**Research Grants Council**

**Strategic Topics Grant 2025/26**

**Guidance Documents on Submission of Preliminary Proposals and**

**Preliminary Proposal Application Form Template**

**Contents**

[Objective of the Strategic Topics Grant](#objective)

[Preamble: Using this Template](#Preamble)

[Preliminary Proposal Content](#Content)

[Preliminary Proposal](#Proposal) Application Form Template

1. [Summary of the Research Proposal](#I)

[II. Details of the Research Proposal](#II)

[III. Pathways to Impact Statement](#III)

[IV. Re-submission of a Proposal not Supported Previously](#IV)

[V. Undertaking and Confirmation of the Project Coordinator (PC](#VI))

[VI. University’s Endorsement](#VII)

[Annex I – Brief Curricula Vitae of All Key Members and Declaration of Time Commitments of PC](#CV)

[Annex II – Details of Project Budget](#Budget)

[Appendix A – Strategic Topics](#AppendixA)

[Appendix B – Implementation Timetable](#AppendixB)

[Appendix C – General Points to Applicants and Universities](#AppendixC)

[Appendix D – Operational Arrangement](#AppendixD)

**Objective of the Strategic Topics Grant**

The Strategic Topics Grant (STG) is to support collaborative research in specific areas which can help Hong Kong overcome imminent challenges and capture emerging opportunities. Applicants are required to submit research proposals relevant to the strategic topics announced by the Research Grants Council (RGC) for each exercise. Details of the STG strategic topics are at **Appendix A**.

**Preamble: Using this Template**

This template provides details for the structure and content of preliminary proposals for the STG. Project Coordinators (PCs) should use this template in preparing their preliminary proposals, which should provide sufficient information about the proposed project to allow assessment of the main ideas and approaches. Applicant is not permitted to submit the same proposal to both STG and Theme-based Research Scheme (TRS) / Areas of Excellence (AoE) Scheme in the same exercise. If such is found, the proposal submitted to TRS / AoE Scheme would not be processed but treated as withdrawn.

The implementation timeline of the STG is at **Appendix B**. Universities should refer to General Points to Applicants and Universities at **Appendix C** when filling in the application. The operational arrangement of the STG is at **Appendix D**.

*Eligibility to apply*

The PC of a STG project must be an academic staff member of a University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded university with conditions of employment meeting ALL the following requirements:

(i) having a full-time[[1]](#footnote-2) appointment in the university proper[[2]](#footnote-3);

(ii) being in Staff Grades from ‘A’ to ‘I’[[3]](#footnote-4) as defined in the Common Data Collection Format (i.e. from ‘Professor’ to ‘Assistant Lecturer’, see Annex B of “General Research Fund (GRF)– Scheme Overview and Guidance Notes (GRF2), which is available on the RGC website: <https://www.ugc.edu.hk/doc/eng/rgc/form/GRF2.pdf>).;

(iii) being primarily engaged in and spending at least 80% of time in degree or higher degree work[[4]](#footnote-5) at the university proper; and

(iv) salary being wholly funded[[5]](#footnote-6) by the university proper.

The following categories of PCs are subject to the following additional requirements besides meeting criteria (i) to (iv) above:

(v) a newly appointed PC should have formally entered into a contract of service with the university on or before 1 November 2024 and that his / her appointment would take effect on or before 1 June 2025;

(vi) a PC, who is / will be employed on a fixed term contract, should be eligible for the STG at the time of funding award being offered in July 2025 and for at least the first year of the project’s planned duration; and

(vii) a PC, who is a visiting scholar, should have a full-time employment at the university proper covering at least one year or the expected duration of the project whichever is the longer.

