



## **SINO-MALTA Fund 2023 Call**

**National Rules for Participation – For Public Entities and Public Research and Knowledge-Dissemination Organisations that do not carry out an economic activity within the meaning of [Article 107 TFEU](#).**

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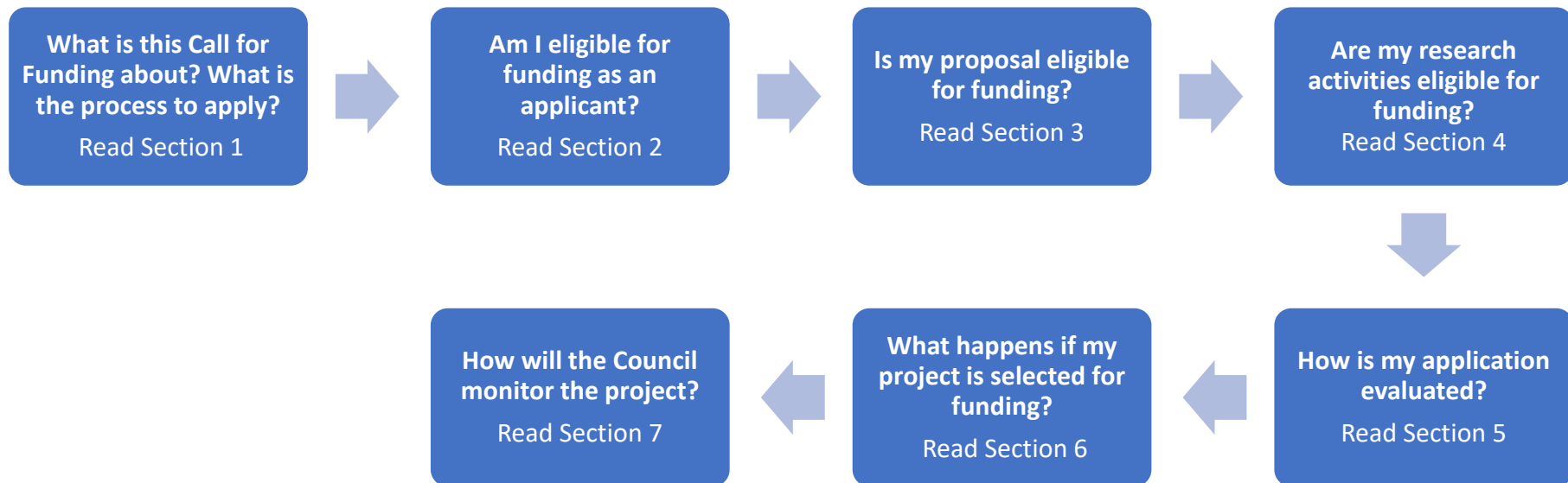
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## Guide to this document

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# 1. Introduction

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The Malta Council for Science and Technology (referred to as the 'Council' hereafter) is administering the **SINO-MALTA Fund 2023 Call** for and on behalf of the Foundation for Science and Technology and is located at Villa Bighi, Kalkara, KKR 1320, Malta.

The Call for Proposals for the Science and Technology Cooperation – SINO-MALTA Fund for 2023 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 Definitions

<b>Applicant</b>	The term refers to any representative of a local entity that is eligible for participation in a Project in terms of these National Rules for Participation and who applies for funding under this joint initiative.
<b>Arm's length</b>	The term 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.
<b>Beneficiary</b>	The term refers to the Applicant whose project has been awarded and hence will be receiving funding.
<b>Council</b>	The term refers to the Malta Council for Science and Technology on behalf of the Foundation for Science and Technology.
<b>Due Diligence</b>	The term refers to an investigation of a business or person prior to signing the Grant Agreement.
<b>Eligible direct costs</b>	The term refers to 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 capped at the approved requested funding value.

