



**Innovation and Technology Fund
Researcher Programme
for
Technology Companies Conducting
Research and Development Activities in Hong Kong**

Application Guide

The Researcher Programme provides funding support for organisations/companies undertaking research and development (R&D) projects funded by the Innovation and Technology Fund (ITF)¹ (“RP-ITF”), start-ups selected for co-investment under the Innovation and Technology Venture Fund (“RP-ITVF”), incubatees and innovation and technology (I&T) tenants of the Hong Kong Science & Technology Parks Corporation (HKSTPC) and Hong Kong Cyberport Management Company Limited (Cyberport) (“RP-SPC”) as well as technology companies conducting R&D activities in Hong Kong (“RP-TC”) to engage researchers to conduct R&D work.

This guide sets out the details of **RP-TC**. For RP-ITF, RP-ITVF and RP-SPC, please refer to [RP-ITF Application Guide](#), [RP-ITVF Application Guide](#) and [RP-SPC Application Guide](#) respectively.

1. Eligibility

Applicant Company

A technology company which is conducting or plans to conduct R&D activities (see below for definition of R&D activities) in Hong Kong is eligible to apply for funding under RP-TC to engage researchers to conduct R&D work if it is –

- (a) registered in Hong Kong under the Business Registration Ordinance (Cap.310) or incorporated in Hong Kong under the Companies Ordinance (Cap.622); and
- (b) not a government subvented organisation or a subsidiary of any government subvented organisation².

¹ R&D projects funded by the ITF include projects funded under the Innovation and Technology Support Programme (ITSP), the Guangdong-Hong Kong Technology Cooperation Funding Scheme (TCFS), the Mainland-Hong Kong Joint Funding Scheme (MHKJFS), the Partnership Research Programme (PRP), the Matching Grant for Joint Research Scheme (UIM) of the University-Industry Collaboration Programme (UICP), the Enterprise Support Scheme (ESS), and the Midstream Research Programme for Universities (MRP), as well as R&D projects undertaken by research centres and laboratories set up in the research clusters of the InnoHK.

² A government subvented organisation means an organisation that receives grant from the government on a recurrent basis. The grant contributes towards the organisation’s operational expenses, in exchange of its service to the public. The recurrent grant may account for the bulk of the organisation’s income or may just be a token contribution/sponsorship forming a small percentage of the organisation’s total income.

The applicant company must have substantive business operations in Hong Kong. A shell company or a company having most of its main business operations outside Hong Kong will not be regarded as having substantive business operations in Hong Kong. The applicant must provide documentary evidence proving its substantive business operations in Hong Kong at the time of application.

Incubatees and I&T tenants of HKSTPC and Cyberport should apply under the RP-SPC.

The applicant company should state in the application the R&D activities it is engaged in or plans to conduct in Hong Kong and also describe the R&D duties to be assigned to the researcher.

The Innovation and Technology Commission (ITC) reserves at all times the right to determine whether an entity is eligible to apply for funding under RP-TC.

Researcher

To qualify for RP-TC, the researcher must be legally permitted to work in Hong Kong and should be a graduate³ with a bachelor's degree (including top-up bachelor's degree) or a master's or higher degree awarded by a local university, or jointly awarded by a local university together with a non-local university. He/she should be a graduate in the relevant field of the research activity in which he/she is to be engaged. The recruitment of researcher should go through an open process (e.g. to advertise the position via mass media, online platform, etc.) to ensure fairness. Moreover, the proprietor, partner, shareholder or management of the applicant company or their relatives are not eligible to be engaged as researchers under the programme.

The applicant company and the researcher shall not be receiving other employment subsidies provided by any other local public funding for the subject engagement under application.

R&D Activities

For the purpose of RP-TC, an R&D activity is –

- (a) an activity in the fields of natural or applied science to extend knowledge;
- (b) an original and planned investigation carried on with the prospect of gaining new scientific or technical knowledge and understanding; or
- (c) the application of research findings or other knowledge to a plan or design for producing or introducing new or substantially improved materials, devices, products, processes, systems or services before they are commercially produced or used.