**Preliminary Proposal Content**

In order to ensure consistency and fairness to all applicants, applicants must complete the applications, including attached documents, CVs and references, in the following standard RGC format. **Failure to comply with the application format and / or allowable page will lead to termination of further processing of the application.**

Font: Times New Roman

Font Size: 12 points

Margin: 2.5 cm all round

Spacing: Single-line spacing

Pdf version: Compatible with Adobe Acrobat Reader 5 with **text search function**

The preliminary proposals should consist of six mandatory parts (including Annexes I and II) and one optional part, namely:

Mandatory parts

(I) Summary of the Research Proposal – should not exceed one A4 page[[6]](#footnote-7);

(II) Details of the Research Proposal – should not exceed five A4 pages6;

(III) Pathways to Impact Statement – should not exceed two A4 pages6;

(IV) Re-submission of a Proposal not Supported Previously – should not exceed one A4 page6;

(V) Undertaking and Confirmation of the PC;

(VI) University’s Endorsement; and

Annexes I and II

All sections of the relevant parts should be completed. Where information sought is not applicable or not provided under a particular section, insert“N.A.” or “Nil”.

A project reference number to be assigned by the Research Office of the coordinating university should be in the format of STGx/x-xxx/25-N or R (i.e. STG[Topic code]/[Field area][[7]](#footnote-8)-[University code][[8]](#footnote-9) [Serial number]/25-[N] for new proposal and [R] for re-submission) and placed on the top right corner of the cover page of each part.

*Assessment Criteria*

In preparing materials, applicants may wish to take into account the following assessment criteria and the questions assessors will be considering in reviewing preliminary proposals:

1. **the academic merit;**
2. **the long-term goal of the proposal and its potential to help Hong Kong overcome imminent challenges and capture emerging opportunities under the strategic topics;**
3. **credentials of the project team;**

* Does the proposal build on existing strengths and achievements? If the proposal contains topics that are relatively new to the project team, does the project team have sufficient intellectual and infrastructure resources that would allow successful delivery of new ventures?

1. **existence of a clear strategy; and**

* Does the proposal have a clear strategic direction and plan?
* Is there coherence in terms of an integrated and focused programme of research, research training, teaching and knowledge transfer?
* Are there milestones and deliverables structured in a reasonable and achievable manner, based on the proposed timeline and resources?

1. **sound structure for an excellent research project.**

* Does the project team have a sound system of governance?
* If the proposed project involves collaboration among multiple institutions and / or multi-disciplinary teams, do the collaborating parties know their clear roles and responsibilities? Is the proposed collaboration necessary for success, or is it superficial?
* Is there stakeholder (e.g. industry, government, etc.) involvement in steering the project? Is the involvement meaningful for impacting the development of Hong Kong?

**Strategic Topics Grant (STG) 2025/26**

**Preliminary Proposal Application Form Template**

1. **Summary of the Research Proposal**

*[This summary should not exceed* ***one page*** *and should include the followings:]*

1. Particulars of the project:

1. Project title (English & Chinese)
2. Topic code & Strategic topic
3. Primary field code and area[[9]](#footnote-10); Percentage
4. Secondary field code and area9; Percentage
5. (Optional) Third field code and area9; Percentage
6. Project duration (max. duration: 60 months)
7. Project cost in the proposed budget to be funded by the RGC[[10]](#footnote-11)
8. Nature of application: New / Re-submission\*  
   (Reference number of the most-recent previous application / on-going / completed project: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_)

*\* Please delete as appropriate.*

2. *[Mandatory]* Project Co-ordinator (PC) (only one for each proposal), the Co-Principal Investigators (Co-PIs)11

*[Optional]* Co-Investigators and Collaborators[[11]](#footnote-12)

3. A summary of the proposed project. This summary should present clearly the outstanding merit of the proposed project.

1. **Details of the Research Proposal**

*[This section should not exceed* ***five pages*** *and should include the followings:]*

1. (a) Mission

(b) Goals (I), (II), (III), (IV)….

(c) Deliverables (I), (II), (III), (IV)….

2. The approach and methodology to be employed to achieve the mission, goals and deliverables.

3. Collaboration plan, the strength of the project team and how the synergy of team members from different disciplines will lead to advancement in fundamental knowledge and achieve the intended impact.

1. **Pathways to Impact Statement**

*[This section should not exceed* ***two pages****]*

1. 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; and that are **beyond the academia.** The impacts may occur in any geographical location whether locally, regionally, nationally or internationally.