<b>End Date</b>	The term refers to the date when the Project Period, having commenced on the Start Date, expires.
<b>Evaluators</b>	The term refers to consultants who responded to MCST's Call for Applications to provide evaluation services for submissions made through this Programme.
<b>In-kind</b>	The term refers to any non-monetary contribution, such as a service or a good.
<b>Innovation</b>	The term 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.
<b>Legal Entity</b>	The term refers to any entity created within the European Union, having an operating base in Malta and which has legal personality, which may, acting under its own name, exercise rights and be subject to obligations.
<b>Partner</b>	The term is defined as an entity within a consortium of a transnational project.
<b>Personnel costs</b>	The costs of researchers, technicians and other supporting staff to the extent employed on the relevant project or activity.
<b>Project Contact Point</b>	The term refers to the individual, appointed to act on behalf of the Applicant and who is responsible for communicating with the Council on the Project. The Project Contact Point(s) shall have the following responsibilities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To ensure effective execution of the project according to set timeframes and deliverables, as well as compliance with the obligations in terms of the Grant Agreement.</li> <li>• To compile Periodic and Final Technical/Financial Reports and ensure their timely submissions.</li> </ul>
<b>Principal Investigator</b>	The term refers to the lead researcher on behalf of the local Applicant / Beneficiary of a transnational project consortium. May be the same as the Project Coordinator and/or the Project Contact Point.
<b>Project Grant</b>	The term is defined as the granted funding provided by the Council.
<b>Project Period</b>	The term refers to the time required to execute the Project as indicated in the Grant Agreement.
<b>Project Value</b>	The term refers to the project budget needed by the Applicant to carry out the project, including any co-financing.
<b>Public Entity</b>	The term refers to any Ministry, Department, Entity, Authority, Public Commission, Public Sector Foundation or a similar organisation that does not carry out an economic activity within the meaning of Article 107 TFEU and that exercises public power, or else acts in its own capacity as public authority, where the activity in question forms part of the essential function of the State or is connected with those functions by its nature, its aim and the rules to which it is subject. However, the classification of a particular entity as an undertaking depends entirely on the nature of its

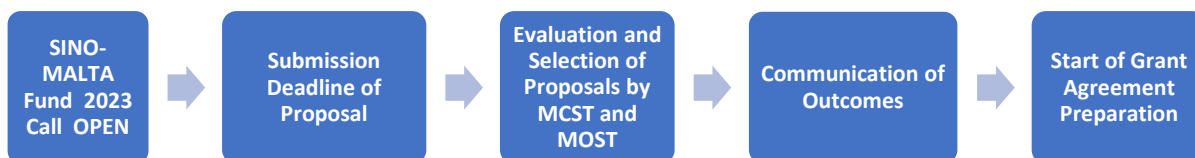
	<p>activities, and the overriding criterion of consideration is whether it carries out an economic activity or not, e.g., an entity that is formally part of the public administration may nevertheless have to be regarded as an undertaking within the meaning of Article 107(1) of the Treaty. Thus, an entity that carries out both economic and non-economic activities is to be regarded as an undertaking only with regards to the former. In this case, if the economic activity can be separated from the exercise of public powers, then that entity acts as an undertaking in relation to that activity and the financing, the costs and the revenues of that economic activity shall be accounted for separately from the other non-commercial activities.</p> <p>If an economic activity cannot be separated from the exercise of public power, the activities exercised by that entity as a whole, remain connected with the exercise of those public powers and therefore fall outside the notion of an undertaking.</p>
<p><b>Research and Development</b></p>	<p>This term 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 to acquire new knowledge, primarily directed towards a specific practical aim or objective, and includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. <b>Fundamental Research</b> 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.</li> <li>ii. <b>Industrial Research</b> 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.</li> <li>iii. <b>Experimental Development</b> 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.</li> </ul> <p>Experimental development may comprise prototyping, demonstrating, piloting, testing and validation of new or improved products, processes or services in environments representative of</p>

	<p>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.</p>
<p><b>Research and Knowledge-Dissemination Organisation (RKDO)</b></p>	<p>The term refers to 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.</p>
<p><b>Start Date</b></p>	<p>The term refers to the date is stated in the Grant Agreement for the official start of the project.</p>
<p><b>Start of Works</b></p>	<p>The term refers to the earlier of either the start of 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.</p>
<p><b>Subcontracted Activity</b></p>	<p>The term refers to any activity related to the project, (including but not limited to consultancy), which is not carried out directly by a Partner or its employees but is carried out by any third party (local or foreign) individual, company, partnership, or entity under whatsoever terms and conditions.</p>



## 1.2 Call Process and Snapshot

The Call process consists of one (1) stage as per the flow chart below:



### Proposal

Malta-based Lead Applicants are required to follow the latest version of the National Rules and check their eligibility as Applicants ([Section 2](#)), check the eligibility of their project proposal ([Section 3](#)) and costings ([Section 4](#)) and to submit an Application Form accompanied by the relevant documentation ([Section 1.4](#)).

