MAHARASHTRA NATIONAL LAW UNIVERSITY, NAGPUR

SEED MONEY POLICY FOR ASSISTANT PROFESSORS

SPRINT GRANT, ACADEMIC SESSION 2026-27

SPARK Scheme

(SEED Project for Academic Research and Knowledge)

Approved by: Office of Hon'ble Vice Chancellor Date of approval: 30th November, 2026

1. Preamble, Title and Application

1.1 Maharashtra National Law University, Nagpur ("the University") frames this Policy to support short-duration empirical research by Assistant Professors in the Academic Session 2026-27.

1.2 This Policy may be called the **SPARK (SEED Project for Academic Research and Knowledge)** Seed Money Policy for Assistant Professors (Sprint Grant), 2026-27. It comes into force on approval by the Competent Authority (the Vice-Chancellor) and applies to Principal Investigators (PIs), Co-Investigators, Student Research Associates (SRAs), and the officers and committees administering it.

1.3 All projects under this Policy shall be completed, and all final submissions made, on or before **20 February 2027**.

2. Objectives

(a) To encourage empirical, inter-disciplinary and socially relevant legal research; (b) to enable Assistant Professors to lead independent projects as PIs; (c) to promote publication in UGC-CARE, Scopus or Web of Science journals with the University's affiliation; (d) to train students in research methods; and (e) to strengthen the University's research performance for UGC, NAAC and NIRF, and prepare faculty for external funding.

(b) A project completed under this Policy shall be treated as a sanctioned and completed research project of the University. The PI shall receive a sanction letter and a completion certificate, which may be relied on for the API research score and the Career Advancement Scheme.

3. Grant and Nature of Research

3.1 The maximum grant per project shall be **Rs. 50,000/-** (Rupees Fifty Thousand only). The number of grants shall be fixed by the Competent Authority on the recommendation of the Committee headed by Director (Research), within the budget head **"Seed Money for Research"**.

3.2 Preference shall be given to empirical research, i.e. research collecting or analyzing primary or secondary data on the working of law and legal institutions (surveys, interviews, field observation, court records, content analysis or official data).

4. Eligibility

4.1 Only Assistant Professors in the permanent, full-time service of the University may apply as PI. Contractual, ad hoc, visiting and guest faculty are not eligible, however, they can be C0-PI.

4.2 An Associate Professor or Professor may be associated only as Co-Investigator or mentor. No faculty member may be PI of more than one project, or Co-Investigator of more than one other project, at a time.

4.3 **Not eligible:** a faculty member with any report or utilization certificate pending under any University seed grant; one debarred under clause 11; one on leave for more than one month during the project period; or a proposal substantially the same as work already funded or published.

5. Student Research Associates (SRAs)

5.1 A PI may engage up to **two** SRAs, selected through an open call via the Research Cell, from students who have completed the first year (or are LL.M./Ph.D. scholars), met the attendance requirement and have no disciplinary proceedings pending. Relatives of the PI or Co-Investigator shall not be selected, in their projects.

5.2 An SRA who completes at least **thirty hours** of documented satisfactory work shall, on a certificate issued by the PI and countersigned by the Director (Research), be **exempted** from Continuous Evaluation component of **two** subjects. No exemption shall apply to end-semester examinations, clinical courses, dissertations or seminar papers forming a degree requirement, internships or moot courts. Marks for the exempted component shall be the average percentage scored in the other Continuous Evaluation components of that course. Ph.D. scholars shall receive a certificate instead. This sub-clause is subject to the approval of the Academic Council.

5.3 The PI shall train and supervise SRAs, maintain their work logs, ensure their safety in the field, and acknowledge them in all outputs.

6. Proposal

6.1 The proposal **(Annexure A)**, within **2,000 words** excluding references, shall state the research questions, data, sampling, method of collection and analysis, ethical safeguards, work plan, research team, expected outputs and budget. It shall be enclosed with the API research score sheet for the three preceding academic years with proofs **(Annexure B)**, the budget **(Annexure C)**, the declaration and forwarding certificate of the Head/Dean (Annexure D), and a similarity report. A proposal with similarity above ten per cent (excluding references and quotations) shall be rejected.

6.2 The proposal shall be emailed to the Office of Director, Research as a signed PDF and an editable Word file, with the subject line "Seed Grant – Sprint – Proposal – [Name of PI]", with one signed hard copy, on or before **4 November 2026**. Late or incomplete proposals shall not be considered.

7. Selection

7.1 **Selection Committee:** The Selection Committee shall be constituted as per the instructions and directions received from the Office of the Vice-Chancellor.

7.2 The Office of Director, Research with team shall scrutinize proposals. Each applicant shall present for seven minutes, followed by ten minutes of discussion, on **17 November 2026**. Each member shall mark independently; the average shall be the final marks.