1. The statement shall address the following:

(a) Who are the potential beneficiaries of the proposed research in the short (one to three years), medium (four to ten years) and long term (over ten years)?

(b) How will the potential beneficiaries benefit? What will be the objective demonstrable / measurable benefits beyond academia?

(c) What will be done during and / or after the project to increase the likelihood of achieving the identified benefit and reaching the identified beneficiaries?

(d) What are the potential risks that might adversely affect the achievement of the stated impact and how will such risks be mitigated?

1. The statement shall be comprehensible to a lay person.
2. Applicants may find the impact case studies available on the Research Assessment Exercise 2020 Impact Database (https://impact.ugc.edu.hk/) useful reference to understand more about research impact. These case studies demonstrated the impact generated by the underpinning research undertaken from January 2000 to September 2019. For the purpose of this Pathways to Impact Statement, the research team should describe how the research findings arising from this proposal **would / could be used**, and what the research team and universities **would do**, in bringing about and achieving future impact beyond academia. It should be noted that research impact may or may not be arising from a single research. Hence, the expected impact as described in the Pathways to Impact Statement may also include findings from other research, but the part to be contributed by this research proposal should be clearly defined.
3. **Re-submission of a Proposal not Supported Previously**

*[This section should not exceed* ***one page****]*

*Re-submission*

1. The PC should provide details in case the proposal (including its component) is a re-submission (submitted to the UGC / RGC before) or is largely similar to proposal(s) that has / have been submitted to the UGC / RGC or other funding bodies (similarity amounting to 50% or more with a previous proposal should be regarded as a re-submission). It is the responsibility of the PC to declare clearly and honestly whether his / her proposal is a re-submission. The PC should re-visit the main concerns / suggestions previously expressed by all reviewers if an earlier / similar version of the proposal has been assessed before and provide a summary of all of his / her previous submissions and the revisions made to each of the previous submissions to facilitate the Assessment Committee’s assessment. The RGC reserves the right to discount the rating of an application for its failure to acknowledge the fact that it is a re-submission of a previous application. This section allows the applicant to respond to those comments, and explain whether and what changes have been incorporated in the latest proposal. Some reviewers’ comments may be more agreeable / disagreeable than others. However, if a rebuttal is offered, it should be scholarly, professional and measured. Under the existing policy, re-submitted proposals will be treated as fresh applications in peer-review and handled in an identical manner to other new applications. Although the Assessment Committee will take into account the PC’s responses to the reviewers’ comments, the Assessment Committee is not obliged to invite the same group of reviewers for assessment of the new application.

(a) Is this proposal a re-submission or largely similar to proposal(s) that has / have been submitted to but not supported by the UGC / RGC or other funding agencies? An affirmative reply should be given if a component of this proposal is a re-submission.

\* Yes \* No

If yes, please state the funding agency(ies) and the funding programme(s):

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Reference No.(s) *[for UGC / RGC projects only]*: |  |
| Project title(s) *[if different from Section I Part 1(a) above.]*: |  |
| Date (month / year) of application: |  |
| Outcome: |  |
| Number of times of re-submissions since its first submission and proposal reference number(s) *(if applicable)*: |  |

(b) Please provide a summary of all the previous submissions and the revisions made to each of the previous submissions.

|  |
| --- |
|  |

*[The following parts are not counted towards any page limit.]*

1. **Undertaking and Confirmation of the PC**
2. \*🞏 By submitting the application, I undertake 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.
3. \*🞏 I confirm that all the Co-PIs (and Co-Investigators (Co-Is) if any) listed in this preliminary proposal have explicitly agreed to serve in the project team and a copy of the preliminary proposal has been provided to each of the Co-PIs (and Co-Is if any). I will provide written proof on the collaboration upon the request of the RGC / Secretariat.
4. \*🞏 I confirm that this STG proposal would not be submitted to TRS / AoE Scheme in the same exercise. I understand that if such is found, the proposal submitted to TRS / AoE Scheme would not be processed but treated as withdrawn.