N.B: Applications must be submitted before the Start of Works (see definition in [Section 1.1](#)).

The project proposal will be evaluated, and Applicants will be duly informed whether their proposal was successful or not.

The selection and funding of proposals under this Programme shall be on a competitive basis.

## 1.3 Call Snapshot

<b>Call Website</b>	<a href="https://mcst.gov.mt/science-technology-cooperation-sino-malta-fund/">https://mcst.gov.mt/science-technology-cooperation-sino-malta-fund/</a>
<b>Project Consortia</b>	<b>At least one eligible legal entity operating in Malta and one eligible entity in China</b>
<b>Research areas</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Health, with a focus on:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Cancer,</li> <li>○ Cellular therapy,</li> <li>○ Drug development,</li> <li>○ Traditional Chinese medicine,</li> <li>○ Digital tools to support healthcare.</li> </ul> </li> <li>ii. Green and Blue Economy Transitions, with a focus on:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Renewable energy,</li> <li>○ Sustainable mobility,</li> <li>○ Smart manufacturing,</li> <li>○ Marine and Maritime technologies.</li> </ul> </li> <li>iii. Digital technologies,</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Digital technologies may remain general as a theme,</li> <li>○ Digital technologies as a cross-cutting theme may be equally supported.</li> </ul>
<b>TRL levels supported</b>	1-7
<b>Project Duration</b>	Up to 24 months
<b>Max. funds that can jointly be requested by Maltese national partner/s per project</b>	€200,000
<b>Submission deadline of Proposal</b>	27 <sup>th</sup> June 2023 (23:59 CET)
<b>Submission MCST email</b>	<a href="mailto:international.mcst@gov.mt">international.mcst@gov.mt</a>

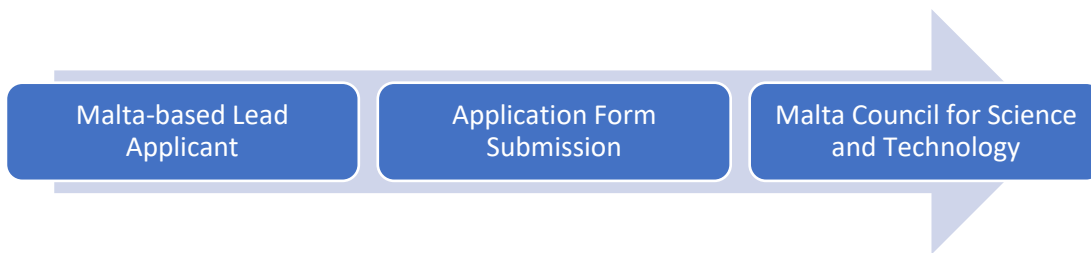
## 1.4 Application Submission Details

The Applicant should ensure complete compliance to these ‘Rules for Participation’ prior to applying to this Call. No amendments or negotiations are allowed after submission, unless requested by the Council. Any unapproved deviations will result in the failure of the application during the administrative check. The content of the Application Form will be directly appended to the Grant Agreements for successful applicants and will constitute the Grant Agreement technical obligations.

The legal representative of the participating organisation of the applicant must sign off on the application and enter the date of signature in blue ink (not electronically). The legal representative of the applying organisation must also sign off all relevant declarations found within the Appendices of the Application Form.

The proposal will request an in-depth account of the implementation methodology, as well as a detailed proposed budget breakdown. A complete Application Form must be submitted by the Malta-based Lead Applicant (on behalf of the Project Consortium) to MCST via email on [international.mcst@gov.mt](mailto:international.mcst@gov.mt). Corresponding Annexes may be sent by the Project Partners directly to MCST via email.

