling form that allows tracking of actions taken and decisions made.

Checklist for Preparatory Activities

- Identify the primary target audience for the grant project.
- Determine the most effective means to reach this audience.
- Develop communication materials based on the target audience and dissemination strategy that is to be used (may involve hiring a public relations consultant or company).
- Establish a system to track all incoming proposals.
- Develop form letters for acknowledgement of receipt of proposals and action taken.

Proposal Development and Assessment (Due Diligence)

IDRC and its recipients have used two systems to review proposals:

- In some grant projects, the call for proposals asks that "ideas" for research support be submitted as a preliminary step in assessing proposals (the system used by IDRC). This limits the amount of work that the proponents are initially required to undertake and makes the culling of off-topic proposals easier.
- In other grant projects, proponents are asked to submit complete proposals and decisions are based on these submissions (and in some cases, assistance is provided to further improve proposals that are deemed to be worthy of support).

Either methods works well, but seeking ideas first is likely more efficient and effective if the scope of the program is broad and the call for proposals is quite general. If the grant project is focused on a smaller well-defined community it may be more effective to seek full proposals immediately.

As grant projects run for a few years and become better known, there tends to be an evolution from requesting full proposals for consideration to requesting outlines of research proposals for a pre-screening of proposals into a short-list for further consideration — only then are the preselected applicants asked to develop more complete proposals that are used for making funding decisions (at this time the applicants are asked to complete a comprehensive application form that ensures that key pieces of information are provided along with the research proposal).

One concern with the review of full proposals is that "better off or more experienced" organizations have a clear advantage because of their experience in writing and submitting proposals. With the submission of ideas, less experienced proponents can be identified who have potentially good ideas but lack presentation experience. They can then be coached through the proposal development stage (some grant projects also provide financial and technical assistance to further develop full proposals) — but this is a labour- and time-intensive activity that will entail a significant input of resources and must be adequately taken into consideration in project planning. Another concern for a research-oriented donor such as IDRC is the dilemma that can exist between funding research and funding implementation via grant projects — this is especially true when grants are given to NGOs and grass-root organizations that require small investments to tackle community-level development problems.

Some projects have encountered difficulties in receiving proposals that are well-written in English or French. To help alleviate this difficulty, projects have provided funds to help researchers seek assistance with the writing and presentation of proposals in English or French and/or with the translation of the original proposals from the local language into English or French so that they can be reviewed. This is a useful and innovative approach when the objective is to encourage project proposals from regions, institutions, or individuals with limited access to such support services.

Application Forms

IDRC has developed comprehensive application forms that proponents are asked to complete; whereas, other programs provide guidelines for proposal development. The advantage of a comprehensive form is that all administrative and financial data are collected along with the

proposal, but this represents a great deal of work for proponents who might be unsuccessful. It is best to use such forms in conjunction with prescreening approaches so that only applicants whose "ideas" have passed the initial stage are asked to complete detailed application forms.

Preliminary Screening

Although the final assessment of proposals and funding decisions should be done by the management committee (or other committee charged with this responsibility — see Figure 2), preliminary screening of proposals can be delegated to one or two individuals (however, their assessments must still be documented and filed).

This pre-screening should:

- Check that the proposal includes all of the required elements;
- Ensure that the proposal meets the guidelines and terms and conditions of the grant project.
- Assess the proposed activities and budget; and
- Determine if there are inconsistencies in the activities or budget.

The use of screening forms can help with the preliminary review of proposals. Proposals that are deemed incomplete or outside the mandate of the program should be rejected (form letters can be used to communicate with applicants.)

In some cases, interesting proposals may be received that require work to make them complete. In this case, the applicant might be asked to resubmit a revised proposal based on comments provided by the reviewers. In other cases, for capacity development purposes, advisors (or members of the review committee) might work with the researchers to help improve interesting proposals or ideas. The decision on how to proceed with such incomplete proposals will vary among projects; however, if proposals may be accepted that require further development, it is important to communicate to proponents in the call for proposals how the proposals will be rated and selected and to indicate what will happen if one or all of the proposals fail to meet all predetermined standards. If proposals are substandard over several grant cycles, the manager of the grant project should question how the call for proposals or the target group for the grant project might be modified. If plans are made to help develop substandard proposals, the resources needed to provide such detailed feedback and assistance should not be under budgeted.

Some grant projects use an "initiation workshop" at the start of the process to refine proposals, discuss common research methodologies, and start the networking process among awardees. However, this can sometimes cause ill feelings among grantees because they have already had their proposals accepted but are still required to revise them — some programs are considering changing such workshops into peer-review and information exchange sessions rather than proposal rewriting exercises.

