

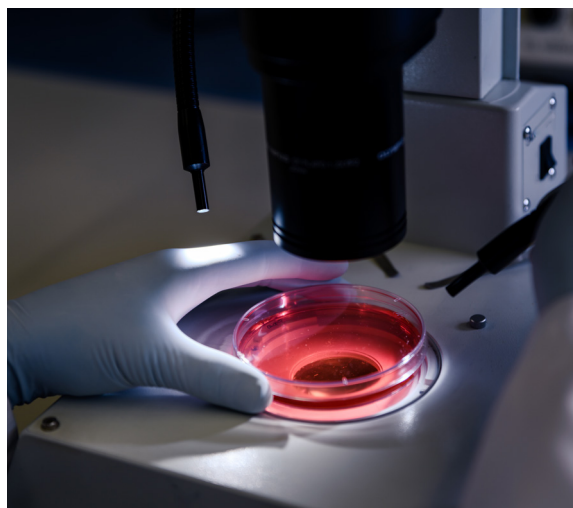
First Organisation Certified under the Good Financial Grant Practice standard

**GFGP
CASE
STUDY**

Photo credit: CRL KIMS

The Central Research Lab at the Kempegowda Institute of Medical Sciences (CRL KIMS) in Bangalore, India, is the first organisation to be certified under the Good Financial Grant Practice (GFGP) standard of the Global Grant Community implemented by the Alliance for Accelerating Excellence in Africa (AESA). AESA is a funding, agenda-setting, programme management initiative created in 2015 through a partnership of the African Academy of Sciences (AAS), the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD), and founding and funding global partners. CRL KIMS achieved this milestone with support from the UK based Centre for Genomic Pathogen Surveillance (CGPS). Described here are challenges, lessons learned and recommendations to other organisations as they seek to be GFGP certified.

The Central Research Lab at the Kempegowda Institute of Medical Sciences (CRL KIMS) in Bangalore, India.



Why we chose GFGP certification

CRL KIMS conducts research related to microbial immunogenicity, antimicrobial resistance, and genomics. The work has focused on infectious diseases with an emphasis on Pneumococci for the last decade. As CRL KIMS' financial management and operational practices were lagging behind their research practices, the lab implemented a plan to improve their financial and grant management structures by implementing the GFGP standard through to GFGP certification. GFGP is the world's first financial governance standard developed for grantees to self-assess their ability to manage grant funding.

The CGPS and the CRL KIMS worked in close partnership throughout the GFGP certification process to:

- Assess the CRL KIMS capabilities based on the requirements of the GFGP Standard of the Global Grant Community and hence identify critical gaps in the financial and operational procedures in the organisation. The GFGP standard provides an online self-assessment tool, through the GGC portal, covering four grant management practice areas – financial management, human resources, procurement and governance – adopted by African Organisation for Standardization (ARSO) to promote transparency in the use of funds by local organisations.
- Focus on developing a customised manual of standard operating procedures (SOPs) to fill the gaps
- Support and review the implementation of these SOPs to ensure that CRL KIMS was able to establish the required three-month minimum implementation period for GFGP certification.
- Engaging BDO LLP (Binder Dijker Otte Limited Liability Partnership), which holds a global license

for the provision of certification services through its UK office, to perform an audit on the assessment report at the bronze tier. This involved inspection of SOPs, walkthrough tests, reperformance of controls and discussion with individuals charged with implementing related procedures. Through this process BDO verified that the responses to the assessment were an accurate reflection of CRL KIMS activities and CRL KIMS could demonstrate adequate procedures and practical implementation of those procedures.



How GFGP Certification works

The GFGP standard is a quality standard that specifies requirements to be met by grant recipients for demonstrating robust management of financial grants.

The GFGP Certification process is activated when the organisation completes the GFGP pre-certification assessment. A licensed GFGP Certification Body is commissioned for the GFGP certification audit based on the pre-certification report, and issues certification for those organisations that achieve the required standards.

The duration of the certification process is typically three to six months, depending on the state of the organisation's preparedness, resources and the tier of certification being sought. Before GFGP, there was no international standard which comprehensively covered financial governance and operations. The GFGP standard supports and streamlines due diligence of funders. The GFGP certification can be



made available to multiple grantmaking organisations, thereby saving considerable costs and time.