*(\* Please tick ‘√’ to consent.)*

Signature : \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Name of PC : \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

(in BLOCK letters)

Designation : \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

University : \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date : \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**VI.** **University’s Endorsement**

The university’s endorsement should be included in the preliminary proposals:

*(To be completed and signed by the appropriate authority of the PC’s university. The university should confirm that it has evaluated and given support to the application before submission to the RGC. It is required to verify that the PC fully meets the criteria for and is not* *debarred from applying for UGC / RGC funds. Before giving the various confirmations required, the university should satisfy itself that the PC in all respect meets the requirement of the RGC and can complete the project, if funded. It is also required to report to the RGC immediately if the PC subsequently becomes ineligible for the grant.*

*To safeguard the interests of the researcher and the university, the awardee university bears the primary responsibility for prevention, detection and investigation of research misconduct, including but not limited to misuse of funds, data falsification, plagiarism, self-plagiarism and double-dipping. The university is strongly encouraged to vet the applications using anti-plagiarism software before submitting them to the RGC.)*

*(\* Please tick ‘√’ in the appropriate boxes.)*

I confirm that:

1. **Staff eligibility requirement for the STG**

(a) The application has been evaluated and endorsed by the university for submission to the RGC;

(b) the PC, in the staff grade \_\_\_\_\_\_, meets fully the stipulated staff eligibility requirement for the STG set out in the Guidance Documents on Submission of Preliminary Proposals for the STG 2025/26 and is not debarred from applying for UGC / RGC grant;

[where the PC is newly appointed, the university has formally entered into a contract of service with him / her on or before 1 November 2024 and that his / her appointment would take effect on or before 1 June 2025.]

\* the PC is / will be primarily engaged in and spending at least 80% of time in degree or higher degree work at the university; **or**

\* the PC is / will be seconded to work full-time or part-time at the following Innovation and Technology clusters at the Hong Kong Science Park with effect from \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (mm/yyyy)

\* Health@InnoHK

\* AIR@InnoHK

\* the PC is conducting research in a university or a research institute / body / agency in the Mainland / overseas jurisdiction.

(c) the PC is / will be employed on \* permanent term or \* fixed term contract;

[if the PC is / will be employed on a fixed term contract, the PC should be eligible for the STG at the time of funding award being offered in July 2025 and for at least the first year of the project’s planned duration.]

(d) the PC \* is / will be a visiting scholar or \* is NOT a visiting scholar;

[if the PC is a visiting scholar, he / she should have a full-time appointment at the university covering at least one year or the expected duration of the project whichever is the longer.]

(e) university’s endorsement(s) from the relevant university(ies) of all Co-PI(s) confirming that the Co-PI(s) concerned will have the number of hours per week as declared in the table summarising the key information on the PC and Co-PIs to supervise the proposed project without prejudice to his / her existing commitment in other research work, teaching and administrative duties \* has / have been sought or \* is / are being sought. I understand that when the project is funded, university’s endorsement(s) for Co-PI(s) would be submitted to the RGC for scrutiny;

(f)the university will inform the RGC as soon as the PC ceases to be eligible to apply, receive or hold a STG project grant, and will withdraw the application; or recommend to the RGC for approval of a suitable new PC, to take over the funded project once it is funded and commenced. The RGC has the discretion to terminate / conclude the project as appropriate. The university understands that failure in identifying a suitable new PC or obtaining approval from the RGC for change of PC will result in termination of the funded project; and

(g) the university understands that the STG, if given, will be withdrawn if the project does not start within six months of the announcement of funding result without justifications to the satisfaction of the RGC. The university should report to the RGC as soon as possible when a PC proceeds on no-pay leave / professional leave for a continuous or cumulative period exceeding 183 days within the project period.

