



SINO-MALTA Fund 2022

National Rules for Participation – State Aid

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1. Introduction

Funding Party: Malta Council for Science and Technology for and on behalf of the Foundation for Science and Technology,
Villa Bighi, Kalkara, KKR 1320
Malta

1.1 Scope and Focus

The Call for Proposals for the Science and Technology Cooperation – SINO-MALTA Fund for 2022 is to be carried out in accordance with the framework of the Agreement on Science and Technological Co-operation between the Government of Malta and the Government of the People’s Republic of China and subsequent agreements by Joint Commission on Science and Technology between the Malta Council for Science and Technology (hereinafter referred to as ‘MCST’) and the Ministry of Science and Technology of the People’s Republic of China (hereinafter referred to as ‘MOST’).

The aim of this Science and Technology Cooperation – SINO-MALTA Fund, is to intensify scientific collaboration between the two countries to strengthen R&D activities, technology transfer and to carry out comprehensive, steady and long-term cooperation through support of researchers’ mobility and the networking of industries, universities and research institutions to generate mutual-beneficial and win-win research.

1.1.1 Research Areas

The selection of topics for funding has been made on the basis of bilateral negotiations between MCST and MOST with respect to joint-priority areas. For this call, the selected areas are:

- a) Digital Technologies
- b) Green Transitions
- c) Health

1.1.2 Type of Research

Projects under the SINO-MALTA Fund 2022 can undertake either Fundamental Research, Industrial Research or Experimental Development in line with the definitions outlined in Section 1.3, under Regulations A or B of this scheme. MCST will be funding all three research work categories.

1.1.3 Project Proposals

Project proposal submissions will be undertaken in two stages. A pre-proposal is submitted in stage one (1) of the Call, whilst a full proposal is submitted in Stage two (2) of the Call.

Each project pre-/proposal must be in accordance with the following:

- The proposed research project must be consistent with the scope of this call determined in both the MCST and MOST Call Text and National Rules for Participation.
- The proposed project must relate to one (1) predominant theme, a), b) or c) detailed above.
- The proposal should be novel and not correspond with on-going or completed projects funded by other instruments, programmes, or projects.
- Only pre-proposals that have an approved cooperation agreement signed by all partners and an approved IP agreement signed by all partners will be considered. Furthermore, pre-/full proposals on either side must bear matching thematic areas and the applications on either side are to be complementary.

- Project consortia consisting of **at least one eligible legal entity operating from Malta** and one eligible entity from China can apply for funding. The eligibility of Maltese participants is highlighted within this document, whereas the eligibility of Chinese participants is published within the MOST call.
- The proposal should strive to be balanced between the countries involved in the project as far as the volume of work is concerned and preferably be balanced in terms of the requests for funding.
- There is no upper limit on eligible consortium size. Consortia may involve as many partners as necessary to achieve the project goals. However, applicants should be aware that a higher number of entities will not automatically result in a positive evaluation of the proposal. There is also no upper limit of partners from the same country, unless stated otherwise in the MOST call.
- Each collaborating side must have **one Principal Investigator (PI)**, representing the proposal consortium for each country. The PI from each country shall assume the role of Lead Applicant and will be responsible to submit the application form to the Managing Authority of his/her country.
- MCST does not preclude the participation of entities from other countries, however these are to provide written proof that their part of the project will be covered independently from this call (i.e. in kind). They cannot act as a PI and their contribution to the project should not be vital. The MOST call must also be consulted with regards to any exemption of contradiction to this allowance by MCST which could nullify the statement.
- Proposals that pass from Stage 1 to Stage 2 may wish to include additional partners not foreseen in the pre-proposal. Although the addition of new partners to the Project Consortium is not precluded by these National Rules for Participation, additional partners may not request additional funds, and only in-kind contributions will be permitted for the Maltese side. The MOST call must also be consulted with regards to the possibility of adding Chinese partners between stages. The corresponding agreements (IP and Cooperation Agreements) need to be revised accordingly and re-submitted at Stage 2.
- In every proposal, the PI from the Malta side and the PI from the Chinese side, bear the responsibility for submitting the application on behalf of the Consortium, to each of their respective managing authorities (i.e. MCST and MOST), whilst considering the National Rules for Participation of either side.
- Applicants are to submit an application for assistance under this scheme before the start of works.
- Funding under this scheme is made available on the basis that an Applicant does not benefit from any other grant or financial incentive in respect to the expenses related to the execution of the project.
- Successful proposals will see Maltese entities entering into a Grant Agreement with MCST, whereas the Chinese entities will enter into a Grant Agreement with MOST. MCST shall decide whether successful Maltese applicants are to sign a Grant Agreement with MCST on a per partner basis, or in a collective manner.
- Each side (Maltese partners and Chinese partners) must adhere to their respective National Rules for Participation, to ensure joint-eligibility. Ineligibility of one side of the consortium, will result in an ineligible proposal overall.
- Applicants can submit more than one pre- / full- proposal under this Call.
- The proposal submitted by the PI operating from Malta to MCST must be written in **English**. The proposal submitted by the Chinese PI to MOST must be written in Chinese.
- Each proposal submitted correctly and on time will be checked for eligibility as a whole. This means that failure of one partner within the consortium to meet the criteria will cause the entire project to be rejected.

1.2 National Contact Point

Correspondence from Maltese entities should be directed to:

Tel: +356 23602126

E-mail: international.mcst@gov.mt

Correspondence from Chinese entities should be directed to:

Tel: +861068598010

E-mail: zj@cstec.org.cn

1.3 Definitions

Applicant means anyone eligible for participation in a Project in terms of these Rules for Participation and who consequently applies for funding under this scheme.

Arm's length means that the conditions of the transaction between the contracting parties do not differ from those which would be stipulated between independent enterprises and contain no element of collusion. Any transaction that results from an open, transparent, and non-discriminatory procedure is considered as meeting the arm's length principle.

Effective collaboration means collaboration between at least two independent parties to exchange knowledge or technology, or to achieve a common objective based on the division of labour where the parties jointly define the scope of the collaborative project, contribute to its implementation and share its risks, as well as its results. One or several parties may bear the full costs of the project and thus relieve other parties of its financial risks. Contract research and provision of research services are not considered forms of collaboration.

Eligible direct costs are those costs incurred directly by the national beneficiaries during the duration of the project and used primarily for the purpose of achieving the objectives of the project. All eligible expenses must be incurred between the Start Date and the End Date of the Project and must be limited to the budgeted value as indicated in the Grant Agreement.

Eligible undertakings are defined as undertakings planning to carry out Fundamental Research, Industrial Research or Experimental Development projects that are eligible to apply for assistance under this scheme. In order to be eligible, applicants must additionally satisfy the following criteria. They must be either: a) a partnership constituted under the Companies Act, being a partnership *en nom collectif*, *en commandite*; or b) a limited liability company; or c) be duly registered as a co-operative society under the Co-Operative Societies Act, d) professional body; e) self-employed; f) NGOs; g) Non-profit making entities (including Foundations).

'Professional Body' may be an organisation, an association, a chamber, society, institute, or a group of professional persons not being enrolled or registered in terms of The Voluntary Organisations Act (Cap. 492 of the Laws of Malta) or not being otherwise recognised in terms of Law, and which is generally recognised and acknowledged by the professional persons it seeks to represent as their representative Body. For the purposes of this Definition, a professional person is one who has undergone a period of study at a university or a recognised institution of higher learning and has obtained the formal qualification entitling the person to practise the respective profession; and who provides a specialised service to the public, based primarily on a fiduciary relationship between themselves and the party to whom such service is provided, on their own personal credibility and responsibility.