7.3 **Criteria (100 marks):**

Head	Criterion	Marks
A	Quality of the research proposal: originality and significance (8); empirical design and methodology (12); feasibility within the period (6); ethics and data management (4); budget (4); SRA involvement (3); expected outputs and impact (3)	50
B	API score for the research component claimed and verified: (score ÷ 60) × 30, maximum 30; prorated for service under three years	50
C	Presentation and response to questions	
	Total	**100**

7.4 Ties shall be resolved by Head A marks, then preference to first-time grantees, then Head B+C marks. The Committee shall recommend a merit list with amounts (which may be less than requested) and a waiting list; the Vice-Chancellor shall approve the results.

8. Schedule

Sl.	Activity	Date
1	Last date for proposals	10 November 2026
2	Scrutiny and verification	11–13 November 2026
3	Presentations before the Selection Committee	17 November 2026

Sl.	Activity	Date
4	Declaration of results, sanction, undertaking, ethics clearance, release of 1st instalment; commencement of projects	By 25 November 2026
5	Engagement of SRAs	By 3rd December 2026
6	Progress Report I	17 December 2026
7	Progress Report II (with utilisation certificate)	10 January 2027
8	Progress Report III	31 January 2027
9	Final report, outputs and final utilisation certificate	**20 February 2027**

Where a date falls on a holiday, the next working day applies, except 20 February 2027, for which the preceding working day applies. The Director (Research) may, with the approval of the Competent Authority, revise any date other than 20 February 2027.

9. Sanction, Release and Utilization of Funds

9.1 The Vice-Chancellor shall issue a sanction letter stating the grant number, amount, period and conditions. Before release, the PI shall execute the undertaking (Annexure D, Part 3).

9.2 The grant shall be released in three instalments:

Instalment	Share	Condition
First	50%	On sanction, by 25 November 2026
Second	30%	On acceptance of Progress Report II and utilisation certificate (January 2027)
Third	20%	By reimbursement, on acceptance of the final report, outputs and final utilisation certificate

9.3 **The grant shall be used strictly for completing the sanctioned research project.** Admissible items are: field travel, conveyance and lodging of the PI, Co-Investigator and SRAs at University rates; survey tools, printing, translation and transcription; data sets, certified records and RTI fees; honorarium to enumerators, interpreters and resource persons engaged for specific project tasks; consumables; and contingencies up to ten per cent.

9.4 **The grant shall not be used for any other academic activity, including attending, organizing or registering for any conference, seminar, workshop, symposium, training programme or lecture,** nor for salary or honorarium to the PI or Co-Investigator, laptops, phones, furniture or other equipment, hospitality or gifts, or publication charges of any journal unless approved in advance by the Director (Research) for a Scopus/Web of Science open-access journal. Re-appropriation between heads beyond ten per cent requires the approval of the Competent Authority.

10. Ethics, Monitoring and Outputs

10.1 Every project shall comply with the UGC (Promotion of Academic Integrity and Prevention of Plagiarism) Regulations, 2018, and the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023. Informed consent is mandatory, with special safeguards for children, prisoners, victims

and other vulnerable persons. The anonymized data set, tools and codebook shall be deposited with the Office of Director, Research. on completion.

10.2 The PI shall submit **three progress reports** (Annexure F) on 15 December 2026, 10 January 2027 and 31 January 2027, covering work done against the work plan, data collected, difficulties, SRA hours and expenditure. The Director (Research) may call the PI for a review presentation on any report.

10.3 By 20 February 2027 the PI shall submit the final report (Annexure G, not exceeding 6,000 words), the outputs and the final utilisation certificate. No extension shall be granted. Findings shall be presented at the University's Research Colloquium.

10.4 **Outputs:**

(a) the final report;

(b) at least one research paper submitted to a UGC-CARE Group I, Scopus or Web of Science journal by 30 April 2027; and

(c) a working paper or policy brief (Copyright with University).

Every output shall carry the affiliation "Maharashtra National Law University, Nagpur" and the acknowledgement "This work was supported by the SPARK Seed Grant of Maharashtra National Law University, Nagpur (Grant No. _____)." Outputs without these, or published in predatory journals, shall not be accepted.