1. **University’s commitments**

(a) The research project under this application \* is or \* is not in line with the role of the university;

(b) \* the university undertakes to contribute 10% of the total approved budget for a funded project, in monetary terms, exclusive of on-costs . The university understands that upon approval of a project, the RGC will only grant 90% of the total approved budget;

(b) \* the university undertakes to ensure that the PC will spend sufficient time on this proposed project throughout the project period. The PC will have the declared time as stated in Annex I to coordinate the project without prejudice to his / her existing commitment in other research work, teaching and administrative duties;

(c) \* the university undertakes to ensure that the PC will not submit this STG proposal to TRS / AoE Scheme in the same exercise;

(d) \*          the university undertakes to ensure that an audited financial statement will be submitted by the university within six months from the date of project completion / termination of each funded project;

(e) \* the university undertakes to ensure that the PC will include in the completion report URL links to the university’s repository or the publishers’ websites so that the public can have access to the manuscripts or journal articles (though the public may be required to subscribe at the publishers’ websites);

(f) \* the university undertakes to ensure that the PC and the project team are aware of RGC’s collection of open-access-related information of peer-review journal publications arising directly from the project;

(g) \* the university undertakes to provide a video clip to publicise the project’s research achievements within three months upon satisfactory rating of completion report, if the project is funded; and

(h) this application \* has or \* has not (please provide reasons for not scanning by anti-plagiarism software) been scanned by anti-plagiarism software.

Signature : \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Name : \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

(in BLOCK letters)

Designation : \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

University : \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date : \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

RGC

July 2024

**Annex I**

**Brief Curricula Vitae of All Key Members and Declaration of Time Commitments of PC**

1. A one-page curriculum vitae should be prepared for the PC and each of the Co-PIs. A table summarising key information on the team should be provided in the format below (this table is not counted towards the page limit):

| **Project team member#** | **Surname** | **First name\*** | **ORCID iD**[[12]](#footnote-13)9 | **Post** | **Unit/  Department/ University** | **Current Member of UGC/RGC/Subject Panel/ Committee as at application deadline**  **(Yes/No)** | **UGC/RGC/Name of RGC Subject Panel/Committee** | **Number of hours per week to be spent on this project** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| PC |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Co-PI(s) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Co-I(s) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Collaborators |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

# Only PC and Co-PIs are mandatory in this table. Co-Is and Collaborators are optional. If the composition of team listed in table has any change at full proposal stage, the team needs to provide justification.

\* first / given name, then Chinese name in English syllables (hyphenated) or middle name, if any; initials should be avoided (e.g. Peter Tai-wai / Yaping / Phillip Gary). The names provided should be identical to the critical data.

2. Declaration of time commitments of PC:

The PC is required to provide the numbers of:

1. on-going individual research projects[[13]](#footnote-14)10 currently held by him / her in any capacity (e.g. Principal Investigator, Co-I, Collaborator, etc.); and

|  |
| --- |
|  |

1. on-going collaborative research projects10 currently held by him / her in any capacity (e.g. PC, Co-PI, Co-I, Collaborator, etc.).

|  |
| --- |
|  |

If the number declared in (i) exceeds **THREE** **OR** the number declared in (ii) exceeds **TWO**, please provide the following information:

1. overall amount of time spent on research in percentage terms; and

|  |
| --- |
|  |

1. justifications on how he / she would be able to take up this additional research project if funded while maintaining the research quality.

|  |
| --- |
|  |

**Annex II**

**Details of Project Budget**

Details of project budget should be stated in the following format10:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Proposed budget | **Project Cost** | |
| 1. Project cost to be funded by RGC and university matching fund :   $\_\_\_\_\_Million (M) | *R(1)*  *90% from RGC:*  ***$\_\_\_\_\_M***  U(1)  10% from university:  **$*\_\_\_\_\_*M** |
| (2) Budget to be supported by sources other than RGC and the required university matching fund (please specify, if any): | | $\_\_\_\_\_M |
| **Total [(1) + (2)]: $\_\_\_\_\_M** | | |

In drawing up the budget, please note that PC, Co-PIs, Co-Is, faculty positions (e.g. Research Assistant Professors), administrative staff and any of the collaborators are not regarded as staff and must not be remunerated with salaries. For reference, the annual salary ceilings of Research Assistant (RA) and Senior Research Assistant (SRA) adopted in the 2024/25 academic year were $0.361 million and $0.579 million respectively.