*It should be noted that attachments larger than 20MB shall be automatically rejected by the system without notification. The Applicant may make use of cloud storage transfer, but it is up to the Applicant to check that all documents have been received by the Council within the deadline. It is the responsibility of the Applicant to ensure that a confirmation of receipt is provided. Failure by any of the Principal Investigators to submit the application form to the national funding agency will render the entire proposal ineligible.*



Deadline for submission of Application Form:  
**27/06/2023, 23:59 CET**

### Submission Documents

- Only complete Application Forms submitted by the deadline shall be considered.
- All documentation submitted must be in English.
- Each proposal will be checked for administrative eligibility before it is considered for scientific evaluation. This means that failure of one of the consortium partners to meet the eligibility criteria may cause the entire project to be rejected.
- In case of multiple submissions of the same application in the same selection round the last version submitted before the deadline will be that considered for evaluation.

### Documents required for submission

Applicants need to submit an **Application Form** accompanied by the necessary **declarations** in the form of Annexes to the Application Form. These documents will be reviewed during the administrative eligibility check, and consist of the following:

- Proposal application form in MS Word (.docx) and a signed scanned copy in PDF format.
- Declarations that the eligible Applicant is a public entity and/or public RKDO that does not carry out an economic activity within the meaning of Article 107 TFEU. Where applicable, declarations of any indirect state aid, when an eligible undertaking (as defined in [Section 1.1](#) of the National Rules for Participation – State Aid) is a partner in the same project consortium as a public entity and/or public research and knowledge dissemination organisation that does not carry out an economic activity within the meaning of Article 107 TFEU.
- *Curricula Vitae* of Principal Investigator and other key researchers highlighting R&I related experience. These should clearly establish that the Consortium has the potential to carry out the assigned project tasks/activities.
- Overall Detailed Budget Breakdown Form (all Applicants).
- Approved Cooperation Agreement signed by all partners and an approved IP agreement signed by all partners (all Applicants).

Other forms of documentation can be requested during the Call Process or during the Grant Agreement Preparation phase.

## 1.5 National Contact Point

Correspondence from **Malta-based** entities should be directed to:

Tel: +356 23602126

E-mail: [international.mcst@gov.mt](mailto:international.mcst@gov.mt)

Correspondence from **China-based** entities should be directed to:

Tel: +861068598010

E-mail: [zfj@cstec.org.cn](mailto:zfj@cstec.org.cn)

*For escalated matters kindly contact Dr. Maria Azzopardi – Deputy Director (Internationalisation) on [maria.azzopardi.2@gov.mt](mailto:maria.azzopardi.2@gov.mt)*

## 2. Applicant Eligibility

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### 2.1 Eligibility of Entity

- Any Public Entity or Public Research and Knowledge-dissemination Organisation, registered in Malta, that does not carry out an economic activity within the meaning of [Article 107 TFEU](#) 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.
- Any Applicants that at the time of proposal submission are considered by MCST to be non-compliant with respect to Grant Agreement obligations, or outside approved project timelines, on other active projects funded by the Council, may be immediately deemed ineligible at application stage. Similarly, should Applicants become non-compliant during the Call process, they will not be awarded funding under this programme.
- 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, partners or persons holding and / or exercising a controlling power in any other legal entity (Malta-based or otherwise) which will have been at any time declared as non-compliant or defaulting on any other contract or agreement entered with the Council and remained in default, shall be automatically declared as inadmissible.
- Applicants under the Non-State Aid (Option B) regime must understand that, should they be found to be in breach of the conditions for being exempt from State Aid regulations, the Managing Authority will enforce the retrieval of disbursed funds with interest, in part or in full, as the case may necessitate.
- The Applicant also undertakes to comply faithfully and immediately with any decision of the European Commission or a Maltese Judicial Authority declaring Article 107(1) TFEU to be applicable to this Agreement.
- MCST also reserves the right to terminate any applications that have followed in part or in full the Non-State Aid (Option B) regime, should MCST not be satisfied with the segregation of work packages, activities, tasks and deliverables, as well as budgets.

### 2.2 Funding Consideration

- The financial contribution to a Partner where State Aid is not applicable shall be 100% of the eligible costs incurred by that Partner.
- All applications should be accompanied by the relevant declaration forms. Applicants should quantify any possible indirect State aid to undertakings through public research and knowledge dissemination organisations and public entities in cases of collaboration with undertakings or contract research or research services on behalf of undertakings.