Review and Assessment

After proposals pass the initial screening stage, they should be assessed against the program and administrative criteria that have been made public. This professional review of the proposals can be undertaken during a meeting of the project committee charged with this

responsibility (see Figure 2) or the proposals can be reviewed by email exchanges and consultations among the reviewers. In some cases, the reviewers decide to seek outside inputs on proposals that may fall outside their immediate areas of expertise.

Only in exceptional circumstances should proposals that do not meet the publically stated criteria, or that are incomplete, be accepted. Acceptance of such proposals provides a very poor signal to those who are submitting proposals. Program and administrative rigour should be the benchmark for proposal acceptance, and project managers should ask for the standards they expect and be willing to enforce the attainment of a minimum set of standards.

Because all proposals being reviewed at this stage should fall within the program guidelines, assessment should focus on specific review criteria such as:

- The validity of the research design;
- The feasibility of the proposed activities in relation to the human and financial resources that are available or requested;
- The likelihood of producing useful outputs;
- The links that are proposed to policy or implementation;
- The research management skills and fiscal accountability of the proponent;
- A review of the previous history of the applicant (if this exists); and
- The use of standard "ethics" guidelines in the proposed research (see for example section A4 of IDRC's additional terms and conditions for grants).

Transparency

To ensure that there is transparency and fairness in all decisions, care should be taken to determine if there is a real or perceived conflict of interest between any of the members of the committee and the applicant. If this is the case, this person should withdraw from the assessment of that submission (guidelines for dealing with potential conflicts of interest among the committee should be developed and agreed upon in advance).

After the committee has made its decisions on the proposals, all applicants should be informed of the results of the process. Names of successful applicants should be made public along with abstracts of their proposals. This transparency of the decision-making process is considered to be one of the main strengths of grant projects.

Checklist for Due Diligence

- Determine if the proposal is complete.
- Determine if the proposal falls within the guidelines for the grant project.
- If the proposal is incomplete or outside the project guidelines, reject the proposal (or initiate discussion on how to improve the proposal).
- If the proposal passes the preliminary screening, inform the applicant of the scheduled date for review and decision-making.
- Review the relative merit of all proposals based on established evaluation criteria and "grade" all proposals.

- After all proposals are reviewed and funding decision are made, communicate these decision to all applicants in a public way.

Record Keeping

If the process is to be both accountable and public, it important to keep records of all of the decisions that are made, the dates upon which actions are taken, and the name of the person (or committee) making the decision.

From the point-of-view of accountability it is also very important that the minutes of all committee meetings during which funding decisions are made are recorded in writing and filed appropriately. The resources required for adequate administrative support should not be underestimated.

Administrative requirements (e.g., government clearance, grant letters, payments, tracking reports) for each successful applicant increases the workload for administrative staff — the large amount of administrative work involved should not be underestimated, especially if administrative responsibilities are combined with responsibilities to do promotional work. Many projects hire staff specifically for management and administration of their grants.

Cover Sheet

To make record-keeping easier, it is useful to develop a cover sheet that can be attached to each proposal. This might be the same paper-based system used to record all actions that are taken with a proposal, or a separate approval sheet. The approval sheet as a minimum should include:

- The name of the proponent;
- The title of the submission;
- The date of preliminary review (confirming that the proposal is complete and meets project criteria) and the initials of the person performing this review;
- The date of the committee meeting at which the proposal was reviewed;
- The decision of the committee;
- The reason(s) for making the decision; and
- The date upon which this decision was communicated to the proponent.

Unsuccessful candidates for research support often suggest that they would like to know why their proposal was rejected and would appreciate input on the areas in which their proposal could be improved. Although provision of such feedback may be impractical in most cases, this may be something the committee might consider providing to applicants (especially if they anticipate other applications from this person or organization, or wish to encourage them to submit another proposal at a later date). Such an approach would entail much extra work and resources for the committee members and the person charged with responsibility for communicating with the applicants.

Opening and Maintaining Files

What is done in terms of filing when applications are received depends on the proposal review and selection process. Generally, when proposals are received they are prescreened to determine if they meet the minimum standards of eligibility.

The decision to how information on each project is filed depends on how far the proposal moves along in the review process:

- Proposals that do not pass the prescreening are sent to single file that includes all rejected proposals, along with the cover sheet and reason(s) for rejection;
- Proposals that pass the initial screening process should each be filed in a separate file;
- Proposals that are rejected later in the review process would remain in their individual files and these files should document the reason for their rejection (such as the meeting minutes when the decision was made not to fund the project). However, the files would be "closed" and moved to a different filing cabinet; and
- Proposals that are approved for funding should remain in the "active" filing cabinet.

