Office of Research Grants
Indian Institute of Science

PC: Somarupa Sahoo, IPC

Dear Researchers,

We are delighted to share with you this special edition of our monthly newsletter where you will find a new section, titled "*In Conversation*", in addition to information on grant calls for researchers at various stages of their career. We also extend a warm welcome to Dr. Monika Sharma who joins the ORG Team as a Grants Manager with prior work experience with two international funding agencies, the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and the German Research Foundation (DFG). We are sorry to see Dr. Jinu Mathew leave the Team to explore other challenging avenues and wish her the best with her future endeavors.

Dr. Sharma reports on her conversation with Dr. P. V. Lalitha (Senior Scientific Officer) of the Indo-German Science & Technology Centre (IGSTC) about new funding opportunities, research priority areas, the Indo-German Research and Innovation funding landscape, and shares crucial insights and tips to ensure success with your grant proposals based on her experience.

Do drop us a line for any grants related queries or any comments/ feedback. Watch this space for interviews with senior representatives from other funding agencies. Happy reading!

With best wishes,
ORG Team.

✉ For queries, write to us at office.org@iisc.ac.in
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APRIL 2021

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IN CONVERSATION
with Dr. P.V. Lalitha

You joined the IGSTC soon after its establishment. How do you remember the growth of IGSTC and the major milestones in this last decade? Please also describe your specific responsibilities.

IGSTC had its first director in April 2011 and I joined in August 2011. We have grown from 4 proposals to 44; these are big projects with a minimum requirement of 4 partners. These projects are based on "2+2 Mode of Partnership" where the requirement is to have the participation of at least one German and one Indian research institution, as well as one German and one Indian industry. These projects have created a network of more than 180 partners and have connected around 600-650 researchers from both industry and academia. IGSTC has supported 27 Indo-German thematic workshops, as a result of which approximately 2700 scientists, researchers, technologists, and engineers are well connected.

Uniquely, IGSTC follows a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model where 25% of the total project cost comes from Industry. Initially, our annual funding was €2M/year from each side; considering the success and growth of IGSTC, both the governments decided to raise it to €4M/year from each side starting 2017. Of the 44 Indo-German bilateral projects, 21 are completed, 19 are ongoing, and 4 will start in the coming months. Another landmark in the growth of IGSTC is that funded projects were able to create startups, have developed several technologies, and show several approved patents with additional ones in the applied stage.

I head the scientific division in IGSTC and play a major role in the implementation of scientific programmes and related procedures, keeping high standards, follow good practices, allow transparency in the process whilst keeping in mind the policies of both countries.

What is your experience in working with institutions with an active Research Grants Office as a nodal point as compared to those where individual faculty are directly involved with communication?

We strongly believe that the research grants office should be a single window for the PIs, project scientists, and the funding agencies. Requirements like mandatory paperwork, agreements, certificates, and endorsements should be dealt by the research offices rather than by individual PIs. I am very happy to see elite institutions coming up with research grants offices and researchers opting for science management roles. Because these are important tasks, my request to the institutions is to make these positions permanent so that research management is also considered as a career option and the talent retained by an institution.

What are the key do's/ don'ts that determine the success/ failure of an international grant proposal? Could you please explain the assessment followed by IGSTC when screening and the selection process in awarding research proposals?

IGSTC scientific committee considers good quality proposals with defined milestones, deliverables, outcomes and vision. Since the thrust is on the industrial outcomes and not basic research, the selection committee will consider the following points: first, proposals at Technology Readiness Level (TRL) of 3 with the potential to jump 3 more levels in the next three years. Second, a balanced consortium with defined roles. For example, proposals which are not acceptable are those where one partner has 15-25% role whereas the other has just 1-2%. Even if three partners are

excellent in a proposal but the fourth one is a dummy one (with a very limited role), the committee will have to reject the proposal. Third, we want to see the level of commitment from Industry, the future plan for technology development, patent filing, product development for market use etc. should be evident in the proposal. Fourth, when submitting a proposal, do pay attention to the proposed budget as tailor-made budgets are unacceptable. Submit a reasonable budget which is commensurate with the work package and requirements. IGSTC generally has queries during the processing of the grant applications- we appreciate swift responses from the PIs when approached. Fifth, your proposal must be in compliance with the conditions of the call. Read the grant requirements carefully and approach IGSTC staff or check our website for clarifications. Sixth, superficial proposals with vague concept, unrealistic timeframe, and equipment driven proposals, or selection of industry which do not comply to IGSTC norms are generally not considered. Indian industry has to have DSIR recognition for inhouse R&D. Finally, the evaluation process considers the competency of partners in terms of previously handled projects (national and international), existing infrastructure, complementarity among partners, relevance to the call, scientific quality and originality of the project idea, level of contribution of each partner / collaborative interaction and added value, innovative potential for industrial application (prospects for commercial success / commercial exploitability).