11. Compliance and Penalties

11.1 Strict compliance with every time limit is mandatory. The Competent Authority may, after giving the PI seven days to be heard, impose the following:

Default	**Penalty**
Delay in a progress report beyond seven days	Written warning; second instalment withheld until submitted
Final report, outputs or utilisation certificate not submitted by 20 February 2027	Forfeiture of the third instalment; if delayed beyond thirty days, recovery of unspent amount and debarment for two years
Abandonment or non-completion	Refund of the entire amount within thirty days (else recovery from salary); debarment for three years
Paper not submitted by 30 April 2027	Project not certified as completed; debarment until submitted
Expenditure on inadmissible items (including conferences, seminars or workshops) or without vouchers	Disallowance and recovery; written warning
False information, plagiarism, fabrication of data or ethics violation	Cancellation, full recovery, debarment up to five years, and action under the service rules and UGC Regulations

Default	Penalty
Misuse of SRAs or false certificates	Cancellation of certificates; debarment from engaging SRAs for two years
Leaving the University before completion	Settlement of accounts and refund of unspent amount before being relieved

11.2 A penalty may be relaxed, for reasons recorded in writing, for serious illness, maternity/paternity, bereavement, official duty or circumstances beyond the PI's control, if the Director (Research) was informed in writing at the earliest. An SRA who falsifies a work log or data shall forfeit the exemption and certificate.

12. Intellectual Property, Grievance and Interpretation

12.1 Copyright in outputs vests in the University, and its right to host reports and policy briefs on its website. The anonymized data set is the joint property of the PI and the University.

12.2 A person aggrieved by a decision under this Policy may represent to the Vice-Chancellor within seven days; the representation shall be decided within fifteen days. Marks on academic merit are not subject to review, but procedural or arithmetical errors shall be corrected.

12.3 Any question of interpretation, or any matter not provided for, shall be decided by the Vice-Chancellor, whose decision shall be final. The Office of Director, Research with team shall maintain all records required for NAAC (Criterion III) and NIRF.

Annexures

Annexure	Particulars	Stage
A	Format of proposal	With the proposal, by 10 November 2026
B	API research score sheet	With the proposal
C	Format of budget	With the proposal
D	Declaration, forwarding certificate and undertaking	With the proposal; undertaking before the first instalment
E	SRA application and consent, work log and Certificate of Satisfactory Contribution	On engagement and on completion
F	Progress report and utilisation certificate	17 December 2026, 10 January 2027, 31 January 2027
G	Format of final report	By 20 February 2027

Annexure A-Format of Proposal

Instructions: A4, Times New Roman 12 pt, 1.5-line spacing, one-inch margins, page numbers at the bottom. Parts 2 to 9 shall not exceed 1,500 words, excluding references and annexures. Citation: ILI style, consistently. Submit a signed PDF and an editable Word file named "SPARK_[Name]_2026", with one signed hard copy, enclosing Annexures B, C and D and the similarity report.

Part 1: Cover Page

Particulars	**Details**
1. Title of the project	
2. Name of the Principal Investigator	
3. Designation and Department / Centre	
4. Date of joining; date of confirmation as permanent faculty	
5. Email address and mobile number	
6. Co-Investigator (name, designation, department), if any	
7. Area of law and theme	
8. Nature of research (Quantitative / Qualitative / Mixed)	
9. Amount requested (₹)	
10. Number of SRAs proposed (maximum two)	
11. Whether human participants are involved (Yes / No)	
12. API research score claimed (Annexure B)	
13. Seed grants or funded projects received earlier	
14. Signature of the PI with date	

Part 2: Abstract-not exceeding 250 words, with up to five keywords.
Part 3: Introduction and Background-the problem and its legal and social context.
Part 4: Review of Literature and Research Gap
Part 5: Research Questions and Objectives-not more than four research questions; hypotheses where applicable.
Part 6: Research Design and Methodology-(a) design; (b) sources of data and access; (c) universe, sample and sampling method; (d) research tools (draft enclosed); (e) pilot testing; (f) method of analysis and software; (g) limitations.
Part 7: Ethics and Data Management-consent, anonymity, safeguards for vulnerable persons, data storage, and whether ethics clearance is required.
Part 8: Work Plan (November 2026 – February 2027)

Fortnight	**Activity**	**Output**	**Responsibility**

Part 9: Research Team and Expected Outcomes-role and tasks of each member; selection and training of SRAs; target journals with indexing; proposed working paper or policy brief; expected impact; plan for external funding.

Part 10: Budget summary (details in Annexure C)

Part 11: References

Checklist of enclosures: Proposal (Parts 1–11) ☐ · Annexure B with proofs ☐ · Annexure C ☐ · Annexure D (Parts 1 and 2) ☐ · Similarity report ☐ · Draft research tools ☐ · CV of PI and Co-Investigator (two pages each) ☐

Annexure B-API Research Score Sheet

Name of the PI: …… Period: from …… to …… (three preceding academic years)

Sl.	Activity (UGC Regulations 2018, App. II, Table 2 head)	Particulars (title, journal / publisher, ISSN / ISBN, year, authorship)	Score claimed	Score verified by IQAC
1				
2				
	Total			
	Service in the University, if under three years, and proportionate score			

Certified that the above particulars are true and supporting documents are enclosed.