In general, an R&D activity takes place when a project seeks to achieve an advance in science or technology. Any activity which does not directly contribute to achieving this advance in science or technology through the resolution of scientific or technological uncertainty is not an R&D activity. The following activities are **NOT** considered to be R&D activities for the purpose

³ The graduate should have successfully completed the undergraduate/postgraduate programme.

of RP-TC –

- (a) any efficiency survey, feasibility study, management study, market research or sales promotion;
- (b) the application of any publicly available research findings or other knowledge to a plan or design, with an anticipated outcome and without any scientific or technological uncertainty;
- (c) an activity that does not seek to directly contribute to achieving an advance in science or technology by resolving scientific or technological uncertainty;
- (d) any work to develop the non-scientific or non-technological aspect of a new or substantially improved material, device, product, process, system or service;
- (e) quality control;
- (f) routine testing of materials, devices, products, processes, systems or services;
- (g) routine data collection;
- (h) routine, cosmetic or stylistic modifications or changes to materials, devices, products, processes, systems or services;
- (i) market survey for the purpose of ascertaining the needs of customers where no systematic, investigative or experimental activity is involved; and
- (j) production and distribution of goods and services.

The list is by no means exhaustive.

To be eligible for funding under RP-TC, the applicant company must be conducting or plans to conduct R&D activities in Hong Kong and the duties assigned by the applicant company to the researcher must primarily consist of R&D activities.

2. Engagement Period

In order for the researcher to contribute meaningfully to the R&D activities, the engagement period for the candidate should be **no less than 6 months**; and should not overlap with any other engagement period under the Researcher Programme or the Postdoctoral Hub. Upon completion of the engagement in the company, the researcher may be engaged again by another company under the Researcher Programme. Unless otherwise approved by ITC, **the total engagement period under the Researcher Programme viz. RP-ITF, RP-ITVF, RP-SPC, and RP-TC for a researcher should be no more than 36 months in total.** Two researchers can be engaged by an applicant company at any one time to conduct R&D activities of the applicant company. **The total engagement period for an applicant company under RP-ITVF, RP-SPC and RP-TC should be no more than 72 months.** In case the researcher engaged resigns/leaves, the applicant company can recruit another researcher as replacement.

3. Application Procedure

RP-TC is open for application throughout the year.

Applicant companies should register for the purpose of RP-TC through the Innovation and Technology Commission Funding Administrative System (ITCFAS) at the ITF website (<https://itcfas.itf.gov.hk>). For each selected researcher, the applicant company should submit a separate application via ITCFAS. A new application should be submitted for the engagement of an additional/replacement researcher, or for transferring an approved researcher to another company.

The applicant company should assign a person as the “project coordinator” of the application to act as the main contact point between the applicant company and ITC. The project coordinator should be able to fully represent the applicant company. As such, the project coordinator must be a responsible personnel of the applicant company. The project coordinator should also be responsible for direct supervision of the researcher under application, overseeing the management and reporting of the engagement of the researcher generally, ensuring the proper usage of approved funds in accordance with ITC guidelines and instructions, liaising with and answering all enquiries/requests raised by ITC for information and clarification on all aspects of the engagement of the researcher.

The applicant company should provide copy of the following supporting documents:

- (a) Business Registration Certificate or Certificate of Incorporation;
- (b) Form 1(a)/1(c) of the Business Registration Office or the latest Annual Return filed with the Registrar of Companies (Form NAR1);
- (c) Tenancy agreement/other documentary proof showing the premises for conducting R&D activities;
- (d) Employment contract and payroll proof issued within one month of the date of application of at least one existing staff member. If he/she is an R&D staff member, please provide the CV as well;
- (e) Graduation certificate of the researcher;
- (f) Recruitment advertisement for the researcher;
- (g) Identity proof of the researcher;
- (h) Rental agreement/receipts/instalment payment records of R&D facilities/equipment, if available;
- (i) Latest Supplementary Form S3 – Expenditure on research & development (Form BIRS3) and the latest Tax Assessment (I.R.C. 1931) of Inland Revenue Department, if available; and
- (j) Employment contract of the researcher (where applicable).

ITC reserves the right to request additional information and supporting documents when

necessary. If an applicant company fails to respond to ITC's request for information/supporting documents within two months of such request, the application will be considered withdrawn. Ineligible or incomplete application will be returned to the applicant company..