What are the major challenges in the timely execution of awarded projects from a funding agency's perspective?

Delays in submission of mandatory documents and timely procurement of equipment are the major challenges we frequently face. We expect a quick response from principal investigators (PIs) for annual reports, newsletter material, etc. during the project tenure. We organize meetings and partners meet not just to review the progress but also for PIs to interact with funders and share and discuss challenges they face. IGSTC is open to suggestions and willing to incorporate constructive suggestions to improve our processes based on the feedback we receive.

What are the criteria that IGSTC uses to evaluate the success of a funded programme and is there any programme to sustain the funding support to exceptionally promising projects?

We look at successful completion of milestones and objectives, joint IPR developed (joint patents, licenses issued or filed), any start-ups created, market or commercial

potential, revenue generated, etc. The level of capacity building, planned follow-up activities after the completion of project cycle and the scientific outcomes such as journal publications, conference presentations, Ph.D and Masters theses are also considered. Presently, IGSTC has a programme to extend support (called Phase 2) to existing projects for additional two years with equal funding. This support is available only to very successful projects on invitation. Due to very stringent evaluations, a maximum of two projects from a particular call are supported with Phase 2 funding. A mandatory criterion for Phase 2 is that the extension proposal should be Industry led.

IGSTC organizes networking events to connect researchers and industries in both countries like the B2Match platform. Please describe these efforts and what strategies have worked the best in your opinion?

IGSTC had planned a physical workshop before the announcement of the IGSTC 2+2 Call on Additive Manufacturing in early 2020. We could not proceed with this plan due to the pandemic and organized a virtual workshop instead. This event was well received and could gain a lot of visibility with huge participation. As we were getting frequent requests for help with finding a partner, IGSTC used "Find your partner" online matchmaking platform for the 2020 Call that turned out to be a great success. This helped many prospective applicants to find new contacts, collaborators. We kept this platform open for four months before the deadline of the call and tried to publicise through various means including social media. We also had two pitching sessions to facilitate the discussions. The response we got was impressive, we had more than 200 registrations, close to 100 meetings (1:1) were held through this platform. When we received the Additive Manufacturing grant applications, we did an internal analysis and we found out that, through this platform at least 25 consortia were able to find new partners (minimum one) which were relevant to their profiles. I encourage funding agencies to use similar platforms for better response, intend to use this approach more often for IGSTC programmes in future.

There are several diplomatic missions or their bilateral organizations operating in India dedicated to strengthen inter-country R&I partnerships. In this highly competitive set-up, how are IGSTC's research programmes, fellowships unique compared to other funding agencies?

IGSTC is the first and only one such Centre by the German Government outside Germany. Our flagship 2+2 programme is unique with equal participation from India and Germany, it also connects academia and Industry. IGSTC is scheduled to launch industry fellowships to connect young researchers with industry in Germany. This will give young researchers some experience and exposure to Industry set up at a very early stage. IGSTC is in the process of designing new programmes around existing 2+2 schemes, new networking, collaborative and innovative research programmes to explore path breaking ideas, support research which is relevant to society that IGSTC hopes to launch some of these initiatives in the coming months.

What are IGSTC's key research funding priority areas at this stage?

IGSTC's priority areas have always been Agriculture, Bioeconomy, Energy, Environment, Manufacturing, Water etc. We have sufficient funds to continue supporting these areas. Since our 2+2 projects are time bound, and because of COVID our project consortia have lost many months, we intend to support them with additional funds, if required. IGSTC 2+2 grant call topics are decided considering mutual interests of both the countries; however, IGSTC has sufficient funds to support bilateral workshops on topics relevant to both DST and BMBF including COVID-19 related topics.

Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) in India is undergoing rapid transformation in recent years in terms of relevance, scope and scale. For instance, the establishment of National Research Foundation (NRF) which is the Government of India's (GoI) new STI Policy 2020, where among other things, there is a strong urge to connect S&T to Innovation, Industry and Society. With this new policy, would there be any strategic change(s) at IGSTC to further foster Indo-German scientific collaborations?