For accepted proposals, the individual files should include all relevant documentation about the proposal, its review, and its legal status. It is important to determine:

- What needs to be included in the file? — as a minimum this should include the official project proposal and cover letter/application sheet; the record of the committee meeting at which the funding decision was made; legal documents such as country clearance; and the grant letter sent to the applicant;
- Who has responsibility for opening and maintaining records?;
- How long files should be kept? — normally about 6 or 7 years;
- Should the records that are maintained on paper or electronically?; and
- When should files be closed and what are the procedures for closing and archiving files?

Electronic filing of records raises several new issues when compared to paper filing. These include:

- the type of record classification system to be used;
- the file format to be used for the records;
- the file indexing and meta-tagging strategy;
- the type of storage medium to use and its long-term accessibility; and
- the backup strategy to be implemented.

Checklist for Record-Keeping

- Establish file and checklist (cover sheet) for all proposals that are received.
- Record and date all actions taken with regard to all proposals.
- Inform all applicants of the results of the review of their proposals.
- Close files on the basis of agreed upon schedule of action.
- Maintain files of old projects for at least the time required by IDRC.

Grant Approval

As part of the call for proposals, it is important to specify who (what committee, see Figure 2) makes decisions, identify the members of the committee, and clarify the responsibilities all committee members have with regard to proposal review. All parties involved in the process must be clear about how funding decisions are to be made.

Specific Criteria

The specific criteria that have been developing by the grant project to assess proposals should be made public, and decisions on funding must be based on these criteria. Using such a list of criteria, the individual members of the review committee can review all proposals against the same set of criteria. Some projects ask the reviewers to allocate specific numerical values to each criterion during their assessments, which allows the assessments of different reviewers to be easily compared and tabulated. Table 3 presents a simple evaluation grid using a numerical rating system. Different types of evaluation grids have been used by IDRC-supported projects.

Table 3: Simple evaluation grid that could be used to standardize the review of proposals.

Evaluation Criteria Group (the criteria in each group will be specific to each grant project)	**Weight** (to be distributed among the criteria in each evaluation criteria group)
Eligibility	This is an overriding factor, with a pass required for the assessment to go further
Presentation and completeness of administrative information	5
Background and justification	5
Methodology (in research, this often has the most weight)	40
Schedule	10
Results and utilization strategy (links to policy or implementation)	10
Experience of personnel or institution	20
Budget	10
Total	100

Timetable

A timetable should be established in advance to fix the dates for meetings of the committee that will review proposals, and the dates by which decisions will be made. These dates should be made public so that proponents have information about when decisions on their proposals will be made and communicated to them. After the schedule for the committee meeting is made, the following dates should be agreed on and adhered to:

- Date for receipt of proposals or ideas;
- Dates for pre-screening of proposals or ideas;
- Date for circulation of proposals or ideas to committee members for review in advance of the committee meeting; and
- Date on which results will be made public.

All decisions made by the review committee should be recorded in the minutes of the committee meeting and made public according to the preestablished schedule.

Checklist for Grant Approval

- Ensure that all criteria are well known to proponents and review committee members.
- Circulate proposals or ideas to committee members according to a preestablished schedule.
- Ensure that all proposals or ideas are accompanied by a "evaluation criteria" sheet.
- Record all decisions made by the committee in the minutes of the meeting.
- Inform proponents of the decisions that are made on the basis of a predetermined schedule.

Grant Notification

After the decisions have been made as to which of the proposals will be funded, this information must be communicated to the successful proponents in an "official" letter that indicates that the proposal has been accepted. This letter is a contract that spells out the terms and conditions under which the grant is being made. The contract must indicate both the legal relationship that exists between the grant maker and the recipient and the accountability that is expected from the recipient (see Figure 4). These terms and conditions should be clear to the grantee because they will have been part of the original call for proposals. This contract provides the basis for effective project management and evaluation.