Once the application is approved by ITC, the applicant company should comply with the conditions of funding as set out in this Guide throughout the engagement period, and keep relevant records for the engagement as required in section 7 below. ITC reserves at all times the right to seek or collect additional information (e.g. researcher's attendance records) from the applicant company and the selected researcher to monitor the approved application where necessary.

For any subsequent change to the details of the engagement (e.g. change in engagement duration, salary adjustment, etc.), the applicant company should submit a **change request** electronically through the ITCFAS (<https://itcfas.itf.gov.hk>) for prior approval by ITC.

4. Remuneration for Researcher

The ITF will provide a maximum monthly allowance of HK\$18,000 plus the employer's contribution to the Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) (i.e. HK\$900 maximum) for each researcher who possesses a bachelor's degree, and up to HK\$21,000 plus the employer's MPF contribution (i.e. HK\$1,050 maximum) for those with a master's or higher degree. **The monthly allowance shall only cover the engagement period stipulated in the approved application**, and shall be paid in full towards the actual lump sum monthly remuneration for the researcher and should not, in whole or in part, be retained by the applicant company for whatever reasons. No other allowances, overhead or fringe benefits etc. will be payable from ITF. The monthly allowance will be provided to the applicant company on a reimbursement basis after acceptance of the progress report by ITC (i.e. on a half-yearly basis in general) as detailed in section 7 below.

5. Role of Applicant Company

The applicant company should:

- ensure that the researcher selection process is open, fair and without prejudice to any candidates. To avoid conflict of interest, in selecting a researcher, the applicant company must not engage a researcher who is the proprietor, partner, shareholder or management of the applicant company or their relatives. The applicant company or any person/staff authorised by the applicant company to handle or in any way to be involved in the selection process should declare that they have no actual or potential conflict of interest; or otherwise should not participate in the selection process;
- ensure that the researcher is suitably guided by a supervisor, to whom the researcher can report or consult on a daily basis;
- assign to the researcher R&D duties and with an appropriate level of workload which warrants a full-time engagement;
- comply with the relevant legislative requirements concerning the employment of the researcher including the relevant entry/visa requirements for non-local graduate; and
- provide a safe working environment and arrange a proper workplace for the researcher,

including allocating a fixed office room/space with dedicated workstation(s).

6. Role of Researcher

The researcher being engaged should conduct R&D work of the applicant company on a full-time basis.

7. Reporting Requirement

The applicant company is required to submit progress report(s), signed by both the project coordinator and the researcher, on a half-yearly basis in general throughout the engagement period. ITC will conduct vetting of the report and may visit and interview the applicant company and researcher from time to time during the engagement period for monitoring purposes.

Both the applicant company and the researcher are required to submit evaluation reports to ITC within one month from the completion or termination of the engagement . In case of resignation of the researcher during the engagement period or if the applicant company intends to terminate the engagement, the applicant company should report such to ITC immediately. The applicant company is also required to keep the relevant financial documents (e.g. copy of cheques issued to the researcher, payroll sheets or receipts signed by the researcher, etc.) for seven years after completion/termination of the engagement, and submit to ITC on request at any time during this period.

8. Handling of Information

Information provided by the applicant company in its application and progress/evaluation reports will be kept in confidence. It may however be disclosed to relevant parties to process the application, to conduct research and survey, and if the application is successful, to monitor the engagement, to exercise the Government's rights, and for other related purposes.

9. Important Notes

Inaccurate and incomplete information may affect the consideration and processing of the application and may result in deferral or rejection. Applicant companies should note that any misrepresentation or omission of information in the application or progress/evaluation reports may lead to rejection of the application and/or full recovery of the monthly allowances already granted by ITC, and possible court proceedings.

ITC reserves at all times the absolute right to review all applications and adjust the grant approved as necessary. In the event that there is an overpayment due to error in calculation or assessment, applicant companies are required to refund the amount overpaid within one month upon notification.

10. Enquiries

For enquiries on this Guide and the RP-TC application, please contact –

Innovation and Technology Commission
Unit 1275, 12/F, Kowloonbay International Trade & Exhibition Centre
1 Trademart Drive
Kowloon Bay
Kowloon
Hong Kong
Tel.: (852) 3655 5678
E-mail: rptc-enquiry@itc.gov.hk

Innovation and Technology Commission
March 2020