RESEARCH GRANTS COUNCIL
RESEARCH IMPACT FUND 2026/27
Guidance Notes (RIF2P) for completing the Preliminary Application Form

All applicants should read these Guidance Notes carefully before completing and submitting your applications. The Research Grants Council (RGC) may cease processing your application if it does not comply with any of the requirements as set out in the Guidance Notes.

General

2. These Notes are intended to be read by applicant(s) / related staff of university(ies) / organisational partner(s) before completion and submission of a Research Impact Fund (RIF) application.

3. The preliminary proposal application form has two parts, Part I: Research Proposal and Part II: University's Endorsement.

4. For applications which have genuine special needs to be completed in a language other than English, applicant(s) / university(ies) is(are) required to provide an English version for sections 2-8 in pdf format.

5. In order to ensure consistency and fairness to all applicants, applicants must complete the applications, **including attached pdf documents**, in the following standard RGC format. **Failure to comply with the standard RGC format may lead to disqualification of their applications**.

Font: Times New Roman
Font Size: 12 points
Margin: 2.5 cm all round
Spacing: Single-line spacing

6. All sections of the Application Form must be completed. Where information sought is not applicable or not provided under a particular section, insert "NA" or "Nil" respectively.

7. When preliminary proposals are submitted through the Electronic System, an RGC project reference number will be automatically generated for each proposal for identification purpose. This project reference number should be quoted in all future correspondence with RGC.

8. It is the obligation of the Project Coordinators (PCs) to ensure that their applications contain sufficient and consistent information for evaluation to be undertaken. Incomplete submissions or those containing inconsistent / inaccurate information may be disqualified.

9. Applicants should not mention anything unrelated to the research proposal (such as describing the funding rules) with a view to influencing reviewers. Should such act be discovered, the application will be disqualified.

10. Applicants are prohibited to communicate with RGC and Panel Members in the applications with a view to influencing the latter in assessing their applications. Should such act be discovered, the application will be disqualified.

11. All applicants must declare the nature of the application being submitted. "New" refers to an application on research topic which the PC and / or Co-PI(s) applies / apply for RGC funds for the first time. "Re-submission" refers to an application on research topic which the PC and / or Co-PI(s) have previously applied for RGC funds but was not supported. "Renewal" refers to an application continuing the work previously funded by RGC.

12. Unless otherwise stated, all funding amounts stated in the application form should refer to Hong Kong Dollars.

Objectives

13. RIF has the following objectives:

(a) To encourage the local academics to consider and articulate the potential of research to deliver benefit for the wider community; and to encourage more impactful and translational research projects; and

(b) To encourage a greater volume of collaborative research beyond academia (e.g. organisations such as government departments, business sector, industry and research institutes).

Features

14. RIF is operated with the following features:

(a) Two-stage application i.e. preliminary proposal and full proposal. RGC will assess preliminary proposals and invite shortlisted candidates to submit full proposals. Full proposals will then be assessed and RGC will further shortlist candidates for presentation and interview.

(b) Proposals from all disciplines are welcome. Priority will be given to proposals that enhance previous work (e.g. projects awarded with funding in previous RGC / non-RGC grants, projects arising from established research with potential pathways for realising impact, projects with a recognised track record of research achievements), or proposals involving multiple disciplines or that are problem-based (e.g. addressing specific social problems).

(c) Applicants are required to submit a Pathways to Impact statement to demonstrate how impact is to be pursued. (Applicants may refine the statement at full proposal stage.) This means applicants should consider how to secure impact beyond academia, what they propose to do, how they propose to start gathering evidence on impact from the outset, and so on. It is also intended to create a culture of actively thinking about impact as a part of research activity across the full range of academic research.

(d) Applicants invited to full application stage may submit a knowledge and technology transfer plan. The plan will be passed to the Innovation and Technology Commission or relevant parties for reference and will not be assessed.

(e) The project duration should range from three to five years.

Eligibility

15. The eligibility of Project Coordinator (PC) is the same as General Research Fund (GRF). Please refer to the GRF Guidance Notes for the eligibility requirements at http://www.ugc.edu.hk/doc/eng/rgc/form/GRF2.pdf.

16. There is no restriction on the Co-Principal Investigators (Co-PI) who may come from other institutions, the industry or non-governmental organisations. However, only those involved in research activities should serve as Co-PI.

17. Each application should be submitted with one applicant nominated as the PC and no applicant should submit more than one application under RIF as PC. The PC can apply for one GRF, one Collaborative Research Fund (CRF) and one RIF as Principal Investigator (PI) / PC simultaneously. It is the responsibility of applicants to ensure that no duplicate funding from any sources will be sought for the same / similar research project. If a proposal has been awarded funding from other sources, the PI / PC should decide whether he / she will decline the funding from other sources or withdraw his / her application under RIF.

Organisational Partner

18. As one of the objectives of the scheme is to encourage a greater volume of collaborative research beyond academia, each proposal should have at least one non-academic organisational partner (e.g. such as government departments, business sector, industry and research institutes). The organisational partner should be a potential user of the research who may be prepared to co-invest or engage in some way in collaborative activity with the PC / Co-PI. This partner will need to provide a letter of support.