'Self-employed' as registered with Jobsplus.

'NGO' means any Voluntary or Non-Governmental Organisation set up in accordance with The Voluntary Organisations Act (Cap. 492 of the Laws of Malta).

'Non-profit making' is an entity where (a) the statute of the entity contains an express exclusion of the purpose to make profits; and (b) there is express provision in the statute defining the purposes of the entity which do not include the promotion of private interests, other than a private interest which is a social purpose; and (c) no part of the income, capital or property is available directly or indirectly to any promoter, founder, member, administrator, donor or any other private interest. Provided that if a promoter, founder, member, administrator or donor is another enrolled non-profit making organisation, the limitation in paragraph (c) shall not apply provided the availability of such income, capital or property is subject to conditions which are consistent with the general purposes of the grantor entity: Provided further that an organisation shall continue to be deemed as non-profit making notwithstanding that: (i) it obtains a pecuniary gain from its activities when such gain is not received or credited to its members but is exclusively utilised for its established purposes; (ii) it buys or sells or otherwise deals in goods or services where such activities are exclusively related to its principal purposes; (iii) it is established for the general entertainment, pastime, education or other similar benefit only of its members; or (iv) it is established for the promotion of the social role, ethics, education and values of a trade or profession provided it does not promote the private interests of its members.

End Date means the date when the Project Period, having commenced on the Start Date, expires. The Project Period is the time required to execute the Project as indicated in the Grant Agreement.

Innovation is defined as the internationally novel scientific/technological development of a technological process, product or service. Also, the definition of innovation within the same context can also be applied to non-novel, yet step-change/ground-breaking enhancement of existing technological processes, products, or services, or even the application of existing knowledge to new novel applications of these solutions to deliver step-change competitiveness through such an application.

Large undertaking is an undertaking not fulfilling the criteria laid down in Annex I of COMMISSION REGULATION (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty.

Maltese Legal Entity means any entity created within the European Union, having an operating base in Malta and which has legal personality, and which may, acting under its own name, exercise rights and be subject to obligations. For the definition of Chinese entity eligibility, the call published by MOST is to be consulted.

Operating base in Malta means if the legal entity:

a. owns, leases, or has been given the right of use by a third party, adequate premises from where to conduct an eligible economic activity in the region of Malta;

and

b. employs at least one (1) person that is based in Malta and is liable to pay income tax in Malta.

Partner is defined as a partner entity in a local consortium that collaborates with the Lead Applicant and other project partners (if applicable).

Personnel costs means the costs of researchers, technicians and other supporting staff to the extent employed on the relevant project or activity.

Principal Investigator (PI) is the representative of one of the local beneficiaries of a project consortium that is responsible for all communications with MCST and the consortium partners, from proposal submission to project end. The Principal Investigator will have the responsibility of ensuring that all the partners involved in the national consortium are eligible and supervise the project workflow with the help of WP leaders. Additionally, he/she will be required to submit the project application on behalf of the national consortium and must also compile and submit reports / deliverables to the funding bodies which in turn will relay these documents to MCST. The Principal Investigator may also take the role of the Project Contact Point. Can also be referred to as **Principal Coordinator or Lead Applicant**.

Project Contact Point is the individual, appointed to act on behalf of the Lead Applicant and who is responsible for communicating with the Council about the Project.

Project Grant means the granted funding provided.

Project Value means the entire project budget needed by the collaborating applicant(s) in a local consortium to carry out all the project tasks, including any co-financing.

Research and Development is defined as the systematic investigation, work or research carried out in any field of science or technology through experiment, theoretical work or analysis undertaken in order to acquire new knowledge, primarily directed towards a specific practical aim or objective, and includes:

- a) **Fundamental Research** means experimental or theoretical work undertaken primarily to acquire new knowledge of the underlying foundations of phenomena and observable facts, without any direct commercial application or use in view
- b) **Industrial Research** means the planned research or critical investigation aimed at the acquisition of new knowledge and skills for developing new products, processes, or services or for bringing about a significant improvement in existing products, processes, or services. It comprises the creation of components parts of complex systems, and may include the construction of prototypes in a laboratory environment or in an environment with simulated interfaces to existing systems as well as of pilot lines, when necessary for the industrial research and notably for generic technology validation
- c) **Experimental Development** means acquiring, combining, shaping, and using existing scientific, technological, business, and other relevant knowledge and skills with the aim of developing new or improved products, processes, or services. This may also include, for example, activities aiming at the conceptual definition, planning and documentation of new products, processes, or services

Experimental development may comprise prototyping, demonstrating, piloting, testing and validation of new or improved products, processes, or services in environments representative of real-life operating conditions where the primary objective is to make further technical improvements on products, processes or services that are not substantially set. This may include the development of a commercially usable prototype or pilot which is necessarily the final commercial product, and which is too expensive to produce for it to be used only for demonstration and validation purposes.

Experimental development does not include routine or periodic changes made to existing products, production lines, manufacturing processes, services, and other operations in progress, even if those changes may represent improvements.

Research and knowledge-dissemination organisation means an entity (such as universities or research institutes, technology transfer agencies, innovation intermediaries, research-oriented physical or virtual collaborative entities), irrespective of its legal status (organised under public or private law) or way of financing, whose primary goal is to independently conduct fundamental research, industrial research or experimental development or to widely disseminate the results of such activities by way of teaching, publication or knowledge transfer. Where such entity also pursues economic activities the financing, the costs and the revenues of those economic activities must be accounted for separately. Undertakings that can exert a decisive influence upon such an entity, in the quality of, for example, shareholders or members, may not enjoy preferential access to the results generated by it;

Single Undertaking includes all enterprises having at least one of the following relationships with each other:

- i. One enterprise has a majority of the shareholders' or members' voting rights in another enterprise;
- ii. One enterprise has the right to appoint or remove a majority of the members of the administrative, management or supervisory body of another enterprise;

- iii. One enterprise has the right to exercise a dominant influence on another enterprise pursuant to a contract entered into with that enterprise or to a provision in its memorandum or articles of association;
- iv. One enterprise, which is a shareholder in or member of another enterprise, controls alone, pursuant to an agreement with other shareholders in or members of that enterprise, a majority of shareholders' or members' voting rights in that enterprise.

Enterprises having any of the relationships referred to in points (i) to (iv) above through one or more other enterprises shall be considered to be a single undertaking,

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) means undertakings which fulfil the criteria laid down in Annex I of Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty.

Start of Works means the earlier of either the start of construction works relating to the investment, or the first legally binding commitment to order equipment or any other commitment that makes the investment irreversible. Buying land and preparatory works such as obtaining permits and conducting feasibility studies are not considered start of works. For take-overs, 'start of works' means the moment of acquiring the assets directly linked to the acquired establishment.

Start Date means the date which is stated in the grant agreement for the official start of the project.

Start-up Undertaking shall be defined as an enterprise that has been established for less than five (5) years following its registration. For eligible undertakings that are not subject to registration, the five year eligibility period may be considered to start from the moment when the enterprise either starts its economic activity or is liable to tax for its economic activity.

Subcontracted Activity means any activity related to the project, (including but not limited to consultancy), which is not carried out directly by a Beneficiary or its employees but is carried out by any third party (local or foreign) individual, company, partnership, or entity, under whatsoever terms and conditions.