Signature of the PI: …… Verified by IQAC: ……

Annexure C-Format of Budget

Head	Particulars	Rate (₹)	Quantity	Amount (₹)	Justification
Field work (travel, conveyance, lodging)					
Survey tools, printing, translation, transcription					
Data sets, certified records, RTI fees					
Project software (project period only)					
Honorarium to enumerators / interpreters / resource persons					
Field expenses of SRAs					
Consumables and stationery					
Contingencies (not exceeding 10%)					
Total					

No amount shall be budgeted for attending or organizing conferences, seminars, workshops or any other academic activity not directly required for completing the project.

Signature of the PI: ……

Annexure D-Declaration, Forwarding Certificate and Undertaking

Part 1: Declaration by the PI

I, ……, Assistant Professor (permanent, full-time), Maharashtra National Law University, Nagpur, declare that: (a) the proposal titled "……" is my original work; (b) it has not been funded by, or submitted for funding to, any other agency, and has not been published; (c) the particulars in the proposal and Annexure B are true; (d) I have read the SPARK Seed Money Policy and shall abide by it; and (e) I shall obtain ethics clearance, where required, before data collection.

Signature of the PI: …… Signature of the Co-Investigator (if any): ……

Part 2: Forwarding Certificate

Forwarded. The applicant is a permanent, full-time Assistant Professor eligible under clause 4, and the project will not affect the teaching and other duties assigned to the applicant.

Head of the Department / Dean: ……

Part 3: Undertaking (before release of the first instalment)

I, ……, PI of the project titled "……", sanctioned vide letter No. …… dated …… for ₹ ……, undertake that I shall: (a) complete the project and submit the three progress reports, the final report, outputs and utilization certificates within the prescribed dates, the last being 20 February 2027; (b) use the grant strictly for completing the project, and not for attending or organizing conferences, seminars, workshops or other academic activities, maintain all vouchers and follow the University's financial and procurement rules; (c) comply with the Code of Ethics for Research and the conditions of ethics clearance; (d) show the University's affiliation and the SPARK acknowledgement in every output; (e) refund any amount due under clause 11, and authorize recovery from my salary if not refunded within thirty days; and (f) settle the project accounts before being relieved if I leave the University.

Signature of the PI: …… Witness: ……

Annexure E-Student Research Associate

Part 1: Application and Consent

Particulars	Details
Name, programme, semester and roll number	
Title of the project and name of the PI	
Email address and mobile number	
Attendance in the preceding semester (%)	
Whether any disciplinary proceedings are pending	
Consent of parent or guardian, where required	

I agree to work on the project as assigned by the PI, comply with the University's Code of Ethics for Research, and keep all project data confidential.

Signature of the student: …… Signature of the PI: ……

Part 2: Work Log

Date	Work done	Hours	Initials of the PI
	Total hours		

Part 3: Certificate of Satisfactory Contribution

Certified that …… (Roll No. ……) worked as a Student Research Associate in the SPARK project titled "……" from …… to …… for a total of …… hours (minimum forty), and that the work was satisfactory. The student is entitled to exemption from one Continuous Evaluation component under clause 5.2 of the Policy.

Principal Investigator: …… Director (Research): ……

Annexure F-Progress Report and Utilization Certificate

Progress Report No.: I (15 December 2026) / II (10 January 2027) / III (31 January 2027)

Part 1: Progress Report

(a) Grant number, project title, names of PI and Co-Investigator, date of commencement and period covered; (b) work done against each item of the work plan; (c) data collected, with sample achieved against target; (d) preliminary findings, if any; (e) difficulties and steps taken; (f) outputs, with proof; (g) work proposed for the remaining period; (h) SRAs engaged and hours worked.

Part 2: Utilization Certificate (with Report II and the final report)

Certified that out of the SPARK grant of ₹ …… sanctioned to …… vide letter No. …… dated …… for the project titled "……", ₹ …… has been received up to ……, of which ₹ …… has been utilized for the purpose for which it was sanctioned, and ₹ …… remains unutilized.

Head	Sanctioned (₹)	Expenditure (₹)	Balance (₹)
Total			

Principal Investigator: …… Finance Officer: ……

Annexure G-Format of Final Report

(a) Title page with grant number, names of PI, Co-Investigator and SRAs, project period and the SPARK acknowledgement (clause 10.4);

(b) executive summary (up to two pages);

(c) introduction, research questions and objectives;

(d) methodology, with reasons for any departure from the proposal;

(e) findings and analysis;

(f) conclusions and recommendations;

(g) limitations and scope for further research;

(h) list of outputs with journal details and indexing;

(i) annexures: research tools, anonymized data set and codebook (soft copy), ethics clearance, final utilization certificate and SRA certificates.

The report shall not exceed 6,000 words excluding annexures (Times New Roman 12 pt, 1.5 spacing, A4) and shall be submitted as a signed PDF and Word file with one hard copy, by **20 February 2027**.