## 3. Proposal Eligibility

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The following criteria are mandatory and must be fulfilled when applying for this Call.

### 3.1 Types of Projects

- The types of projects that are eligible within this Call encompass Fundamental Research, Industrial Research and Experimental Development.
- The proposed research project must be consistent with the scope of this Call determined in both the MCST and MOST National Rules for Participation. Each side (Malta-based partners and China-based partners) must adhere to their respective National Rules for Participation, to ensure eligibility. Ineligibility of one side of the consortium, will result in an ineligible proposal overall.
- The proposed research project should be novel and not correspond with ongoing or completed projects funded by other instruments, programmes, or projects.
- Malta-based applicants can propose projects of [Technology Readiness Levels \(TRLs\)](#) between TRL 1 and 7.<sup>1</sup>
- The proposed research project 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.
- Only proposals that have an approved cooperation agreement signed by all partners and an approved IP agreement signed by all partners will be considered. Furthermore, proposals on either side must bear matching thematic areas and the applications on either side are to be complementary.
- 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.

### 3.2 Alignment to Scope

The proposal should be consistent with the scope and objectives of this Call (Refer to [Section 1](#)). The proposed project must relate to one (1) or more Research Areas as detailed in [Section 1.3](#).

### 3.3 Eligibility of Consortium Composition

- 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 Malta-based applicants is highlighted within this document, whereas the eligibility of China-based applicants is published within the MOST Call.

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that usage of TRLs are only indicative, as the SINO-MALTA Fund is not limited to commercially viable technologies.

- 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.
- In every proposal, the PI from the Maltese 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.
- Malta-based Applicants should check their national application submission requirements in [Section 1.4](#) and their eligibility in [Section 2](#).

### 3.4 Budget and Grant Value

- The National Budget for this Call is of **€600,000**.
- The maximum amount that national partner/s can jointly request per project is **€200,000**.
- Awarded proposals will receive periodic financing that will be regulated through a Grant Agreement establishing the terms and conditions governing the financing and implementation of the project. Refer to [Section 7](#).

### 3.5 Project Duration

The maximum project duration is **24 months**.

### 3.6 Project Contact Point(s)

The Lead Applicant shall appoint a Project Contact Point. The Project Contact Point(s)'s responsibilities are as defined in [Section 1.1](#).

### 3.7 Deliverables

Deliverables are tangible outcomes of the project and must be submissible. They must be proposed between the start and end date of the project. Deliverables not submitted within the stipulated deadlines will not be considered. If the project is awarded, evidence should be

submitted for each deliverable mentioned in the application form to ensure that it has been attained successfully. A milestone refers to a key deliverable or achievement within the project.

It is recommended that file storing and synchronization service e.g., Google Drive or Dropbox, is set up and shared with the Council to support the project monitoring process. The shared folder should reflect the structure of deliverables provided in the application form i.e., every deliverable should have its own sub-folder with evidence saved within.

The project work plan must give sufficient details of foreseen activities and are to be included as deliverables in the project proposal. The sub-sections below list the Mandatory deliverables that are required by the Council and a non-exhaustive list of Recommended deliverables that may be considered.

The Beneficiaries shall always cooperate with the Council in the promotion of the Programme by delivering presentations about the Awarded Project or through other reasonable means at the request of the Council.

### Mandatory Deliverables

- Publish **at least two (2) articles per year** in local newspapers, online platforms, or magazines including an acknowledgement to the Council and any other acknowledgements as stipulated in [Section 7.2](#). These should not contain intellectual property but should raise awareness about the project and its benefits. A copy of this/these should be presented to the Council within two weeks of publication. Other forms of publications may be considered.
- Organise **at least one (1) Half Day Dissemination** event to be held at ESPLORA (unless directed otherwise by the Council) during the final months of the project.
- Report on project progress through reports and meetings as per [Section 7.3](#) and in line with the templates provided by the Council.