Undertaking in Difficulty means an undertaking in respect of which at least one of the following circumstances occurs:

(a) In the case of a limited liability company (other than an SME that has been in existence for less than three years or, for the purposes of eligibility for risk finance aid, an SME within 7 years from its first commercial sale that qualifies for risk finance investments following due diligence by the selected financial intermediary), where more than half of its subscribed share capital has disappeared as a result of accumulated losses. This is the case when deduction of accumulated losses from reserves (and all other elements generally considered as part of the own funds of the company) leads to a negative cumulative amount that exceeds half of the subscribed share capital. For the purposes of this provision, 'limited liability company' refers in particular to the types of company mentioned in Annex I of Directive 2013/34/EU and 'share capital' includes, where relevant, any share premium.

(b) In the case of a company where at least some members have unlimited liability for the debt of the company (other than an SME that has been in existence for less than three years or, for the purposes of eligibility for risk finance aid, an SME within 7 years from its first commercial sale that qualifies for risk finance investments following due diligence by the selected financial intermediary), where more than half of its capital as shown in the company accounts has disappeared as a result of accumulated losses. For the purposes of this provision, 'a company where at least some members have unlimited liability for the debt of the company' refers in particular to the types of company mentioned in Annex II of Directive 2013/34/EU.

(c) Where the undertaking is subject to collective insolvency proceedings or fulfils the criteria under its domestic law for being placed in collective insolvency proceedings at the request of its creditors.

(d) Where the undertaking has received rescue aid and has not yet reimbursed the loan or terminated the guarantee, or has received restructuring aid and is still subject to a restructuring plan.

- (e) In the case of an undertaking that is not an SME, where, for the past two years:
1. the undertaking's book debt to equity ratio has been greater than 7.5 and
 2. the undertaking's EBITDA interest coverage ratio has been below 1.0.

2. Eligibility for Participation

2.1 Eligibility

Any Eligible Undertaking, with an operating base in Malta, as defined in Section 1.3, may apply and will be eligible for funding subject to the terms and conditions laid out in this document and in particular the conditions for eligibility.

Applicants who fall within the definition of Eligible Undertaking, will be required to provide the following documents which will be considered during the national eligibility check stage (to be included as an annex to the Application form or else provide authorisation to MCST to obtain directly from the Malta Business Registry):

- Memorandum & Articles of Association or other constitutive document;
- Audited financial statements for last 3 fiscal years (2 sets).

In the event that the Applicant is a start-up, and the above documents are not available, the Applicant shall provide the financial projections for three (3) years signed by an auditor, including:

- an income statement,
- a cash flow statement, and
- a statement of financial position

Applicants, who fall within the definitions of professional bodies and NGOs, will still be required to provide the above financial documents as well as, including but not limited to, a Statute/Deed (Authenticated) and VO certificates.

Other forms of documentation can be requested depending on the nature of the eligible undertaking.

All applications should be accompanied by the relevant declarations duly completed as Annexes to the Application Form.

If the review of these documents may result in too high an exposure risk to MCST, the Applicant will no longer be entitled to participate in the project.

Any applicant(s) that at the time of proposal submission is considered by MCST to be non-compliant with respect to Grant Agreement obligations on other active projects funded by MCST, may be immediately deemed ineligible at application stage or will not be awarded funding under this programme. This also applies to situations whereby the applicant is outside approved project timelines on other projects funded by MCST, and where the applicant is in recognised default.

Any application submitted by or including the participation of any legal person or legal entity having, in totality or in majority ownership, the same shareholders, business partners or persons holding and / or exercising a controlling power in any other legal entity which will have been at any time prior to such application declared as non-compliant or defaulting on any other contract or agreement entered into with MCST, shall be automatically declared as inadmissible.

Funding under this scheme is made available on the basis that the Applicant has not benefited and will not benefit from any other grant or financial incentive of whatever nature, applied for and/or utilised for the same costs and scope as that subject of the funding requested under this scheme.

3. Funding Criteria

The funds for the national beneficiaries participating in the project consortium will be made available in accordance with these rules and regulations.

3.1 Project Duration

Project duration should be a maximum of two (2) years. Successful projects are envisaged to start at the earliest possible date in 2023. The earliest possible Start Date for projects will be fixed at the beginning of the contract negotiations with the national funding organisations and should ideally be within the first 3 months since the publishing of the results.

3.2 Application Process

The Application Process is a two-stage process:

Stage 1 – Pre-Proposal Application Form

A concise application will be submitted in Stage 1 of the call, where applicants are invited to provide an abstract of the project together with a brief overview of the objectives, targets, research, innovation, and technical aspects of the project. Information on the foreseen timeline as well as the strength of the partnership will also need to be included. Collaboration and Implementation Agreements need to be submitted as part of this application phase.

Stage 2 – Full-Proposal Application Form

A full proposal submission is required in Stage 2 of the call, where a detailed explanation of the project will be required, including further elaboration on the content that was provided in Stage 1. The full proposal will request an in-depth account of the implementation methodology, as well as a detailed proposed budget breakdown. Although the full proposal will contain further elaboration on the content that was provided in the Stage 1, the Stage 2 application will be evaluated in its own right.

A complete Application Form must be submitted by the Lead Applicant of the Malta-based entity (on behalf of the Project Consortium) to MCST via email on international.mcst@gov.mt. Corresponding Annexes may be sent by the Project Partners directly to MCST via email.

It should be noted that emails larger than 6MB shall be automatically rejected by the system. The applicant may make use of cloud storage. All received applications shall be acknowledged by email.

Failure by any of the PIs to submit the application form to the national funding agency will render the entire proposal ineligible.

Only complete Application Forms shall be considered.

3.3 Submission Deadline

The submission deadline for Stage 1 is **30th June 2022 at 23:59 CET**. Stage 2 submission deadline will be communicated to the applicants that are invited to submit a Stage 2 Full Proposal Application Form.

3.4 Budget and Grant Value

The total maximum National Budget for this Call is of €600,000.

One (1) project will be selected for funding from each of the thematic areas, with a maximum requested budget, for Maltese partners in a consortium, of €200,000 per sector per project. If no applications are successfully awarded under one of the thematic areas, the proposal that would have had the highest score within the remaining pool of proposals, from the other two thematic areas, will be selected for funding.

Funding for successful project submissions will be based on a periodic cash advance and will be regulated through a Grant Agreement establishing the terms and conditions governing the financing of the project.

Funding under this scheme is made available on the basis that an Applicant does not benefit from any other grant or financial incentive with respect to the expenses related to the execution of the project.

3.5 Project Contact Point

The Lead Applicant shall appoint a Project Contact Point. The Project Contact Point shall have the following responsibilities:

- To act as the main contact between the partner executing the project and MCST.
- To ensure compliance with their obligations in terms of the Grant Agreement.
- To compile Periodic Reports and Final Reports including their timely submissions and effective execution of the project.
- To ensure submission of all required financial reporting as per the contractual obligations of the partner.
- To monitor and ensure the execution of the project activities according to set timeframes and deliverables.

3.6 Deliverables

Mandatory deliverables

The project plan must give details of certain activities which are required by MCST. These should be included as deliverables in the project proposal and include:

1. A showcase of the project to the general public by the national project partner(s) through:
 - The publication of at least two (2) articles per year in local newspapers, magazines or online platforms. These should not contain intellectual property but should raise awareness about the project and its benefits.
 - The organisation of at least one (1) half-day event to be held at the MCST's premises or as otherwise directed by MCST.
2. Reporting on project progress as per the list hereunder in line with the templates provided by MCST;
 - End of Stage Technical and Scientific Reports;
 - End of Stage Financial Report;
 - End of Project Technical and Scientific Report;

End of Project Audited Financial Report.