**Appendix A**

**Strategic Topics Grant (STG) 2025/26**

**Strategic Topics**

**Topic 1 : Using** **Advanced Technology to Address Health Care Challenges**

Proposed research should focus on inter-disciplinary study on enhancing Hong Kong's health care service delivery and reducing medical mis-happenings in diagnostics, medication, communication, medical surveillance; in promoting drug discovery and device development; and in meeting the challenges to Hong Kong's health care system brought about by our aging population (including related chronic diseases) and manpower shortages.

**Topic 2 : Striving towards Carbon Neutrality before 2050**

This topic covers inter-disciplinary collaborative research on technological, engineering, socio-economic, architectural, environmental, material science, earth system science, geoinformation, ecological, urban-planning, infrastructural, supply chain, education and policy solutions to better equip Hong Kong in meeting the challenge of climate change and achieving carbon neutrality before 2050.

**Topic 3 : Establishing Hong Kong as the Leading Integrated Circuits, and Opto-electronics Innovation and Technology Hub in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area**

This topic includes but is not limited to collaborative research in nanopatterning, heterogeneous system integration, emerging memories, silicon photonics, next generation opto-electronics devices, wide-band-gap semiconductors, electronic design automation (EDA), intelligent wearables/meta devices, integrated circuit design and quantum information processing.

**Topic 4 : Managing the Socio-economic Dimensions of Public Health Challenges**

With valuable lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic, proposed research under this topic should enhance Hong Kong’s readiness in managing major public health issues in future from cultural and socio-economic perspectives. These could include, for example, fostering trust in science, improving social connectedness, mobility, promoting personal as well as community health and wellbeing, improving people’s mental and physical health, and challenges brought by poverty and migration.

**Topic 5 : Innovative and Environmental-friendly Construction Technologies and Materials**

This topic includes but is not limited to intelligent devices for automated construction site management and monitoring, green and high-performance construction materials, biodegradable, energy-saving and eco-friendly materials. Proposals should address how these technologies and practices can be applied to Hong Kong’s mega development projects such as the Artificial Islands in the Central Waters and the Northern Metropolis and their wider impact on sustainable development for Hong Kong.

**Appendix B**

**Strategic Topics Grant (STG) 2025/26**

Implementation Timetable

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Date**  **(tentative)** | **Event** |
| 22 July 2024 | * Invitation for applications |
| 9 September 2024  (5:00 pm) | * Deadline for universities to submit preliminary proposal |
| late September – late November 2024 | * Review of preliminary proposals by Assessment Committee |
| late November 2024 | * The Assessment Committee to finalise the shortlisted proposals |
| mid December 2024 | * Universities to be informed of shortlisted proposals and invited to submit full proposals |
| mid February 2025 | * Deadline for submission of full proposals |
| March 2025 | * Peer review of full proposals by External Reviewers (ERs) * Responses from project teams to the assessments by ERs |
| April 2025 | * Assessment of full proposals by Assessment Committee |
| early May 2025 | * Announcement of shortlisting results of full proposals for selection interview |
| June 2025 | * Assessment Committee to conduct interviews and evaluate full proposals, and the RGC to make funding decisions on the recommendation of the Assessment Committee |
| July 2025 | * Announcement of funding results |