Budget Thresholds and Project Finance

19. The amount requested from RGC should range from $3 million to $10 million. The project grant does not cover on-cost.

20. Mandatory matching funds are required from UGC-funded universities / organisational partner(s) for approved projects on a 70% (RGC) / 30% (university / organisational partner(s)) basis. Partners' contribution may come from industry, non-governmental organisations, stakeholders or private donation. It is not essential for partners to provide matching funding. Universities may instead undertake to provide the matching funding up to 30%.

21. The funding approved will be released to the coordinating university by two instalments. The first instalment of 50% will be released before the start of the project. The second instalment will be released subject to satisfactory progress as reported in the progress report.

22. Audited accounts should be provided upon project completion. RIF proposals may include purchase of equipment. There must be a research proposal with well explained methodology and a Pathways to Impact statement. Equipment-only proposals should be submitted under the CRF. Teaching relief is not provided.

Pathways to Impact Statement

23. This section should cover in a maximum of 2 A4 pages:

(a) A brief outline of the research proposal in layman terms.
(b) Who are the potential beneficiaries of the proposed research in the short (1-3 years), medium (4-10 years) and long term (over 10 years)?
(c) How will the potential beneficiaries benefit? What will be the objective demonstrable / measurable benefits beyond academia?
(d) What will be done during and / or after the project to increase the likelihood of achieving the identified benefit and reaching the identified beneficiaries?
(e) What are the potential risks that might adversely affect the achievement of the stated impact and how will such risks be mitigated?

24. The Pathways to Impact Statement shall demonstrate how the research team will realise the "impact" beyond the academia by the findings / outcome of the research proposal and by addressing any associated risks. For the purpose of this section, impact is defined as the demonstrable contributions, beneficial effects, valuable changes or advantages that research qualitatively brings to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life whether locally, regionally or internationally; and that are beyond the academia. The impacts may occur in any geographical location whether locally, regionally, nationally or internationally.

25. RGC will invite laypersons to assess the potential research impact of the proposal based on the Pathways to Impact statement. The statement should be written

in a way that is comprehensible to a layperson and could be read as a separate document independent of the proposal.

Assessment Criteria

26. As one of the objectives of the RIF is to encourage more impactful and translational research projects, equal weights on academic merit and potential research impact will be adopted in the assessment.

27. The over-riding criterion is the quality of the research itself, but the Pathways to Impact statement will strengthen the proposal.

28. For the purpose of RIF, impact shares the same definition in Research Assessment Exercise 2020, i.e. the demonstrable contributions, beneficial effects, valuable changes or advantages that research qualitatively brings to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life; and that are beyond the academia.

Assessment of Research Impact

29. The Pathways to Impact statement, the applicants' track records and any support from potential users of the research will be considered for evaluating potential research impact. For track record, the applicants' grant record of RGC / non-RGC funding schemes, patents held / under application, collaboration history beyond academia etc. will all be taken into account.

30. RGC values both local and global impact as well as both short and long term impact. The substance of the impact is the critical factor.

31. Potential research impacts will be assessed in terms of their reach and significance, regardless of the geographic location in which they occurred. The criteria of 'reach and significance' will be understood as –

(a) 'reach' is the extent and / or breadth of beneficiaries of the impact; whereas

(b) 'significance' is the degree to which the impact has enabled, enriched, influenced, informed or changed the products, services, performance, practices, policies or understanding of commerce, industry or other organisations, governments, communities or individuals.

Assessment Process

32. Proposals will be assessed by an assessment panel with members comprising both local and non-local academics, local RGC lay member(s) and end users (e.g. government departments, non-government organisations, business sector, industry, etc.).

33. Preliminary proposals will be evaluated by panel members. Full proposals will be peer-reviewed by non-local external reviewers and also evaluated by end-users.

34. For full proposals, an interview session will be incorporated into the review process to allow applicants to answer questions from the panel. Representatives of the Innovation and Technology Commission may attend the interview session as observers to identify projects with potentials for Innovation and Technology Fund grants. No observers will have a role in the assessment process.

35. All things being equal, priority will be given to proposals with a high ratio of matching funding from universities/partner(s).

36. RGC will invite shortlisted candidates in June 2026 to submit full proposals. Applicants will be notified through the universities.

Undertaking of the PC

37. By submitting the application, the candidate undertakes that the research activity(ies) / expenditure(s) of the project, if funded, will be carefully monitored for its / their compliance with applicable laws, health and safety guidelines and ethical standards, including but not limited to the Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

Enquiries and Miscellaneous

38. Enquiries about the contents of these Guidance Notes and other related matters about the RIF funding exercise should be directed to the Research Offices of the Universities which, if in doubt, should consult the UGC Secretariat for clarification. Any correspondence regarding RIF matters including enquiries, appeals and complaints should be made through the Research Offices of the Universities.

39. The policy statement on handling of information and personal data contained in RIF applications are at Annex A of the GRF Guidance Notes, available at http://www.ugc.edu.hk/doc/eng/rgc/form/GRF2.pdf. Applicants requiring additional information about internal deadlines, application procedures or assistance in completing the application form may contact the Research Offices of their own universities.

UGC Secretariat
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