### Recommended Deliverables

- During the duration of the project, publish at least one (1) peer-reviewed research paper based on the work carried out throughout the Project in an open-access journal. The paper is to include an acknowledgement to the Council and any other acknowledgements as stipulated in [Section 7.2](#).
- Oral presentation/s at international conference/s on the work carried out through the Project.
- 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).
- Additional project dissemination activities including but not limited to project exhibitions, workshops, and events (preferably open access). Examples include



Science in the City, R&I cafes, Enterprise European Network events, project exhibitions and so on.

- Registration of patents or other Intellectual Property Rights stemming from the Project, in Malta as well as in any other country, on the work carried out throughout the project (or any tangible outcomes during the patenting process).
- The formation of any spin-off entities that are envisioned. Kindly highlight if these spin-offs will also be licencing any IP generated.
- Commercial commitments such as technology innovations to be included in a partner's existing product or service.
- Commercial commitments such as technology transfer licences.

In the case of publications, these should take place during the duration of the project, and where available and possible, deposited in the entity's repository, including an acknowledgement to the Council. In cases where open access-fees were budgeted for, it is the responsibility of the beneficiary to account for the time it would take for the invoicing and payment of that fee.

Provided further that if the Beneficiary claims that such an attempt to publish this research paper will have been unsuccessful, the Beneficiary must prove to the satisfaction of the Managing Authority and through the submission of sufficient and adequate documentary evidence that such an attempt to publish a research paper in terms of the requirements of this Clause was in fact made. Sufficient and adequate documentary evidence includes evidence that the paper was actually submitted for publication and documentary evidence that the paper was rejected for publication. If the Managing Authority is satisfied with the evidence provided, then the Beneficiary will not be held in breach of this particular obligation.

A copy of all publications must be presented to MCST before any retention is disbursed.

The Council appreciates that the attainment of these deliverables may depend on externalities. The Consortium is expected to take these into consideration when submitting their application forms. **Although these deliverables are non-compulsory, if quoted as committed deliverables in the Application stage, they must be adhered to.**

## 4. List of Eligible Costs and Ineligible Costs

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A grant must not exceed the overall amount which is established at the time of the project selection based on the estimated eligible costs indicated in the budget breakdown form.

Eligible costs are costs actually incurred directly by the applicant during the lifetime of the project, and claimed by the beneficiary of a grant which meet all the following criteria:

- They are incurred between the Start Date and the End Date of the project.
- They are necessary for the implementation of the project as outlined in the project proposal which is the subject of the grant.
- They are identifiable, verifiable and being recorded in the accounting records of the beneficiary and determined according to the applicable accounting standards of Malta and according to the usual cost accounting practices of the beneficiary.
- They comply with the requirements of applicable tax and social legislation. They are reasonable, justified and comply with the principle of sound financial management, regarding economy and efficiency.
- 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 within the Definitions ([Section 1.1](#)).
- Any expenses incurred during the course of the Project must be consistent with the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. Any purchases must be carried out at "arm's length" conditions. Commercial transactions between Beneficiaries within the same Project are not allowed.

### 4.1 Eligible Costs

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

#### Personnel

Personnel costs include wages of employees (researchers, technical staff, other research supporting staff) directly engaged by the Applicant to the extent and for the duration of the proposed research project.

- All employees in respect of whom costs are claimed must be registered with the competent local authorities and covered by a valid contract of employment in terms of the national legislation to employment.

- The total claimed hours worked by a full-time employee shall not exceed 1720 hours *per annum*. Moreover, respecting the capping in relation to other funded hours claimed within other funded projects.
- Annual stipends of € 6,000 for students reading for a master’s degree or € 8,000 for students reading for a doctoral degree. In the case of a part-time Post-graduate degree, the respective stipend will be calculated pro-rata and at the discretion of the MCST. For every engaged student, a full-time equivalent researcher(s) must be employed by the Applicant.
- Personnel costs related to Project Management are capped at 10% of the total project value.
- Table 1 shows the eligible hourly rates (inclusive of National Insurance, Inland Revenue, and other allowances) and personnel limits per applicant. The personnel hourly rate is calculated using the following formula:

$$\text{€z} = (\text{gross basic salary} + \text{allowances}) / \text{yearly workable hours of the employee.}$$

Role in Project	Hourly rates in 2023	Hourly rates in 2024	Hourly rates in 2025	Limits per project
Management or equivalent	Up to €52.50/hour	Up to €55.13/hour	Up to €57.89/hour	Max 2 per project
Senior Researcher <sup>2</sup> or equivalent	Up to €37.01/hour	Up to €38.86/hour	Up to €40.80/hour	Max 2 per project
Researcher <sup>3</sup> or equivalent	Up to €26.51/hour	Up to €27.84/hour	Up to €29.23/hour	No limits
Operational, technician, research support assistant or equivalent	Up to €14.54/hour	Up to €15.27/hour	Up to €16.03/hour	No limits

The rates stated in the table above are for the years 2023-2025. For subsequent years a 5% increase per year is allowed. Kindly ensure that hourly rates are provided in the application form.