The Certification Process for CRL KIMS

Prior to seeking certification, CRL KIMS had already implemented some financial controls, but few were properly documented, nor were they consistently followed. The organisation also lacked a governing committee to monitor the activities of the Lab.

“Having identified the need to improve our financial and grant management structures, the drive towards GFGP certification really started when we began working with Harry Harste from the CGPS UK Unit of our National Institute of Health Research (NIHR) Global Health Research Unit project”, said Dr Geetha Nagaraj, Senior Scientific Officer at CRL KIMS.

“Our first major challenge”, was to design procedures that met the requirements of the GFGP bronze tier, whilst also meeting the needs of CRL. As we were familiar with the SOPs format from our internationally accredited laboratory practices, we decided to use this approach in the design of the procedures across financial management, human resources, procurement and governance.

Having designed the procedures, our next challenge was to implement them through the training of personnel. As most staff were well acquainted with the local Kannada language, we translated the procedures from English into Kannada, which made the communication of procedures easier and facilitated implementation.

At the point of making final certification preparations, we were then faced with the worldwide outbreak of COVID19, bringing all our activities to a standstill. The lockdown and international travel restrictions forced us to explore the possibility of a remote certification and focus on virtual certification preparations. This was challenging but was addressed by creating a detailed google drive folder for the certifier, containing evidence of at least three months of implementation across all areas of the GFGP standard.

Achieving GFGP certification was

a huge landmark for CRL KIMS. Now that we have it, the next steps for us on our journey involves fully embedding the procedures we have developed into our management practices and also strengthening the experience of our finance team to lead the process of further developing our protocols.

The Lab started the GFGP implementation process in early 2019 by initially reviewing existing financial management and operational procedures and then drafting new procedures with CGPS support between August and December 2019. Between January and March 2020, the team worked on demonstrating the practical implementation of these procedures before completing the GFGP portal assessment in March 2020. Remote certification was undertaken in June 2020. The remote certification process took five days and, once the recommendations were addressed, the certification was issued within two weeks.



Strategic benefits of GFGP certification

GFGP certification is a marker of international best practice and will help the Lab to attract both national and international funding. It has also brought a clear structure to CRL's operations and represents a symbol of both accountability and trust.

LESSONS LEARNT



BY CRL KIMS

- Implementation of a standard set of procedures for finance is more difficult than implementation of laboratory standards, hence organisations should ensure they have the capacity and resources to manage the process
- Procedures and the steps for their implementation must be written
- Files for the entire system must be retained in Google drive (or similar) folders, and
- Bank and tally reconciliation and other monthly/weekly/daily tasks must be performed in a systematic manner.



BY BDO

- The grantee must be aware of its requirements from the beginning of the process. Specifically, good lines of communication are needed between the certification body and the grantee to ensure that the grantee is aware of what information will be required and that both parties agree that it will be possible to provide this information within specified timeframes. This is especially important where procedures are performed remotely, due to restrictions implemented in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.



BY CGPS

- Certification is a rigorous process: organisations need to prepare adequately by ensuring they have the capacity or resources to support the process or being supported by organisations such as the CGPS, and
- Organisations should work on implementing procedures after designing them. One of the major challenges of certification is demonstrating 3 or 6 months of practical implementation to a certifying body.

Recommendations for organisations looking for GFGP certification

- The GFGP certification provides credibility and worldwide recognition for the certified organisation
- Target a certification tier that is realistic for the organisation
- Where required, seek support from other organisations (such as in this case study, the CGPS, www.pathogensurveillance.net/gfgp)
- Approach the exercise as a project with a cross-functional team of leaders assigned for different areas of the assessment (e.g., procurement, asset management, budget controls, payroll controls), and
- Having the right individuals lead in each area – with an overall designated sponsor/lead to manage the process - will both spread the workload and ensure the most appropriate and informed individuals are accountable for a particular area, reducing the risk of error and delays in the process.

For more information, visit:

CRL Kims: kimsbangalore.edu.in | **CGPS:** pathogensurveillance.net | **BDO:** bdo.in
GGC: globalgrantcommunity.com | **Email Us:** ggcsecretariat@aasciences.africa