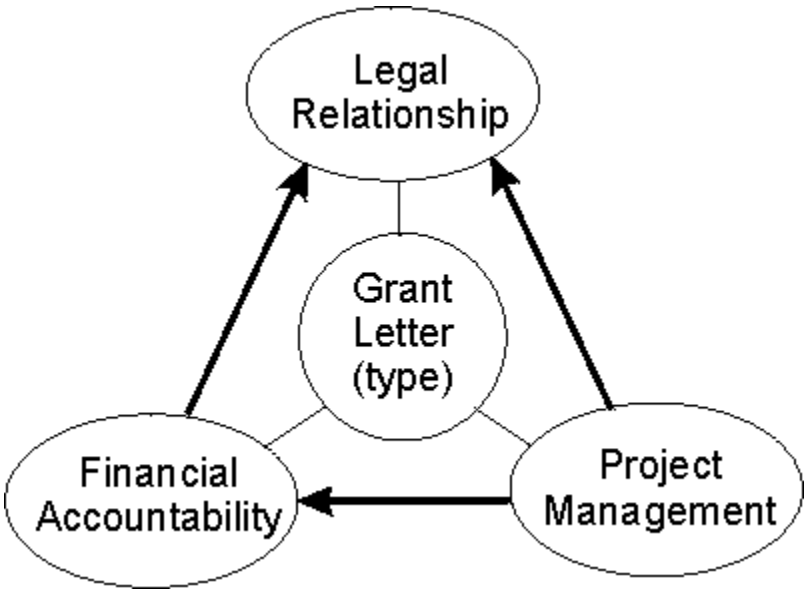

Figure 4: The relationship between project management and legal and financial accountability is spelled out in the grant letter.

Some grant projects have experimented with the use of a comprehensive grant application that includes all of the information that is required for the managing organization to make a grant to the recipient (here is the grant application form used by IDRC). This facilitates preparation of the grant letter, but means that all applicants must complete this paperwork with no assurance that they will even make the short-list of grant applicants or be awarded a grant. For this reason, projects that have used this grant application mechanism often consider only asking short-listed applicants to complete the form. It is at this time that these applicants are also asked to initiate other processes that might be required before a grant can be made (e.g., government clearances). Use of a grant application form can simplify the grant letter as reference can be made to the application form and the standard clauses that it includes.

Grant Letter

The grant letter is a legal document that should be carefully drafted to include the agreed on terms and conditions under which the grant or contribution is made. The terms and conditions reflect both the project management requirements and the financial accountability framework

of the donor (see Figure 4). This grant letter must spell out the responsibilities of both the organization making the grant or contribution and the organization or individual who is receiving the funds.

Pure Grants and Contributions

Project management and financial accountability are closely linked. Generally, institutions that are managing a grants project must chose to provide funds as either pure grants or contributions.

Pure grants are agreements that are:

- Open to both individuals and institutions;
- Based on the satisfaction of the decision-maker that all technical and administrative eligibility criteria are met at the time of approval (no technical or financial reporting to the grant project administrator is required, but a written declaration from the recipient must be received before the grant payment is made);
- Paid when the grant is approved (subject to the overall project's cash-flow situation); and
- The intellectual property is vested entirely with the recipient. (The donor can ask for some dissemination rights and usually requests that the results be part of the public domain).

Pure grants are appropriate for short-term, well-defined, and relatively low-risk awards. Although no financial reporting is required, the grant letter for a pure-grant agreement must include provisions for audit and review of the awardee's records. IDRC's evaluation and audit criteria have been developed to ensure that accountability is assured in its business practices with regard to funding research and research-support activities. The administrator of the grants project must have a strategy in place to review a sample of the awards to control both the quality and impact of the program. Other conditions that must be included in the letter of agreement include:

- The purpose of the grant;
- The method of payment;
- An assurance that the project will comply with national laws;
- A stipulation of allowable expenses; and
- A statement indicating that the awardee keeps the intellectual property of the results (although the donor may wish to retain a right to disseminate the results should the recipient be unwilling or unable to do so).

Contributions are agreements in which:

- The donor expects the recipient to contribute to the cost of the work, in kind or in real cash terms;
- Technical performance or outputs (i.e., results) are expected in consideration of the grant;
- The intellectual property of the project remains with the grantee but is automatically shared with the donor;

- Satisfactory performance must be demonstrated to continue to receive grant funds -- in other words, future payments are linked to project outputs; and
- All funds must be accounted for by the recipient.

Contributions agreements are appropriate for longer-term, process-driven, and relatively risky projects (here is a generic contribution agreement that is based on the Memorandum of Grant Conditions used by IDRC). The administrator of the grant project retains control over the outputs. The grantee keeps the intellectual property but shares the benefits with the donor.

Very often, contributions are paid in arrears and on the basis of detailed financial reports supported by receipts. However, for research projects, payments may be made in advance, but full justification of any previous advance would be required before the next payment was released.