The reports are to include sufficient evidence on the achievement of the project objectives as well as the parameters indicated in the application.

Changes to the project objectives, deliverables, work-packages and all the parameters committed in the applications are to be detailed, justified, and approved by MCST.

Recommended deliverables

Further to the mandatory deliverables, MCST invites applications to also include deliverables as recommended below, subject to the nature of the research project:

1. Monograph/s and/or peer-reviewed paper/s for accepted publication in international journal/s of repute based on the work carried out through the Project. The subscription levels, Impact Factor and open access should be considered in the selection of journals and conferences. Similar papers published on open access media would also be considered favourably.
2. Oral presentation/s at international conference/s on the work carried out through the Project.
3. The attainment of undergraduate degrees and/or postgraduate degrees and/or post-doctoral research. In cases where the project duration is insufficient for the purpose of submitting a degree, there has to be a commitment to complete the degree outside the duration of the project utilising other sources of funding.
4. Registration of a patent or other Intellectual Property Rights stemming from the Project, in Malta as well as in any other country.
5. Commercial commitments such as technology innovations to be included in a beneficiary's existing product or service.
6. Commercial commitments such as technology transfer licences.

4. List of Eligible and Ineligible Costs

4.1 Eligible Costs

Eligible direct costs are those costs incurred directly by the national beneficiaries during the duration of the project and used primarily for the purpose of achieving the objectives of the project.

All eligible expenses must be incurred between the Start Date and the End Date of the project and must be limited to the budgeted value as indicated in the Grant Agreement.

Applicants may opt for **one** (1) of the following two regulations. In the Pre-Proposal Application Form, applicants are requested to select which funding route they are going to choose.

Please contact MCST for more information on the implications of these State Aid Rules.

4.1.1. Eligible Costs under Regulation A:

[Commission Regulation \(EU\) No. 1407/2013 of 18 December 2013 on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to de minimis aid \(the de minimis Regulation\) as amended by Commission Regulation \(EU\) 2020/972 of 2 July 2020, amending Regulation \(EU\) No 1407/2013 as regards its prolongation and amending Regulation \(EU\) No 651/2014 as regards its prolongation and relevant adjustments.](#)

a) Personnel Costs

Wages of researchers and technical personnel, and other supporting staff, to the extent and for the duration that they are directly engaged on the approved research project.

- i. All employees in respect of whom wage costs are claimed must be registered with Jobsplus and covered by a valid contract of employment in terms of the national legislation on employment.
- ii. Personnel Costs related to Project Management are limited to 10% of the project value.
- iii. Students can be engaged on the project and paid an annual stipend of €6,000 when reading for a Master's degree or an annual stipend of €8,000 when reading for a Doctoral degree. Note that for every engaged student, a full-time researcher must be employed by the applicant to specifically work on the awarded research project.
- iv. Personnel costs are calculated as follows:

The hourly rate (z) is calculated using the formula:

$$\text{€ } z = (\text{basic salary} + \text{allowances}) / \text{yearly workable hours as per the employee's contract of employment with the applying entity.}$$
 The total hours worked on the awarded research project by a full-time employee shall not exceed 1760 hours *per annum*.

Eligible salaries are pinned to the following hourly rates (including National Insurance and Inland Revenue and allowances) and personnel limits per project:

Role in Project	Hourly rates	Limits per project
Management or equivalent	Up to € 50.00/hour	Max 2 per project
Senior Researcher* or equivalent	Up to € 35.25/hour	No limits
Researcher* or equivalent	Up to € 25.25/hour	No limits
Operational, technician, research support assistant or equivalent	Up to € 13.85/hour	No limits

The rates stated in the table above are for the year 2022. For subsequent years a 5% increase per year is allowed.

*The term 'senior researcher' is to be used for a postdoctoral researcher with a specialist and high level of local and international experience in the field. Individuals possessing a high level of experience in industry can still be considered.

*The term 'researcher' is to be used for a Bachelor's, Master's or a Ph.D. degree holder and hence the hourly rate should be equivalent to the degree held by the relevant individual.

Personnel in salary brackets that are higher than those noted above will still only be reimbursed at the rates of the eligible brackets above depending on their role in the project. The hourly rates and the number of hours on the project per engaged individual, will have to be noted in the Budget Breakdown Form that will be requested if the proposal is invited to Stage 2. In the case of existing personnel, the names of the individuals will have to be noted in the Budget Breakdown Form and their respective CVs need to be submitted.

v. Filled time sheets are to be retained for all personnel, including students, as proof of number of hours spent on the project. Documentation of the utilisation of the employees' internally funded research quota for other research activities is to be retained as this evidence may be required by the auditors.

b) Specialised equipment and research consumables

Purchase and/or lease of specialised equipment including software. If a specialised laptop/PC is going to be claimed, please specify its usage and specifications.

Purchase of research consumables. The overall value of consumables typically cannot exceed 30% of project value. Proposals with consumables exceeding 30% of the project value need to be discussed at application stage.

c) Travel and Subsistence

For the attendance of consortium meetings, up to two (2) persons will be eligible to attend the meeting.

For the attendance of international conferences, up to two (2) persons will be eligible to attend per six (6) months.

For 'other' project-related meetings, a maximum of 2 persons will be eligible to attend the meeting. Such meetings should be discussed with MCST at application stage to ensure eligibility.

Eligible costs under this section include the cost of economy flights, public transport and other expenses that have been incurred for the purpose of the project after selection of the most economic solutions. Per diems are payable for travel up to a maximum of 14 days in a row.

d) Other Operating Expenses

Other operating expenses may be incurred directly as a result of the project, however, these must be approved beforehand by MCST and must not fall under ineligible costs. Details shall need to be provided in the Application Form and ideally would have been discussed with the MCST representative for this Call before submission.

e) Costs of IP and knowledge transfer activities

Costs of knowledge transfer activities and patents bought or licensed from outside sources at arm's length conditions. Such activities should be discussed with MCST at application stage to ensure eligibility.

f) Overheads

Overheads (also known as eligible indirect costs) will be covered at **10%** of direct eligible costs, excluding the costs of subcontracting as well as for items of equipment above €5000 and consumables above €5000.

Note that for equipment, the capping of €500 is per piece while for consumables, the capping of €500 is for the total amount of consumables per partner.

g) Subcontracted activities

Subcontracted activities shall be allowed up to a limit of 25% of the project value and must follow fair procurement procedures. Such activities should be discussed with MCST at application stage to ensure eligibility.

Additional Provisions

Eligible Costs are to conform to the following and are subject to the final audit scrutiny:

- Any expenses incurred during the course of the project must be consistent with the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- In the event of purchases of any value, private entity partners are required to demonstrate adequate market testing.
- Public Entity partners are to follow Public Procurement Regulations in their entity.
- Any calls for the recruitment of personnel on a project is to be conducted in a strictly transparent manner and is to include a public call in the form of an online advert and interview process.

- Commercial transactions between any applicants or consortium partners, or between any applicants or a consortium partner and a company with similar shareholding to a consortium partner, is not allowed. All transactions need to be carried out in line with the arm's length principle outlined in Section 1.3.