Because we closely work with GoI, IGSTC is also aligning with STIP, to create a "topic bank" to capture our emerging thrust areas with due consideration to the interests and policies of both the governments. New programmes are being developed to facilitate long term networking and research collaborations to support young researchers, including women. We are intending to create fast track avenues for technology development and commercialization with industry from lab. to market. Grants in basic and applied research is yet another programme we hope to launch. IGSTC will also facilitate exploration of innovative ideas in the coming years; we believe such initiatives also develop strong S &T collaborations, and foster research partnerships down the lane.

Dr Lalitha, thank you very much for your time and the vision you shared as part of this fascinating discussion. It is encouraging to learn that researchers from leading institutions, including IISc, are instrumental in helping IGSTC plan the research priority areas. We echo your sentiments on developing new strategies for international funding, and highlighting the importance of communication to make an efficient network of funders, researchers, policy makers, and end-users. Thank you once again for giving us a fascinating glimpse into your work at IGSTC. We look forward to continued interactions with you and IGSTC in the coming years.

UPCOMING DEADLINES

RESEARCH ENRICHMENT GRANTS

Wellcome Trust- Research Enrichment-Public Engagement
Overview: Supports Wellcome grant holders to use public insights to develop their research.
Submission deadline: 9 April, 2021.

Wellcome Trust Research Enrichment-Diversity and Inclusion
Overview: Funds Wellcome grant holders to identify and tackle barriers to diversity and inclusion in their work.
Submission deadline: 9 April, 2021.

RESEARCH GRANTS

The Minor Foundation for Major Challenges
Overview: Supports climate communication projects that supports low carbon economy.
Submission deadline: 02 April, 2021.

Common Fund for Commodities (CFC)- Support for Commodity Development
Overview: Provides loan for equipment, working capital, or trade finance to introduce new innovations and practices in the value chain.
Submission deadline: 15 April, 2021.

UNESCO- Silk Roads Youth Research Grant
Overview: To address specific issues related to the silk roads shared heritage, plural identities, and its internal diversity.
Submission deadline: 18 April, 2021.

Facebook Research
Overview: Funds research on sample-efficient sequential Bayesian decision making.
Submission deadline: 21 April, 2021.

BILATERAL RESEARCH GRANTS

Simons Collaboration on the Global Brain (SCGB)
Overview: SCGB's Bridge to Independence (BTI) Award supports research in systems and computational neuroscience.
Submission deadline: 5 April, 2021.

Indo- Italian Joint Call for Proposals
Overview: Program invites proposals under three schemes; Mobility of Researchers, Significant Bilateral Projects, and Networks of Excellence to create sustainable interactions between institutes of the two countries.
Submission deadline: 9 April, 2021.

NIH Innovative Molecular and Cellular Analysis Technologies Cancer Research
Overview: Supports early-stage development of innovative technologies offering novel molecular or cellular analysis capabilities for basic/clinical cancer research.
Submission Deadline: 27 April, 2021.

NIH Innovative Biospecimen Science Technologies for Cancer Research
Overview: Funds for early-stage development of highly innovative technologies that improve the quality of the samples used for cancer research or clinical care.
Submission deadline: 27 April, 2021.

NIH- Advanced Biospecimen Science Technologies for Cancer Research
Overview: Supports development and validation of emerging technologies that improve the quality of the samples used for cancer research or clinical care.
Submission deadline: 27 April, 2021.

NIH Population Assessment of Tobacco and Health (PATH) Study Biospecimen Access
Overview: Opportunity for investigators to get access to the biospecimens and related data from the PATH Study.
Submission deadline: 30 April, 2021.

ICGEB Collaborative Research Grants
Overview: Provides support for research projects in basic science, human healthcare, industrial and agricultural biotechnology, and bioenergy.
Submission deadline: 30 April, 2021.

EARLY CAREER GRANTS

EMBO Young Investigator Program
Overview: Supports early stage researchers to set up an independent laboratory.
Submission deadline: 1 April, 2021.

FELLOWSHIPS

DST- Accelerate Vigyan- ABHYAAS - Vritika
Overview: Support provided through the event organizers for post graduate students to participate in training and skill development internship.
Submission deadline: 30 April, 2021.

DST- Accelerate Vigyan - ABHYAAS – Karyashala
Overview: Support provided through the event organizers for students in higher education to participate in high-end workshop that will be facilitated at organizations of national importance.
Submission deadline: 30 April, 2021.