**Appendix C**

**Strategic Topics Grant (STG) 2025/26**

**General Points to Applicants and Universities**

1. Preliminary proposals are called to improve the efficiency of both proposal preparation and peer reviewing process.
2. 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 organisations / disciplines. The formation of research team would best be completed at the beginning of the project though new talents may join the team at various stages of the investigation when needed.
3. The RGC encourages evidence-based research and that data collected in RGC funded projects should be made available to other researchers in a timely manner.
4. It would be best to involve stakeholders in all phases of the project, from steering of the research direction at the beginning to transferring the results to impact the target sector of the society.
5. Applicants invited to full application stage who contemplate applying for funding support from the Innovation and Technology Fund at a later stage may provide a technology transfer plan in the full. This plan will be passed to the Innovation and Technology Commission for reference and will not be assessed.
6. The proposal should include a knowledge dissemination plan to communicate the project outcomes to not only the research community but also other stakeholders such as the general public, relevant industrial sectors and policy makers.
7. The project should have a plan for the training of future research talents and a plan to transfer relevant research results to benefit education such as degree programs, course work, etc.
8. Each application should be submitted by one applicant nominated as the Project Co-ordinator (PC) and each applicant is only allowed to submit one application in the capacity of PC under the STG.
9. The maximum project duration of a STG project is five years (i.e. 60-month), and there will be sunsetting provisions prescribing a review on the second and fourth progress reports of the project.
10. The ceiling of the project cost per each STG project to be awarded by the RGC is $40 million. The amount requested from the RGC per project should range from $10 million to $40 million.. No on-costs will be provided.
11. Coordinating universities are required to commit at the application stage that they would contribute 10% of the total approved budget, in monetary terms, for a funded project.
12. Universities should also provide “in kind” contribution (e.g. research infrastructure, staff time for research, etc) throughout the project period. Each proposal should include a budget with breakdown of funds requested from the RGC and matching funding from universities / other funding sources as indicated in the template.
13. Applicants are required to provide a “Pathways to Impact Statement” in their applications to articulate how to secure impact, including amongst others, economic and societal impact, what they propose to do and how they propose to start gathering evidence on impact from the outset. Assessment on research impact of the proposals will be based on the “Pathways to Impact Statement” provided by the applicants.
14. The "right of reply" arrangement is adopted in the full proposal stage. The comments of the External Reviewers (without grading or ratings) will be released to the PCs of the full proposals and the PCs will be allowed to respond to the comments of the External Reviewers in one A4 page within one week. The PCs’ responses will be considered by the Assessment Committee together with the external reviews.

1. The PCs and coordinating universities are required to commit at the application stage that if the project is funded, the PC would spend sufficient time on the project throughout the project period.
2. To understand more about the research efforts of a PC, each PC will need to provide the numbers of both on-going individual research projects[[14]](#footnote-15)14 being held by him / her in any capacity (e.g. Principal Investigator (PI), Co-Ivestigator (Co-I), Collaborator, etc.) and on-going collaborative research projects[[15]](#footnote-16)15 being held by him / her in any capacity (e.g. PC, Co-PI, Co-I, Collaborator, etc.). Research projects funded from all sources (irrespective of whether from UGC / RGC or others) should be included, except those funded under the joint research schemes and the fellowship schemes administered by the RGC. A project is regarded as “on-going” if the completion report of the project has not been submitted by the application deadline.

If the PC holds more than three on-going individual research projects **or** more than twoon-going collaborative research projects, he / she will need to provide the overall amount of time spent on research in percentage terms; and justifications on how he / she would be able to take up this additional research project if funded while maintaining the research quality.

1. The coordinating university of each funded project is required to submit an audited financial statement for the concerned STG project within six months from the date of project completion / termination.
2. PCs of funded projects are required to include in the completion reports URL links to the university’s repositories or the publishers’ websites so that the public can have access to the manuscripts or journal articles (though the public may be required to subscribe at the publishers’ websites). They are also encouraged to include in the completion reports the data repositories where research data of their projects can be accessed and shared, where appropriate.
3. With a view to further promoting open access and obtaining a more in-depth understanding of the local open access landscape, the RGC will collect open-access-related information of peer-reviewed journal publications arising directly from the project.
4. As an initiative to highlight the impact of the STG on research and societal development in Hong Kong and worldwide, coordinating universities are required to commit at the application stage that if the project is funded, they would provide a video clip on the research project to publicise the project’s research achievements within three months upon satisfactory rating of completion report. The video should be bilingual (e.g. English narration with Chinese subtitles or vice-versa), about three minutes’ long and in a format supported by YouTube for vetting. PCs of completed projects are also encouraged to upload the video clips onto their universities’ own websites or video channels.
5. Applicants should not mention anything not related to the research proposal per se in the application form (such as describing the funding rules) with a view to communicating to the reviewers that the latter should give a certain rating if they intend to support the projects. Should such act be discovered, the applications concerned will be disqualified.
6. Applicants should not communicate with the RGC and Assessment Committee Members on the applications submitted with a view to influencing the latter in assessing their applications. Should such act be discovered, the applications concerned will be disqualified.
7. Applicants shall not include links to external websites in their applications which contain extra information about the proposed project in the research proposal.
8. The shortlisting / funding decisions are based on the careful assessments and considered judgement of the Assessment Committee. It is inappropriate to assume that any subsets of comments are specifically responsible for the final decision. The funding / shortlisting decisions are final and no appeal will be considered unless in case of a major procedural flaw.