Aid Intensity

The financial contribution to a beneficiary applying under Regulation A shall be up to 75% of the eligible costs incurred on the project by that beneficiary. The beneficiary must finance the remaining percentage of the eligible costs. It is not possible for a Beneficiary to cover the remaining percentage contribution 'in-kind'.

Applicable State Aid Regulations and Obligations

Assistance provided under Regulation A of these National Rules for Participation is in line with the [Commission Regulation \(EU\) No. 1407/2013 of 18 December 2013 on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to de minimis aid \(the de minimis Regulation\)](#), as amended by [Commission Regulation \(EU\) 2020/972 of 2 July 2020, amending Regulation \(EU\) No 1407/2013 as regards its prolongation and amending Regulation \(EU\) No 651/2014 as regards its prolongation and relevant adjustments](#).

The total amount of *de minimis* aid granted to a single undertaking shall not exceed the amount of €200,000 over any period of three consecutive fiscal years. The total amount of *de minimis* aid granted to a single undertaking performing road freight transport for hire or reward shall not exceed €100,000 over any period of three fiscal years. Applicants should ensure and declare that they are eligible for the requested grant under State Aid rules before applying.

This aggregate maximum threshold applies in principle to all economic sectors with the exception of the road transport, agriculture and fisheries sectors for which different thresholds and criteria apply. This period covers the fiscal year concerned as well as the previous two fiscal years. 'Fiscal year' means the fiscal year as used for tax purposes by the undertaking concerned.

This maximum threshold would include all State aid granted under this aid scheme and any other State aid measure granted under the *de minimis* rule including that received from any entity other than the Malta Council for Science and Technology. Any *de minimis* aid received in excess of the established threshold will have to be recovered, with interest, from the undertaking receiving the aid.

The *de minimis* declaration form must be filled in and submitted together with the Application Form. For successful applications, an updated declaration form shall be provided at the time of the signing of the Grant Agreement, ensuring that the applicant remains eligible for funding under the State Aid regime.

Assistance approved under this aid scheme is NOT:

- Aid granted to undertakings active in the fishery and aquaculture sector, as covered by Council Regulation (EC) No. 104/2000.
- Aid granted to undertakings active in the primary production of agricultural products.
- Aid granted to undertakings active in the sector of processing and marketing of agricultural products, in the following cases:
 - Where the amount of the aid is fixed on the basis of the price or quantity of such products purchased from primary producers or put on the market by the undertakings concerned.
 - Where the aid is conditional on being partly or entirely passed on to primary producers.
- Aid to export-related activities towards third countries or Member States, namely aid directly linked to the quantities exported, to the establishment and operation of a distribution network or to other current expenditure linked to the export activity.

- v. Aid contingent upon the use of domestic over imported goods.
- vi. Aid for the acquisition of road freight transport vehicles granted to undertakings performing road freight transport for hire or reward.

Where an undertaking is active in the sectors referred to in points (i), (ii) and (iii) above as well as in other sectors falling within the scope of the *de minimis Regulation*, the Council will ensure a separation of the activities or distinction of costs. Only those sectors eligible for assistance under the *de minimis Regulation* will be assisted. Activities in the sectors excluded from the scope of the *de minimis Regulation* will not benefit from assistance under this aid scheme.

In terms of Article 5 of the *de minimis Regulation*, *de minimis* aid granted under this initiative may be cumulated with *de minimis* aid granted in accordance with Commission Regulation (EU) No 360/2012 up to the ceiling laid down in that Regulation. It may be cumulated with *de minimis* aid granted in accordance with other *de minimis regulations* up to the relevant ceiling fixed in terms of the *de minimis Regulation*.

De minimis aid approved under this initiative shall not be cumulated with State aid in relation to the same eligible costs or with State aid for the same risk finance measure, if such cumulation would exceed the highest relevant aid intensity or aid amount fixed in the specific circumstances of each case by a block exemption regulation or a decision adopted by the European Commission. *de minimis aid* which is not granted for or attributable to specific eligible costs may be cumulated with other State aid granted under a block exemption regulation or a decision adopted by the Commission.

4.1.2. Eligible Costs under Regulation B: [Commission Regulation \(EU\) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty](#), as amended by [Commission Regulation \(EU\) No 2017/1084 of 14 June 2017 amending Regulation \(EU\) No 651/2014 as regards aid for port and airport infrastructure, notification thresholds for aid for culture and heritage conservation and for aid for sport and multifunctional recreational infrastructures, and regional operating aid schemes for outermost regions and amending Regulation \(EU\) No 702/2014 as regards the calculation of eligible costs](#), by [Commission Regulation \(EU\) 2020/972 of 2 July 2020 amending Regulation \(EU\) No 1407/2013 as regards its prolongation and amending Regulation \(EU\) No 651/2014 as regards its prolongation and relevant adjustments](#), and by [Commission Regulation \(EU\) 2021/1237 of 23 July 2021 amending Regulation \(EU\) No 651/2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty](#), and as may be subsequently amended.

a) Personnel Costs

Wages of researchers and technical personnel, and other supporting staff, to the extent and for the duration that they are directly engaged on the approved research project.

i) All employees in respect of whom wage costs are claimed must be registered with Jobsplus and covered by a valid contract of employment in terms of the national legislation on employment.

ii) Personnel Costs related to Project Management are further limited to 10% of the project value.

iii) Students can be engaged on the project and paid an annual stipend of €6,000 when reading for a master's degree or an annual stipend of €8,000 when reading for a Doctoral degree. Note that for every engaged student, a full-time equivalent researcher must be employed by the applicant to specifically work on the awarded research project.

iv) Personnel costs are calculated as follows:

The hourly rate (z) is calculated using the formula:

$$\text{€ } z = (\text{basic salary} + \text{allowances}) / \text{yearly workable hours as per the employee's contract of employment with the applying entity.}$$
 The total hours worked on the approved research project by a full-time employee shall not exceed 1760 hours *per annum*.

Eligible salaries are pinned to the following hourly rates (including National Insurance and Inland Revenue and allowances) and personnel limits per project:

Role in Project	Hourly rates	Limits per project
Management or equivalent	Up to € 50.00/hour	Max 2 per project
Senior Researcher* or equivalent	Up to € 35.25/hour	No limits
Researcher* or equivalent	Up to € 25.25/hour	No limits
Operational, technician, research support assistant or equivalent	Up to € 13.85/hour	No limits

The rates stated in the table above are for the year 2022. For subsequent years a 5% increase per year is allowed.

*The term 'senior researcher' is to be used for a postdoctoral researcher with a specialist and high level of local and international experience in the field. Individuals possessing a high level of experience in industry can still be considered.

*The term 'researcher' is to be used for a Bachelor's, Master's or a Ph.D. degree holder and hence the hourly rate should be equivalent to the degree held by the relevant individual.

Personnel in salary brackets that are higher than those noted above will still only be reimbursed at the rates of the eligible brackets above depending on their role in the project. The hourly rates and the number of hours on the project per engaged individual, will have to be noted in the Budget Breakdown Form that will be requested if the proposal is invited to Stage 2. In the case of existing personnel, the names of the individuals will have to be noted in the Budget Breakdown Form and their respective CVs need to be submitted.

- v. Filled time sheets are to be retained for all personnel, including students, as proof of number of hours spent on the project. Documentation of the utilisation of the employees' internally funded research quota for other research activities is to be retained as this evidence may be required by the auditors.

b) Specialised equipment and research consumables

The costs and/or leasing of specialised equipment (including specialised software), to the extent and for the period used for the project, may be eligible. If a specialised laptop/PC is going to be claimed, please specify its usage and specifications.