Checklist for Notification

- Prepare grant or contribution letter for each successful applicant (ensuring that standard terms and conditions are included in all such letters that are prepared and that payment and reporting schedules are clearly stipulated).
- Send the letter to the recipient (either for signature and eventual release for the initial payment or as a notification that the grant or contribution has been approved and to confirm transmission of the initial payment).
- Record the date on which the grant letter was sent and the date and amount of payment (if applicable).
- Record the date on which the signed grant or contribution letter was returned and the date and amount of the payment that is made based on receipt of the signed letter.

Grant Monitoring

Monitoring is important from a financial and administrative as well as a programming point of view. Monitoring includes making and recording payments, monitoring the receipt of reports on progress of grant activities, providing feedback to the recipient on the progress reports that are received, assessing the progress of activities to ensure they are in accordance with the plans spelled out in the grant agreement, and providing advice and guidance.

Monitoring and evaluation of grant projects can be difficult and time-consuming and the amount of work is often underestimated. Therefore, this needs to be carefully considered when developing project budgets and making work plans. Particularly with open competitions in new program areas, the range of topics can be broader than anticipated and in practical terms this makes the monitoring process more demanding because advice and assistance must be provided on a wider range of research issues and methods. Experience has shown that the degree of grantee responsiveness and the management rigour of grant projects and individual grants are directly proportional to the level of monitoring and follow-up. The impact of monitoring cannot be overestimated.

Tracking System

Experiences with grant projects suggest that you must be very well organized to handle the administrative and financial aspects of a grant project because there are many payments to be made and reports to be monitored. For this reason, extra effort at the beginning of a project to ensure that systems are properly established can avoid much extra work and problems during the life of the project.

Procedures for making grant payments must ensure that the proper payments are made on schedule to the appropriate recipient. As well, the tracking system must ensure that payments are made in a way that provides a proper audit trail (for example, the initial payment is based on signature of the grant agreement and other payments are made on the basis of achieving specific project milestones). Here are links to IDRC guidelines on administration and funding of projects.

Effective tracking helps to minimize or anticipate delays in individual projects. Because each grant project has many different recipients, delays related to one recipient can affect the progress of work by others (for example, mid-term workshops to review research progress). Delays later in the life of individual projects can delay the closing of project files and lead to the need to extend or supplement the overall grant project.

Project Reports

On the program side, it is important to develop clear guidelines for reporting on the progress of activities covered by the grant. These guidelines should be an integral part of the grant letter or memorandum of grant conditions and should cover both when reports are due and the content and extent that is expected in the reports (see IDRC guidelines for preparing interim and final technical reports). It is important to strike a balance between the need for information, the capacity of granting staff to review the reports, and the need of the grantee to provide such reports to strengthen project implementation and the management of the research process.

Financial Reports

Financial reporting will depend on the type of grant and the agreement that the awardee signed. When the award is a pure grant, detailed reporting of the expenditure of funds is unnecessary. However, with a contribution agreement, systematic recording of all payments and the dates upon which they are made is required and must be supported with receipts. In addition, it is essential to record when reports are required and the actions that are triggered when satisfactory reports are received. Normally, these reports will include both a narrative account on the progress of the research (including both successes and constraints) and a financial report that indicates the current financial status of the project. It is useful to develop a checklist to assist with the review of financial reports.

As a rule, IDRC tries to simplify and streamline the process of financial reporting and the detail required in financial reports. This is done to minimize the work required from both recipients and IDRC staff.

Sometimes, recipients may be unclear as to whom they are expected to report to on different issues — for example, sometimes there is one contact for financial issues, one for contractual issues, and one for program issues. Therefore, it is important to clarify reporting relationships.

Audit

On occasion, the donor may decide to undertake a review or audit of project finances. Audit programs typically review a minimum of 2-3% of recipients, who are selected on a random basis.

When combined with other elements of monitoring, audits provide assurance that donor funds are used for their intended purposes. A donor has no other way to ensure that recipients comply with the terms of their grant agreements because financial reports typically do not contain sufficient detail to verify compliance or reasonableness of claims. Detailed reviews of financial claims and reports are therefore essential elements of the financial monitoring of grant agreements.

An audit should not delay a project payment (unless fraud is suspected). Ideally, the audit should be conducted about a year before the planned completion date of the project.

Feedback to Recipients

When reports are received, processes must be established to review and evaluate both the narrative and financial reports. As a minimum, this review should ensure that the activities that were undertaken were consistent with the goals of the project and met the timetable and work plans that were approved. This is an important aspect of project management because it allows program and administrative staff to help recipients deal with any problems that might have been encountered and to approve any modifications in the design or implementation of the project that might be required to address these problems. If problems are serious, the managing organization may choose to provide the services of an external consultant to provide specialized assistance with regard to project implementation or to conduct an audit of the financial reports of the recipient.