**Appendix D**

**Strategic Topics Grant (STG) 2025/26**

**Operational Arrangement**

1. **Submission of preliminary proposals**

* When submitting the preliminary proposal, the project team is required to indicate in the table the total project cost proposed. The breakdown of the proposed budget and the required matching should also be indicated.
* The university is required to commit under the “University’s Endorsement” section of the Preliminary Proposal Application Form that the university will contribute 10% of the total approved budget for a funded project.

1. **Submission of full proposals**

* When submitting the full proposal, the project team is required to indicate in the table under “Proposal Funding” of the Full Proposal Application Form the cash-flow of the total project cost proposed, the cash-flow of the project cost to be funded by the RGC (maximum $40 million), and the cash-flow of the project cost to be funded by university under the matching requirement(s).

1. **Announcement of funding results**

* Upon approval of a project, the RGC will announce the total approved budget for a funded project and the RGC grants to be awarded for each funded project.

1. **Monitoring and assessment of funded project**

* When submitting the progress reports / audited financial statement / completion report, the project team is required to apportion the expenditure from different funding sources (i.e. RGC, university and other sources, if any).

1. **Return of unspent project fund**

* Upon project completion or termination, the unspent RGC funds should be returned to the RGC in accordance with the Monitoring Guidelines to Universities and Project Teams on Funded Projects.

1. Excluding part-time staff and staff holding honorary appointments. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Excluding schools / arms of continuing education and professional training and other analogous outfits. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Excluding polytechnic staff grades. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. A PC who is / will be seconded to work full-time or part-time at the two Innovation and Technology clusters (i.e. Health@InnoHK and AIR@InnoHK) at the Hong Kong Science Park; or to conduct research in a university or a research institute / body / agency in the Mainland / overseas jurisdiction, is still considered eligible to apply for the STG. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Excluding staff members who are receiving income from paid appointments outside the university proper or who are supported by external research grants. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. A two-sided A4 page will be counted as two pages. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. M: Biology and Medicine; E: Engineering; P: Physical Sciences; H: Humanities and Social Sciences; B: Business Studies [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. 1: CityU; 2: HKBU; 3: LU; 4: CUHK; 5: PolyU; 6: HKUST; 7: HKU; 8: EdUHK [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Please refer to the list of subject areas in the Scheme Overview and Guidance Notes (GRF2) for the General Research Fund exercise of the RGC, which is available on the RGC website: https://www.ugc.edu.hk/doc/eng/rgc/form/GRF2.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Please complete Annex II first for the figure (i.e. R(1)).

    The project cost to be funded by the RGC is 90% of the total approved budget. No on-costs will be provided.

    All costs stated in the preliminary proposal should be in Hong Kong dollars. Figures should be rounded to three decimal places. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. All names provided in the proposal, Annex I and critical data should be identical. Initials should be avoided. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. 9 ORCID is a unique researcher identifier facilitating the identification of researchers with expertise in specific areas. All local academics must provide valid ORCID iDs in applications in all capacity under all research funding schemes administered by the RGC. Grant applications submitted by applicants without valid ORCID iDs will not be considered. Non-local academics in the capacities of Co-PIs or Co-Is are encouraged to provide their ORCID iDs in the applications. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. 10Research projects funded from all sources (irrespective of whether from UGC / RGC) should be included, except those funded under the joint research schemes and the fellowship schemes administered by the RGC. Projects for which completion reports have not been submitted by the application deadline should also be counted. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. 14 Examples include research projects funded under the General Research Fund, Early Career Scheme, etc. Individual research projects funded from sources other than UGC / RGC should also be included. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. 15 Examples include research projects funded under the AoE Scheme, TRS, Collaborative Research Fund and Research Impact Fund. Collaborative research projects funded from sources other than UGC / RGC should also be included. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)