Where such costs are not used for their full life for the project, only the depreciation costs corresponding to the life of the project, as calculated on the basis of generally accepted accounting principles are considered as eligible. The depreciation costs must be verified by a Certified Public Accountant.

The costs incurred to purchase research consumables. The overall value of consumables typically cannot exceed 30% of project value. Proposals with consumables exceeding 30% of the project value need to be discussed at application stage.

c) Costs of IP and Knowledge Transfer activities

Costs of knowledge transfer activities and patents bought or licensed from outside sources at arm's length conditions. Such activities should be discussed with the Council at application stage to ensure eligibility.

d) Other Operating Expenses

Other operating expenses incurred directly as a result of the project. These must be approved beforehand by the Council and must not fall under ineligible costs. Details shall need to be provided in the Application Form and ideally would have been discussed with the Council before submission.

e) Overheads

Overheads (also known as eligible indirect costs) that are incurred directly as a result of the project will be covered at 10% of direct eligible costs, excluding the costs of subcontracting as well as for items of equipment above €5000 and consumables above €5000.

Note that for equipment, the capping of €500 is per piece, while for consumables, the capping of €500 is for the total amount of consumables per partner.

f) Subcontracting Activities

Subcontracted activities shall be allowed up to a limit of 25% of the project value and must follow fair procurement procedures. Such activities should be discussed with the Council at application stage to ensure eligibility.

Aid Intensity

The aided part of the research and development project shall completely fall within one or more of the following categories:

- a) Fundamental research
- b) Industrial research
- c) Experimental development

The aid intensity for each beneficiary shall not exceed the following thresholds:

Type of Research	Small Undertaking	Medium Undertaking	Large Undertaking
Fundamental Research	100%	100%	100%
Industrial Research	70%	60%	50%
Industrial Research with an effective Collaboration and/or results are widely disseminated	80%	75%	65%
Experimental Development	45%	35%	25%
Experimental Development with an effective collaboration and/or results are widely disseminated	60%	50%	40%

The project involves effective collaboration if at least one of the following (a or b) requirements is satisfied:

- a. Project is being undertaken between undertakings among which at least one is an SME, or is carried out in at least two Member States, or in a Member State and in a Contracting Party of the EEA Agreement, and no single undertaking bears more than 70% of the eligible costs,

or

- b. Between an undertaking and one or more Research and Knowledge-dissemination Organisation/s, where the latter bear at least 10% of the eligible costs and have the right to publish their own research results.

For the results of the project to be considered as widely disseminated, this must be done through conferences, publications, open access repositories, or free or open-source software. The activities to be undertaken to satisfy these criteria must be clearly made visible in the Application Form.

The amount of assistance granted to participants will not exceed the thresholds laid down in Article 4(1) (i) of Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014.

Additional Provisions

Eligible Costs are to conform to the following and are subject to the final audit scrutiny:

- Any expenses incurred during the course of the project must be consistent with the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.
- In the event of purchases of any value, private entity partners are required to demonstrate adequate marketing testing.
- Public entity partners are to follow Public Procurement Regulations in their entity.
- Any calls for the recruitment of staff on a project is to be conducted in a strictly transparent manner and is to include a public call in the form of an online advert and interview process.
- Commercial transactions between any Applicants or consortium partners, or between any Applicants or a consortium partner and a company with similar shareholding to a consortium partner, is not allowed. All transactions need to be carried out in line with the arm's length principle outlined in Section 1.3.

Applicable State Aid Regulations and Obligations

The terms and conditions set out in Regulation B of these National Rules for Participation are in line with the [Commission Regulation \(EU\) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty](#), as amended by [Commission Regulation \(EU\) No 2017/1084 of 14 June 2017 amending Regulation \(EU\) No 651/2014 as regards aid for port and airport infrastructure, notification thresholds for aid for culture and heritage conservation and for aid for sport and multifunctional recreational infrastructures, and regional operating aid schemes for outermost regions and amending Regulation \(EU\) No 702/2014 as regards the calculation of eligible costs](#), by [Commission Regulation \(EU\) 2020/972 of 2 July 2020 amending Regulation \(EU\) No 1407/2013 as regards its prolongation and amending Regulation \(EU\) No 651/2014 as regards its prolongation and relevant adjustments](#), and by [Commission Regulation \(EU\) 2021/1237 of 23 July 2021 amending Regulation \(EU\) No 651/2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty](#), and as may be subsequently amended.

Assistance will not be granted if the aid is:

- i. related to export activities towards third countries or Member States, namely aid directly linked to quantities exported, to the establishment and operation of a distribution network or to the other current expenditure linked to export activity.
- ii. contingent upon the use of domestic in preference to imported goods.

- iii. granted in the sector of processing and marketing of agricultural products, in the following cases:
 - i. where the amount of the aid is fixed on the basis of the price or quantity of such products purchased from primary producers or put on the market by the undertakings concerned;
 - ii. where the aid is conditional on being partly or entirely passed on to primary producers.
- iv. granted in favour of a beneficiary which is subject to an outstanding recovery order following a previous Commission decision declaring an aid granted by Malta illegal and incompatible with the internal market.
- v. granted in favour of an undertaking in difficulty defined in terms of the Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014, unless the undertaking was not in difficulty on 31 December 2019 but then became an 'undertaking in difficulty' in the period from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2021.

Aid approved by the Corporation in terms of these National Rules for Participation will be suspended until the undertaking has reimbursed old, unlawful and incompatible aid that is subject to a recovery.

Rules on *cumulation of aid* shall be in line with Article 8 of the Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17th June 2014.

In determining whether the notification thresholds and the maximum aid intensities are respected, the total amount of State aid for the aided activity or project or undertaking shall be taken into account.

Where Union funding centrally managed by the institutions, agencies, joint undertakings or other bodies of the Union that is not directly or indirectly under the control of the Member State is combined with State aid, only the latter shall be considered for determining whether notification thresholds and maximum aid intensities or maximum aid amounts are respected, provided that the total amount of public funding granted in relation to the same eligible costs does not exceed the most favourable funding rate laid down in the applicable rules of Union law.

Aid granted under this incentive may only be cumulated with:

- a) any other State aid, as long as those measure concern different identifiable eligible costs,
- b) any other State aid, in relation to the same eligible costs, partly or fully overlapping, only if such cumulation does not exceed the highest aid intensity or aid amount applicable to the aid under Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014.

Aid awarded under these National Rules for Participation shall not be cumulated with any *de minimis* aid in respect of the same eligible costs if such cumulation would result in an aid intensity exceeding those laid down in these Incentive Guidelines.

For any individual aid awarded in excess of €500,000 (or for beneficiaries active in primary agricultural production, each individual aid award for such production exceeding €60 000 and for beneficiaries active in the fishery and aquaculture sector, each individual aid award exceeding €30 000), the details of the beneficiary, the aid awarded, and the project details shall be published as provided for in Article 9 of the General Block Exemption Regulation.

4.2 Ineligible Costs

The following expenditure shall be considered as ineligible costs:

- Expenses related to loans, interest, etc
- Recoverable value added tax.
- Expenses which are recoverable through other funding mechanisms.
- Re-purchase of equipment originally procured through other funding mechanisms.
- Purchase of equipment from partners or their subsidiaries.