Checklist for Monitoring

- Before the project starts, ensure that systems are in place to monitor all payments and reports that are due during the life of the grant project.

- Record all payment amounts and dates on which the payments are made.
- Record the receipt of all reports when they arrive and ensure that necessary followup takes place.
- Ensure that the recipient is aware of the elements that are expected in both the technical and financial reports.
- Provide feedback to recipients on their reports.
- When necessary, review and approve suggested changes in the conduct of the project.
- When necessary, arrange for consultants or financial audits.

Dissemination of Results

As a grant project nears completion, it is an excellent time to ensure that the accomplishments of the both the overall grant project, and the individual grants that have been funded by the grant projects, are documented and that appropriate dissemination of all project results has been undertaken. Ideally, plans for dissemination of project results should be considered from the start of the project and built into the overall strategy and budget of the project, both in terms of expenses and workload. For example, projects with policy implications need to think about how to involve and interest policymakers in the proposed research and how to synthesize and present results in ways that will be useful to policymakers at various levels (e.g., village, province, and/or national).

Ensuring that the results of a series of individual projects within a research network are integrated and disseminated in a meaningful way can mean that the sum of the results of the individual grants will make a more significant contribution to a common goal.

Often there is limited effort to evaluate or disseminate the results of research grant. Therefore, it is important to provide feedback to those who have conducted the research or competed specific academic training and to find ways to publicize these efforts, link them to policymakers or extension services as appropriate, and create networks among grant recipients.

Even if dissemination was not considered from the start of the project, dissemination of project results should receive serious consideration as the project nears completion. Discussions should be initiated with the recipient to determine how the results might be used, who could make most effective use of the results, and how to best communicate the results to the most important audiences (see Table 4). Among the possible methods are:

- Articles in peer-reviewed journals;
- Notes in special-interest newsletters or magazines;
- Topics for discussions in on-line forums;
- Face to face meetings and conference presentations;
- Articles and features in local mass media (e.g., radio, television, and newspapers);
- Materials (print and audio-visual) that can be shared with extension services;
- Discussion groups within communities;
- Discussion papers or briefs for policymakers.

Given the importance of documentation, public relations, and evaluation to achieving project impacts and improving future research and implementation, projects might wish to allocate 10% of total project resources to such activities.

IDRC includes a standard dissemination clause in its memorandum of grant conditions (see Section A6 of Attachment A of MGC), and a similar statement should be included in the standard grant agreement for any grant project. This clause essentially gives the funder of the research the right to disseminate the results of the research it funds should the recipient either be unwilling or unable to do so. In some cases, it may be necessary to considered the possibility that the project results could be patented. As far as possible, this should be

anticipated in advance of the project agreement being signed. In this case, a patent agreement should be included as part of the project documentation.

Because the amount of a grant can sometimes be small, there can be a reluctance on behalf of the awardee or grant recipient to report on their work. For the same reason, donor staff may be less likely to monitor such activities closely.

Table 4. Different audiences and the types of dissemination strategies that might be most effective in reaching them

Users	Effective dissemination strategies
National Policymakers	Newsletters Face-to-face meetings Conferences Mass media
Local Policymakers / Farmers / Community members	Booklets Festival / showcase / cultural events Local media Include user as research partner Local translation
Peers / Other researchers	Scientific publications Conferences Networking "Brown bag" lunches
Other organizations	Networking Websites Personal contacts Conferences
International / Regional policymakers	Regional organizations, conferences, and parallel events Using a "burning" issue that will call regional attention, dialogues

Checklist for Dissemination

- Review project results and dissemination plans and determine if more support is required to disseminated research findings.
- Consider if any of the results might lead to a patent application.
- If appropriate, develop plans to synthesize results into formats suitable for different audiences and different media and create a strategy to disseminate or market the results.

Project Evaluation

As a project nears completion, it is a good opportunity for the organizations involved in the project to take stock of what has been learned and to document this learning. The assessment and learning process should take place at least two levels. At the first level, it is important for each of the individual projects to be assessed against their project objectives. At the second level, the group of projects supported by the grant-making project should be assessed to determine how well they as a group were able to address the overall objectives of the grant-making project.

Traditionally, evaluations were conducted to provide a "report card" on a project. Donor organizations still want a sense that they are getting value for the resources they have invested, but as development activities have evolved to become more holistic and multi-disciplinary (meaning that more partners and stakeholders are involved) and participatory approaches have become more common, institutions and projects no longer want evaluations to be imposed on them — recipient organizations and the communities involved in the research want to directly benefit and learn from evaluations as well.