- 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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

- For personnel who are yet to be recruited for the project, applicants should submit a job description highlighting requirements of the role at the application stage.
- For personnel engaged by a Research Organisation - as recognized by the Council as per L.N 212 of 2018 - from third countries, the respective hosting agreement signed between the Research Organisation and the researcher/third country national, is required to be submitted to the Council.
- The hourly rates and the number of hours on the project per engaged individual, will have to be noted in the Budget Breakdown Form as requested at application stage. In the case of existing personnel, the names of the individuals will have to be noted in the Budget Breakdown Form and CVs are to be provided.
- **Timesheets are to be completed and 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 since this evidence may be required by the auditors.

### Instruments, Specialised Equipment and Research Consumables

These costs include the purchase/leasing of specialised equipment including software. An explanation of the relevance of the equipment in relation to the project, including specification where applicable, is required. If a specialised laptop/PC is to be purchased, please specify its usage and specifications.

These costs also include 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.

### Travel and Subsistence

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.

Type of Meeting	Number of persons funded	Comments
Consortium meeting	Max. of 2 persons per meeting	Within the project period.
International Conference	Max. of 2 persons per event	Max. of one conference every 6 months
'Other' project-related meetings	Max. of 2 persons per occasion	Need to be discussed and approved by the Council.

### Costs of IP and Knowledge Transfer Activities

These costs include the costs of knowledge transfer activities and patents bought or licensed from outside sources obtained at arm's length conditions. Such activities should be discussed with the Council before submission of the application to ensure eligibility.

### Subcontracted Activities

Subcontracted activities shall be allowed up to a limit of 25% of the project value. Such activities should be discussed with the Council before submission of the application to ensure eligibility.

Where a component of the project work is a Subcontracted Activity, the following considerations shall apply:

- The PI remains responsible for the timely delivery of the subcontracted tasks;
- The PI shall ensure that such a third party is selected in a manner which is transparent, fair and impartial. Partners shall ensure that there is no discrimination between bidders and that all bidders are treated equally and transparently in all calls for quotations.
- The PI should ensure that the attainment of any services or goods respect the procurement criteria listed in [Section 4](#).

### 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 be ineligible costs. Details shall need to be provided in the Application Form and ideally would have been discussed with the Council before submission to ensure eligibility.

### Overheads

Overheads (also known as eligible indirect costs) are costs that are incurred directly as a result of the project. These will be covered at **10%** of direct eligible costs claimed.

### Aid Intensity

The financial contribution to an Applicant under these Rules for Participation shall be 100% of the eligible costs incurred by that Partner.

Should at any point in time the Council or any other relevant entity deems that the project constitutes State Aid, the beneficiary will be required to follow State Aid Regulations and this in turn may or may not result in the recovery of funds.

## **4.2 Ineligible Costs**

The following shall be considered as a non-exhaustive list of ineligible costs:

- Expenses which are recoverable through other funding mechanisms, including recoverable value added tax.
- Re-purchase of equipment originally procured through other funding mechanisms.
- Personnel hours for travelling and/or overtime.
- Opportunity costs related to foregone production and production downtime arising from the allocation of resources to the Project.

- Standard office equipment and stationery.
- Purchase of equipment and services from partners or their subsidiaries.
- 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.
- Expenses related to loans, interest, etc.
- Any cost incurred to submit the project proposal.
- Any cost incurred before the start date and after the end date of the project.
- Any other costs not listed down in Sections 4.1

**Any line items not seen to be compliant with the nature of the programme will be subtracted from the grant.**

## 5. Evaluation

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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.

