

Innovation and Technology Fund (ITF) – Researcher Programme *for ITF projects* 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 researcher to conduct R&D work.

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

1. Eligibility

Applicant Organisation / Company

All organisations/companies undertaking R&D projects funded by the ITF, including R&D Centres², designated local public research institutes³ may apply for funding support to engage researchers under the RP-ITF to assist in the ITF project. In general, the RP-ITF is only applicable to all on-going and new R&D projects funded by the ITF.

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 in the research clusters of the InnoHK.

² R&D Centres refer to –

- (a) Automotive Platforms and Application Systems R&D Centre (www.apas.hk);
- (b) Hong Kong Research Institute of Textiles and Apparel (www.hkrita.com);
- (c) Hong Kong Applied Science and Technology Research Institute, designated as the R&D Centre for Information and Communications Technologies (www.astrl.org);
- (d) Logistics and Supply Chain MultiTech R&D Centre (www.lscm.hk); and
- (e) Nano and Advanced Materials Institute (www.nami.org.hk).

³ Designated local public research institutes refer to local universities (including all University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded institutions), self-financing degree-awarding institutions registered under the Post-Secondary Colleges Ordinance (Cap. 320), the Hong Kong Productivity Council, the Vocational Training Council, the Clothing Industry Training Authority and the Hong Kong Institute of Biotechnology.

Researcher

To qualify for the RP-ITF, the researcher must be legally permitted to work in Hong Kong and should be a graduate⁴ (including non-local graduates) 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 project in which he/she is to be engaged.

For private company applicant, the proprietor, partner, shareholder or management of the applicant company or their relatives are not eligible to be employed as researchers under the RP-ITF. 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.

2. Engagement Period

In order for the researcher to contribute meaningfully to the ITF project on the one hand, and have sufficient time to learn on the job on the other, his/her engagement period should be **no less than 6 months**; and should not overlap with any other engagement period under the Researcher Programme or the Postdoctoral Hub. For the first project in which the researcher participates, the applicant organisation/company is encouraged to provide an engagement period of no less than 12 months.

Upon completion of his/her engagement period for a particular ITF project, the researcher may be engaged again under the RP-ITF, RP-SPC, RP-ITVF and RP-TC. Unless otherwise approved by ITC, **the total engagement period under the Researcher Programme viz. RP-ITF, RP-SPC RP-ITVF and RP-TC for a researcher should be no more than 36 months in total.**

Two researchers can be engaged at any one time to assist in an ITF project. In case the researcher engaged for a project resigns/leaves, the applicant organisation/company can engage another one as replacement during the ITF project period. The applicant organisation/company should follow the established human resources practice of the organisation/company in the recruitment of the researcher.

3. Application Procedure

Applicant organisation/company should have its ITF project approved under the ITF and a researcher selected/identified before submission of the application form to the ITF Secretariat. For each selected researcher, the applicant organisation/company should submit a separate application electronically through the Innovation and Technology Commission Funding Administrative System (ITCFAS) at the ITF website (<http://itcfas.itf.gov.hk>). Relevant supporting document(s), including certified copies of academic qualification certificate of the researcher should also be attached to the application. Fresh application should be submitted for additional/replacement researcher; or for transferring an approved researcher to another ITF project.

Subject to approval by ITC, the applicant organisation/company can proceed with the formal recruitment of the researcher. Once approved by ITC, the conditions of

⁴ The graduate should have successfully completed the undergraduate/postgraduate programme.

funding as set out in this Guide would form part of the project agreement of the respective ITF project. Expenses of and payment to the researcher would be additional to the approved budget of the ITF project and should be included in the project account for accounting and auditing purposes. No budget virement into or out of the approved funding for engagement of researcher is allowed.

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

4. Remuneration for Researchers

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 degree. The monthly allowance should be paid in full towards the actual lump sum monthly remuneration for the researcher who participates in the ITF project and should not, in whole or in part, be retained by the applicant organisation/company for whatever reasons. No other allowances, overhead or fringe benefits, etc. will be payable from the RP-ITF.

5. Role of Applicant Organisation/Company

The applicant organisation/company should:

- ensure that the researcher selection process is 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 organisation/company or their relatives. The applicant organisation/company or any person/staff authorised by the applicant organisation/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 (preferably the project coordinator/ deputy project coordinator of the ITF project), to whom the researcher can report on a daily basis;
- assign to the researcher relevant R&D duties (not secretarial or administrative duties) related to the ITF project 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 graduates; and
- provide a safe working environment and arrange placement for the researcher.

6. Role of Researcher

The researcher being engaged for the ITF project should assist in the R&D work of the funded project on a full-time basis.

7. Reporting Requirement

Both the applicant organisation/company and the researcher should submit evaluation reports to ITC **within one month from the completion or termination of the engagement** in each of the ITF project for which the researcher is engaged. In case of resignation of the researcher during the engagement period or if the applicant organisation/company intends to terminate the engagement, the applicant organisation/company should report such to the ITC immediately. The applicant organisation/company is also required to keep the relevant financial documents (e.g. copies of cheques issued to the researcher, payroll sheets, or certified 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. Return of Fund

The applicant organisation/company should return all unused fund and accrued interest to the Government **within one month** upon completion or termination of the engagement.

9. Handling of Information

Information provided by the applicant organisation/company in its application and 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.

10. Important Notes

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

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

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