These trends have seen evaluations shift away from a tool for "control" to a tool that can empower organizations and contribute to organizational learning. As plans are developed to conduct an evaluation, a framework should be developed to guide data collection and analysis. Such a framework is useful because it:

- Helps everyone involved know what is being discussed and examined;
- Helps all parties to know what to focus on during discussions;
- Helps fit the data that are collected into the larger picture or broader perspective; and
- Helps to understand all of the elements and how they relate to each other.

Evaluations can help project managers, project implementers, and target audiences to collect, verify, and use information to make decisions. By recording the outputs of the individual projects as well as the overall grant-making project, and documenting progress and accomplishments, the evaluation process can:

- Improve performance by helping managers, project implementers, and target audiences to understand project performance;
- Document lessons learned and integrate these into planning processes and future activities;
- Enhance accountability by demonstrating how resources were used and results produced; and
- Be used as a "marketing tool" for future grant competitions and as examples of the types of activities that the program supports and the types of results that are expected.

IDRC has developed some guiding principles with regard to evaluation:

- Evaluation is intended to improve project or organizational planning and delivery;
- Evaluations are designed to lead to action;

- No single, best, generic evaluation method exists;
- Evaluations should enlist the participation of relevant stakeholders;
- Evaluation processes should meet standards for ethical research;
- Monitoring and evaluation planning add value at the design stage of a project or program;
- Evaluation should be an asset for those being evaluated;
- Evaluation is both science and art;
- Evaluations are means of negotiating different realities; and
- Evaluations should leave an increased capacity to use evaluation findings.

For additional information on project evaluation see the website of the IDRC Evaluation Unit.

Checklist for Evaluation

- Develop an evaluation framework in a participatory way to guide project learning.
- Conduct the evaluation by involving project personnel (and intended beneficiaries) in the evaluation process.
- Use the evaluation results as a tool for learning by all parties involved and as input into how future projects might be improved.
- Consider how the results of this project might be used to market the next round of competitive grants or to serve as an example of what is expected.

Closing the Grant and Archiving the Records

Closure of the project file formalizes the termination and successful completion of the grant. The project should be closed only after all technical and financial reports have been received and deemed to be acceptable. It might be useful to develop a short checklist or to formalize a short "grant completion report" to ensure that all of the required steps are taken at the conclusion of the project.

The steps that are taken to make a decision on project closure are outlined in Figure 5. After the acceptable financial and technical reports have been received and reviewed the final project payment can be made, dissemination strategies can be considered (if they were not already part of the project design), the appropriate files archived, and the account closed.

Delays in financial reporting by any one of the recipients of a grant project means that the project cannot be closed on time, or if the project is part of a network, other training or networking activities might be delayed because of having to wait for the one delinquent organization to submit their financial statement — in some cases, projects have developed a system of penalties that can be applied if financial (or other) reports are late in arriving.

Archiving Records

Procedures should be established to indicate which documents should be kept and for how long these records should be retained. Each approved project file should include as a minimum:

- Project proposal and official request;
- Minutes of committee meeting at which the funding decision was made;
- Country clearance documents (if they were required);
- Grant letter notify the recipient that the grant or contribution was approved and stipulating the conditions under which the grant or contribution was made;
- All financial and technical reports that were submitted;
- Evaluation reports on any aspect of the project;
- Outputs produced by the project; and
- Communication regarding the formal closure of the project.

Records of all projects (both approved and rejected) should be retained for a specified time (typically about 6 or 7 years). IDRC has developed specific guidelines with regard to the disposal of files (see Table 5). These guidelines should be considered to minimum standards for all recipients of IDRC funds.

Table 5: IDRC guidelines for disposal of project files.

• Before the process of disposal begins, the project files must be "legally" closed for at least 7 fiscal years. • Before any disposal takes place, a list of all records that are to be disposed must be sent to "records manager" for approval. Only after receipt of this approval, can

disposal begin.