- Opportunity costs related to foregone production and production downtime arising from the allocation of resources to the Project.
- Any activity related to the reproduction of a commercial product or process by a physical examination of an existing system or from plans, blueprints, detailed specifications, or publicly available information.
- Standard office equipment.
- Personnel hours for travelling.
- Travel and Subsistence is an ineligible cost in relation to applications submitted under Regulation B
- Any other costs not listed down in Section 4.1.1 and 4.1.2. Any line items not seen to be compliant with the nature of the programme will be subtracted from the grant.

5. Evaluation

Submission of applications from the Maltese and Chinese applicants will be checked for eligibility by MCST and MOST respectively. The Lead Applicant will be required to submit a copy of the **Application Form and corresponding Annexes** to the Council which may be downloaded from the Council's website or by contacting the Council. Any discrepancies on either side or the failure to fulfill all requirements of the call will result in the overall proposal being ineligible.

MCST may undertake a due diligence exercise through its contractors for the purpose of administrative compliance. Further assurances, such as bank guarantees, may be required at the discretion of MCST.

Pre-proposals will undergo a thorough eligibility check to ensure that:

- The project is aligned with the priority area/s.
- The application form and all supporting documentation is duly and correctly filled in.

If, at pre-proposal stage, the number of eligible proposals is more than four times the number of the projects to be funded (i.e. oversubscription rate >4), it is at the discretion of MCST to go through a first round of scientific evaluation before proceeding to the second stage of the evaluation process.

Applicants that satisfy the eligibility criteria will be invited, by MCST and MOST respectively, to submit a full proposal in accordance with the Stage 2 application process.

In the Stage 2 Application process, applicants will have the chance to elaborate on the proposed project idea that was introduced in the pre-proposal. The full proposals will be evaluated independently by the Maltese and Chinese sides.

Full proposals will be evaluated at national level according to the following criteria:

- Scientific Excellence.
- Research Methodology – including work package details, risk management, distribution of work between partners as well envisaged timelines.
- Appropriateness of requested budget with respect to methods and expected results.
- Impact – including post-project plans and industrial benefits.
- Competence and expertise of the research team/s (including CV's).
- Strength of the partnership and benefits of proposed scientific collaboration.
- Quality of the Cooperation and Intellectual Property Agreements.

Preference will be given to:

- Proposals involving more than one Maltese partner, and/or,

- Proposals that offer collaborative opportunities for scientific breakthrough research and/or,
- Proposals having a potential for strong commercial synergies and industrial impact.

MCST and MOST will agree on a common ranking list and move forward to inform all applicants with the outcome of the Call.

For applications submitted under Regulation B of these National Rules for Participation, expert evaluators shall be appointed to confirm, or otherwise, the proposed Research and Development type chosen by the applicant, as per the respective definitions of Fundamental Research, Industrial Research and Experimental Development. Definitions can be found in Section 1.3 of these National Rules for Participation. The aid intensity and grant amount will be awarded accordingly.

6. Post Selection Process

6.1 The Grant Agreement

For each project approved for funding, a **Grant Agreement** shall be signed between the successful national entities of the consortium and MCST. This Agreement will act as the basis for project funding and will regulate the transfer of funds to National beneficiaries based on these regulations.

Hard copies of the Grant Agreement must be signed by the beneficiary/ies within one (1) week from the date on which the beneficiary/ies receives them. The beneficiary/ies must ensure that the respective legal representative/s are available to endorse the Grant Agreement within 1 week timeframe. Failure to endorse the Grant Agreement within the stipulated timeframe may result in a withdrawal of the offer for funding.

The Principle Investigators from the Maltese and Chinese sides are to ensure that a common start date is applied to all partners following guidance from the funding bodies. This will ensure that project timelines are synchronised.

MCST reserves the right not to proceed with signing any National Grant Agreement in the event that it results that doing so would be too high an exposure risk to MCST.

The Project Contact Point must provide two (2) images related to the project and an abstract upon signing the Grant Agreement. These will be used to publicise the award.

6.2 Start Date and End Date

The project will start on a pre-determined date as agreed by all the respective parties and determined in the Grant Agreement, in line with Section 3.1 of these National Rules for Participation.

In view of the particular nature of the Grant Agreement, the said agreement may not be signed simultaneously by all parties but will be signed by all the parties separately. Each party will signify the date of signing and the Grant Agreement will come into force on the date on which the final signature is made thereon (hereinafter the "Agreement Date").

Between the Agreement Date and the Start Date, the Project Contact should ensure that all activities required for a smooth project start are completed.

To be eligible for funding, all expenses must be incurred between the Start Date and the End Date of the Project.

6.3 Double Funding

Funding under this scheme is made available on the basis that the Beneficiary would not have benefited and will not benefit from any other grant or financial incentive of whatever nature, applied for and/or utilised for the same scope as that subject of the funding requested under this scheme. Provided that, in the case where the application covers work that is part of a larger project, the Applicant must submit a table as an appendix to the application form that shows a comprehensive list of the items of work and the source of funding for each item.

The Applicant will be required to sign a declaration to this effect and authorising MCST to exchange essential information related to the project with other funding agencies, both local and overseas, for any necessary checks. Any occurrence of double funding should be communicated in writing to the Unit Director prior to the signing of the Grant Agreement.

6.4 Project Extensions

Time extension requests are unlikely to be accepted unless these are due to extenuating circumstances that are deemed by MCST as having been unavoidable by the partners following all efforts and best practice project management. In exceptional cases, even though MCST may deem a request for extension as valid, this would need to be endorsed by MOST, and vice versa. If a common agreement is not reached between the funding bodies, the request will automatically be declined.

All projects shall need to be finalised as indicated in the Grant Agreement of awarded projects in order to ensure that funding remains eligible.

7. Funding, Management and Progress Monitoring

7.1 Allocation and Disbursement of Funding

Following the termination of the project or expiry of the Grant Agreement, the Project Contact will be required to submit a Final Technical Project Report for the whole project, thus covering the work undertaken.

For the purpose of funding and reporting, a project submission shall be divided into a maximum of two (2) Stages. Each Stage shall be of a maximum twelve (12) month duration. No more than two (2) Stages are permissible. Funding for any one (1) Stage shall not exceed 80% of the total project financial contribution due. Total financial contribution over the lifetime of the project shall not exceed the funding limit as established in the Grant Agreement, irrespective of actual expenditure.

The periodic funding will be allocated according to the following schedule:

1. For the first Stage, MCST will make an initial advance payment of 100% of the due financial contribution in relation to that particular Stage. This will be calculated on the Applicant(s)'s component of projected expenditure for that Stage and include both direct and indirect costs.

In the case of a single-Stage project (one 12 month period), MCST will make an advance payment to the applicant equivalent to 80% of the due financial contribution calculated on the projected costs. This will include both direct and indirect eligible costs.

2. At the end of the first Stage, the Project Contact will be required to submit a Technical Stage Report and a Financial Stage Report to MCST with details of actual expenditure over the past stage, together with an updated forecast of projected expenditure for the following stage. The stage report

has to be approved by MCST before moving to the next stage. This should be in line with the templates for stage and final reports as provided by MCST within the Grant Agreement.

