



Innovation and Technology Fund Researcher Programme (formerly known as Internship Programme) for Innovation and Technology Venture Fund Investee Companies 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 and 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 assist in the R&D work. Start-ups selected for co-investment under ITVF or technology companies conducting R&D activities in Hong Kong who are also incubatees and I&T tenants of HKSTPC and Cyberport should apply under the RP-SPC.

2. This guide sets out the details of the **RP-ITVF**. For **RP-ITF**, **RP-SPC** and **RP-TC**, please refer to the respective Application Guides on the ITF website (<https://www.itf.gov.hk/1-eng/RP.asp>).

Eligibility

Applicant Company

3. Start-ups selected for co-investment under the Innovation and Technology Venture Fund (“ITVF investee companies”)² are eligible to apply for funding under RP-ITVF to engage researchers to conduct R&D activities in their companies. 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.

Researcher

4. To qualify for the RP-ITVF, 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

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), Enterprise Support Scheme (ESS), 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 The core business activities of the applicant company should be technology-intensive and innovation-based. The applicant company’s operations should not be primarily in mass production, although small scale pilot production or high value-added production in support of product and market development and innovation may be permitted.

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

degree) or a Master's degree awarded by a local university, or jointly awarded by a local university together with a non-local university 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 is not eligible to be engaged as researchers under the programme.

5. 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

6. For the purpose of RP-SPC, 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.

7. 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 of RP-SPC –

- (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.

8. The list is by no means exhaustive.

9. To be eligible for funding under RP-SPC, 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.

Engagement Period

10. In order for the researcher to contribute meaningfully to the R&D activities on the one hand, and have sufficient time to learn on the job on the other, 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 under the Researcher Programme. Unless otherwise approved by the Innovation and Technology Commission (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.** For the first project in which the researcher participates, the applicant company is encouraged to offer the researcher an engagement of no less than 12 months. Two researchers can be engaged at any one time to assist in the R&D work of an 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 for a project resigns/leaves, the applicant company can engage another researcher as replacement if it is still an ITVF investee company.

Application Procedure

11. Applicant companies should register for the purpose of the RP-ITVF 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. New application should be submitted for employment of an additional/replacement researcher, or for transferring an approved researcher to another company. The applicant company should also provide copies of the following supporting documents:

- (a) Business registration certificate of the applicant company;
- (b) Graduation certificate of the researcher;
- (c) Recruitment advertisement for the researcher; and
- (d) Employment contract of the researcher (where applicable).

12. 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. ITC reserves the right to decline acceptance of any applications at any time at its sole discretion.

13. 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(s) to monitor the approved application where necessary.

14. 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** for prior approval by ITC.

Remuneration for Researchers

15. 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 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 shall 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 the 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.

Role of Applicant Company

16. 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 relevant R&D duties (not secretarial or administrative 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 graduates; 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).

Role of Researcher

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

Reporting Requirement

18. The applicant company is required to submit progress report(s), signed by both the programme 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 companies and the researchers from time to time during the engagement period for monitoring purposes.

19. 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 approved engagement period or if the applicant company intends to terminate the engagement, the applicant company should report such to the ITC immediately. The applicant company is also required to keep the relevant financial documents (e.g. copies 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.

Handling of Information

20. 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.

Important Notes

21. Inaccurate and incomplete information may affect the consideration and processing of the application and may result in deferral or rejection. The applicant company 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 the ITC, and possible court proceedings.

22. The 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, the applicant company is required to refund the amount overpaid within one month upon notification.

Innovation and Technology Commission
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