- Historical documents must to be removed — these include: the original project summary; the original project completion report; and the final technical report (or final report) — these documents must be clearly marked with the project file number and indicate the type of document (e.g., Final Technical Report).
- The files of projects in which IDRC is involved in a Patent must be kept in their entirety.
- After all historical documents have been removed from the project file and written approval has been obtained for file disposal, the remaining records can to be disposed. Recycling is the preferred method of disposing of this information. However, the recycling method must ensure that these records are treated as confidential information, which requires that they be shredded or pulped.
- Placing contents in boxes and:

  a) Ensure documents are clearly marked to indicate their contents.

  b) Place documents in standard file boxes in numerical order starting by the oldest and working your way to the most recent. For example: Box 175-0001 to 75-0111; Box 275-0112 to 76-0022; and Box 376-0023 to 77-0234.

  c) Place files or documents in boxes facing the same way and ensure that folder labels, file titles, or file numbers are up. Do not invert files.

  d) Seal the bottom and top flaps with clear (3 inch or 4 inch tape).

  e) All markings on the box should be done using a "Permanent Marker" (and please "Print Clearly")

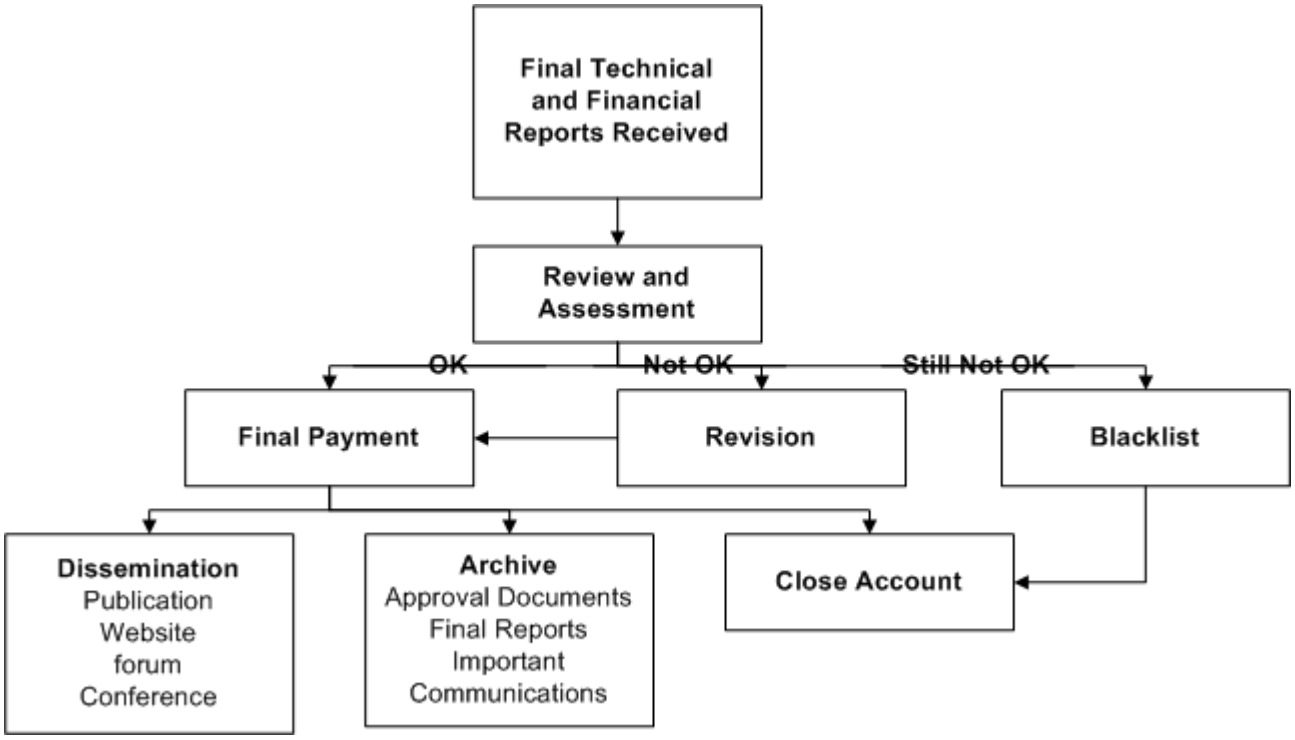

Figure 5. Flow chart of the steps required for the closure and archiving of project files

Early Closure

In certain cases, it may become necessary to close an individual project grant early because it is not performing as expected. These projects are recognized to be either delinquent and failed. EEPSEA has developed guidelines for such projects: projects for which a report is more than 3 months overdue are considered to be delinquent; and projects previously classified as delinquent, and for which a report is still overdue as of the revised deadline and for which explanations are, in EEPSEA's view, lacking or inadequate, are considered to be failed. In both cases, EEPSEA has established specific actions that will take place if projects are deemed to have become either delinquent or failed.

Checklist for Closure

- Formally close all project files after the final financial and technical reports have been received, evaluated, and deemed acceptable.

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