3. For the subsequent Stage, MCST will calculate the due financial contribution in relation to that particular Stage based on the Financial Stage Report submitted. This contribution will be calculated as forecast eligible expenditure, adjusted for any overspend or underspend of the preceding Stage.
4. Except for the final Stage (or for single Stage projects) of the project, MCST will make an advance payment equivalent to 100% of the due financial contribution in relation to that particular Stage, calculated as in bullet (3) above.
5. For the final Stage of the project (or in the case of single Stage projects), MCST will make an advance payment of up to 80% of the due financial contribution calculated as in bullet (3) above. However, MCST shall retain 20% of the total project grant to be transferred only upon successful completion of the project. MCST reserves the right to deduct dues in the absence of the delivery of activities, work packages, deliverables, in part or in full, and where the appropriate standards of reporting have not been achieved.
6. Following the termination of the project or expiry of the Grant Agreement, the Project Contact Point will be required to submit a Final Technical Project Report together with a Final Financial Report for the whole project, thus covering the work and expenditure undertaken. The Final Financial Report needs to be audited by a certified auditor appointed by the Applicant and approved by MCST once submitted. The audit should determine the total eligible costs and compare these to the funds forwarded. MCST reserves the right to appoint an auditor to audit the Project Financial Audit as submitted. Failure to submit a timely audited Final Financial Report may result in MCST recovering all funds disbursed across the project.
7. As soon as the verifications and audits are finalised and cleared, MCST will release the retention money due. In the case of overpayment, the Applicant will be required to refund the under-spend amount to MCST within a specific timeframe, or as agreed to with MCST.

MCST reserves the right to alter the funding parameters as deemed appropriate.

7.2 Dissemination & Externalisation

Any articles and text material related to the project should include the words:

'Project <Project Name> received funding from the Malta Council for Science and Technology (MCST) and the Ministry for Science and Technology of the People's Republic of China (MOST), through the SINO-MALTA Fund 2022 (Science and Technology Cooperation).'

Any websites or printed material related to the project should also include MCST's logo.

During the term of Agreement, the Applicant shall include and prominently feature MCST in any publicity related to the project.

All publicity material shall be vetted and approved by MCST before publication and should make mention of the initiative and MCST. In the case where printed material is published without a mention of the initiative and MCST, the Applicant shall be obliged to publish a correction at its own expense in the subsequent issue of the publication.

7.3 Reporting

On the last day of a stage, an End of Stage Technical Report is to be presented to MCST. An End of Stage Financial Report is then to be submitted within one month from the end of the stage.

On the last day of the project, the Project Contact is required to submit a Final Technical Project Report. The final audited Financial Report covering the work and expenditure undertaken during the entire project shall need to be submitted by not later than four (4) weeks from the stipulated end of project date.

MCST reserves the right to request additional project-related information.

Approval of the stage reports allows the beneficiary to proceed with the next stage of the project. Approval of the final reports permits the release of the retention.

In the event that a project is found to be in breach of the Grant Agreement or to materially depart from the submitted application, MCST reserves the right to discontinue the award and the applicant may be required to refund the Grant in part or in full. In any such event, MCST may also exclude an applicant from participating in future calls.

The Project Contact Point shall set a schedule for quarterly progress meetings with MCST to take place as part of the reporting work package.

The templates provided by MCST should be used to develop the End of Stage Technical and Financial Reports as well as the Final Technical and Financial Reports.

The End of Stage Technical and Financial Reports shall contain the following details:

- (i) An account of project activity and achievements over the past stage compared with the originally submitted application;
- (ii) An account of actual expenditure over the past stage compared with the originally submitted budgeted expenditure. All financial reports must be signed by the person responsible for the financial management, and assembled as per the instructions in the Grant Agreement;
- (iii) An updated forecast of project activity and projected achievements for the following stage;
- (iv) An updated forecast of projected expenditure for the following stage;

The beneficiary shall appoint an auditor to conduct a detailed financial audit, following the completion of the project. The audit will consist of, at least, the following checks and based on the template provided by MCST:

- Accounts
- Physical inventory
- Timesheets and payslips / employee contracts
- Receipts for all equipment and consumables
- Bank statements for the Project Account

MCST reserves the right to appoint an auditor to audit the Project Financial Audit as submitted.

7.4 Accountability

The beneficiaries shall open a specific project bank account and records, clearly distinguishable from their other accounting records. All relevant expenses must be recorded in these accounts. All funding payments by MCST must be received in the project bank account.

Eligible expenses must have been determined in accordance with the usual accounting and management principles and practices of the applicant. Direct eligible costs must be backed up with the relevant documentation as specified in the Grant Agreement.

7.5 Supervening Circumstances

The Project Contact is obliged to immediately advise in writing MCST of any internal or extraneous significant event which might affect the validity or implementation of the project. This obligation applies to the entire period between the submission of the Project Application and the completion of the project.

MCST, at its own discretion, shall either give such directives as it deems necessary for the furtherance of the project or re-assess the project in its entirety accordingly.

Failure on the part of the Project Contact to respect this obligation may lead MCST to suspend or terminate funding for the project and request a refund of funds already paid out.

If during the course of a project a partner withdraws from the Project Consortium, the Applicant will immediately advise MCST in writing. In this event, the relevant articles of the Project Consortium Agreement and the National Grant Agreement shall apply.

7.6 Default

If the implementation of a project becomes impossible or if the Applicant fails to implement it, MCST shall be entitled to collect refunds of money already paid out.

7.7 Interpretation of Rules

This document endeavours to establish comprehensive and unambiguous rules governing participation in this initiative. However, should circumstances arise where the rules are inadequate, unclear, ambiguous, or conflicting, MCST shall exercise its discretion in the interpretation of the rules through the setting up of an *ad hoc* committee.

8. Confidentiality of Submissions

Unless otherwise indicated, all project application submissions except for the abstract shall be treated in strict confidence.

The data collected by the Council via the application for the aid and its subsequent processing by the Council to evaluate data subject's request for aid under the Scheme is in line with:

- i. The National Rules for Participation;
- ii. Commission Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 of 17th June 2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty as amended by Commission Regulation (EU) No 2017/1084 of 14 June 2017 amending Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 as regards aid for port and airport infrastructure, notification thresholds for aid for culture and heritage conservation and for aid for sport and multifunctional recreational infrastructures, and regional operating aid schemes for outermost regions and amending Regulation (EU) No 702/2014 as regards the calculation of eligible costs, by Commission Regulation (EU) 2020/972 of 2 July 2020 amending Regulation (EU) No 1407/2013 as regards its prolongation and amending Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 as regards its prolongation and relevant adjustments, and by Commission Regulation (EU) 2021/1237 of 23 July 2021 amending Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 declaring certain categories of aid compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty, and as may be subsequently amended (hereinafter referred to as the 'General Block Exemption Regulation' (for projects implemented in line with Regulation B of these National Rules for Participation)).

- iii. COMMISSION REGULATION (EU) No 1407/2013 of 18 December 2013 on the application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union to *de minimis* aid (the *de minimis* Regulation). This has now been amended by Commission Regulation (EU) 2020/972 of 2 July 2020, amending Regulation (EU) No 1407/2013 as regards its prolongation and amending Regulation (EU) No 651/2014 as regards its prolongation and relevant adjustments (for projects implemented in line with Regulation A of these National Rules for Participation).
- iv. Data Protection Act, Chapter 586 of the Laws of Malta and Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data and repealing Directive 95/46/EC (General Data Protection Regulation).
- v. The legitimate basis to process personal data submitted by the data subject by virtue of his/her written application for aid is Regulation 6 (1)(b) of the General Data Protection Regulation ("GDPR"), as 'processing is necessary in order to take steps at the request of the data subject prior to entering into a contract'.

Further information may be found within the application form.