

Research Grants Council (RGC) Theme-based Research Scheme

FAQs

What are the objectives of this scheme?

- ▶ The objective of Theme-based Research Scheme (TRS) is to focus academic research efforts of the UGC-funded universities on themes of strategic importance to the long-term development of Hong Kong.
- ▶ The Research Grants Council (RGC) encourages collaboration amongst universities / disciplines with the view that complex problems and high impact projects would often require participation of talents from different organizations / disciplines.

Which discipline(s) is(are) covered in this scheme?

- ▶ All applications should be made under one of the research themes and one of the grand challenge topics under the respective theme. For details of the research themes and grand challenge topics, please refer to the call circular on the RGC's website at https://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/rgc/funding_opport/trs/call_letter.html.

Who is eligible to apply (as a PC/PI)?

- ▶ Those who are eligible for the RGC General Research Fund may submit application under the TRS. For details, please refer to the Explanatory Notes for GRF Application Form “GRF2” which is uploaded on the RGC website (<https://www.ugc.edu.hk/doc/eng/rgc/form/GRF2.pdf>).
- ▶ Each applicant can submit one application as Project Coordinator in each round of the TRS exercise.
- ▶ To ensure that the PCs of major projects will spend reasonable time on project management, a PC of major projects (i.e. projects funded under the TRS and the Areas of Excellence Scheme) should hold not more than two on-going projects at the same time.

Any eligibility requirement on Co-PI/Co-I?

- ▶ There is no eligibility requirement on Co-I.

What are the stages of application?

- ▶ PIs submit preliminary proposal
- ▶ Formal submission of preliminary proposal (paper mode)
- ▶ PIs submit full proposal
- ▶ Optional internal/external review
- ▶ Optional editing service
- ▶ Formal submission of full proposal (paper mode)
- ▶ Proposal update
- ▶ Selection interview
- ▶ “Right of Reply” procedure to allow project teams to respond to assessments made by external reviewers

What document(s) should be prepared before and/or during application stage?

► At Preliminary Proposal Stage:

- Preliminary Proposal
- Signed Undertaking
- VeriGuide scanning result
- Proposed budget split for 1st phase with non-CUHK collaborators
- An Excel file for Completing RGC's Critical Data File

► At Full Proposal Stage:

- Full Proposal
- VeriGuide scanning result
- Quotation list for services/purchase with a value exceeding HK\$ 0.2 million

What document(s) should be prepared before and/or during application stage? (continued)

▶ At Information Update Stage:

- Research Ethics / Safety / Data access Approval Letter(s) (if required)

▶ At Selection Stage:

- Written response to external reviewers' comments
- Presentation file(s) and written response to Panel Members' questions if shortlisted for attending selection interview

Is there an institutional quota for this scheme?

- ▶ There is no institutional quota for this scheme.

What is the range of funding support?

- ▶ Maximum duration: Five years
- ▶ Project fund:
 - The ceiling of direct project cost to be awarded by RGC is \$75 million (or \$15 million per year for up to five years), excluding on-costs and PC allowance.
 - Projects with exceptional reasons and justification may be allowed to exceed the \$75 million total direct project cost limit.
 - There is no funding floor for the projects.
 - With reference to the past exercises, the typical funding per project is in the range of \$10 million to \$50 million, inclusive of on-costs and PC allowance.

What does the funding budget cover?

- ▶ Supporting Staff Costs
- ▶ Other Personnel
- ▶ Equipment Expenses
- ▶ Outsourcing Expenses of Research Work Outside Hong Kong
- ▶ Conference Expenses
- ▶ General Expenses
- ▶ Others

If PIs opt to submit without vetting by ORKTS, what will the minimum processing time be?

- ▶ At Preliminary Proposal Stage: Around 7 working days
- ▶ At Full Proposal Stage: Not applicable as internal review of full proposal and Panel's endorsement of the PC's declaration of research ethics / safety / data access approvals are required.

What are the assessment criteria?

- ▶ The RGC will assess the proposals on academic excellence and whether they fall within the chosen themes. The proposals will be assessed based on the following general criteria:
- ▶ Qualification as world-leading by international standards
- ▶ Impact to Hong Kong
- ▶ Credentials of the Project Team
- ▶ Existence of a clear strategy
- ▶ Sound structure for an excellent research project
- ▶ For detailed description of each of the criteria, please refer to the call circular on the RGC's website at https://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/rgc/funding_opport/trs/call_letter.html.

Is it possible to include/exclude specific potential reviewers? If yes, how can I file a request?

- ▶ If, for any reason of possible conflict of interest, the PC wants to exclude a person from reviewing his / her application, he / she should submit the request in writing separately through ORKTS setting out the full circumstances and justification.
- ▶ Such request should not be made under any section of the full proposal and appendices, which in its entirety will be sent to external reviewers for assessment.
- ▶ In all cases, the RGC reserves the right of final decision on the selection and invitation of external reviewers having regard to the merits involved.

When will grantor announce the funding result?

- ▶ The RGC intends to announce the final funding decisions in July 2021.

Is there any support available for applicants of this scheme?

- ▶ External review service fee
- ▶ Editing fee
- ▶ Institutional matching

Is there any support available for applicants of this scheme? (continued)

- ▶ At Preliminary Stage: Potential applicants can obtain application materials of funded projects archived at ORKTS for reference when preparing their applications. They may also get the contact method of the past awardees from the ORKTS's archive if they wish to seek advice and tips from past awardees direct. At Full Proposal Stage: The following support are provided to applicants who have shortlisted for submission of full proposal: 1. Funding support for academic editing: ORKTS Coordinator will help line up with external editors to provide free editing services if sufficient time is provided (details: <https://www.orkts.cuhk.edu.hk/research-and-funding/editing-services>) 2. Internal review by relevant experts, e.g. members of CUHK Research Committee, past large grant awardees, etc. 3. Provision of funding support for inviting external reviewers to review the full proposal 4. Provision of institutional support letter signed by VC At Selection Interview Stage: For project teams being shortlisted to attend RGC's Selection Interview, Grants Team of ORKTS will assist the Research Committee to organize mock interview so as to help the project teams to better prepare for the interview.

Is institutional matching contribution required for this Scheme?

- ▶ Yes, institutions are required to make monetary contributions on:
 - 50% of the total equipment cost (irrespective of the number of items) if the total amount of equipment expenses is \$2 million or above; and
 - 10% of the total approved budget, inclusive of the direct project cost (excluding the equipment cost if the total amount of it is \$2 million or above), on-costs and PC allowance.
- ▶ The University will arrange for matching funds on the basis of actual amount to be received by CUHK. As for the arrangement of matching contribution by other participating institutions, the applicant should liaise with the project team members concerned to ensure that the RGC's mandatory matching requirements are met.