The Council may undertake a due diligence exercise through its contractors for the purpose of administrative compliance. Further assurances and documentation, such as bank guarantees and an updated financial documents, may be required at the discretion of the Council.

The 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.

The proposals will be evaluated independently by the Maltese and Chinese sides.

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

Any text within the submitted application, which is more than the prescribed maximum word count and/or page limits, shall be disregarded in the scientific evaluation process.

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

## 6. Post Selection Process

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### 6.1 The Grant Agreement

A Grant Agreement will be signed between the successful Applicant and the Council. This Agreement will serve as the basis for project funding and will regulate the transfer of funds to national beneficiaries. Hard copies of the Grant Agreement must be signed and endorsed by the respective legal representative(s) of the potential beneficiary within 15 days from the date on which the potential beneficiary receives them. Failure to endorse the Grant Agreement within the stipulated timeframe may result in the withdrawal of the offer for funding.

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.

The Council reserves the right not to proceed with signing any Grant Agreement if the Council deems that doing so would be too high an exposure risk.

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 by the Council to publicise the award.

### 6.2 Start Date and End Date

The project partners shall decide on a common Start Date for the project. This information needs to be communicated to both funding bodies, to ensure that the national contracts are synchronised to cover all periods of the project.

The pre-determined date as agreed will be stated in the Grant Agreement, in line with [Section 6.1](#). Successful projects are envisaged to start at the earliest possible date in 2024. 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.

In view of the nature of the Grant Agreement, the said agreement will 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 Point 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 Grant Amount

The acceptance of an application does not automatically lead to an award of value that is equal to the amount requested by the applicant. The funding requested may be reduced



based on the specific funding regulation applied. It should be noted that the grant amount foreseen by the agreement is a maximum which cannot be increased during Grant Agreement preparation with the Council.

## 6.4 Double Funding

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

By signing the Grant Agreement, the Applicant will be authorising the Council 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 Council, prior to the signing of the Grant Agreement and as may arise during the implementation of the project.

## 7. Funding, Management and Progress Monitoring

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### 7.1 Allocation and Disbursement of Funding

The Funding of the project shall be disbursed in the following manner, including both direct and indirect costs:

Pre-Financing	50%
Interim Financing	30%
Retention	20%

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. The Council will make an initial advance payment (pre-financing) of 50% of the due financial contribution and will include both direct and indirect costs.
2. The Project Contact Point will be required to submit a Technical and a Financial Interim Report to the Council with details of actual expenditure in the first half of the project, together with an updated forecast of projected expenditure for the remainder of the project. Both reports must be approved by the Council before proceeding with the project.
3. After the interim reporting is reviewed, the Council will calculate the next due financial contribution based on the Financial Report submitted. This contribution will be calculated as forecast eligible expenditure.
4. The Council shall retain 20% of the total project grant to be transferred only upon successful completion of the project. This is referred to as the Retention Money.
5. Following the termination of the project or expiry of the Grant Agreement, the Project Contact Point will be required to submit a Final Technical Report together with a Final Financial Report for the whole project. The Final Financial Report needs to be audited by a certified auditor appointed by the Applicant and approved by the Council once submitted. The audit should determine the total eligible costs and compare these to the funds forwarded. The Council reserves the right to appoint an auditor to audit the Project Financial Audit as submitted. Failure to submit a timely audited Financial Report may result in the Council recovering all funds disbursed across the project.
6. As soon as the verifications and audits are finalised and cleared, the Council will release the Retention Money due. In the case of overpayment, the Applicant will be required to refund the under-spent amount to the Council within a specific timeframe, or as agreed to with the Council.

7. Any changes to the project objectives, work-packages or any other parameter committed to in the application, are to be communicated in writing with clear justification to the MCST prior to the deadline. The written request will be referred to the Unit Director for approval. The MCST will acknowledge receipt and endeavour to reply in a timely manner so that the momentum of the project remains unaffected. Acceptance or otherwise of any changes shall be at the sole discretion of the MCST and its decision shall be binding, final and irrevocable. Any other communication shall not be considered valid or binding.

The Council reserves the right to alter the funding parameters as deemed appropriate.

## 7.2 Dissemination and Externalisation

All dissemination and publication of information in relation to the proposal selected for award is to commence following the signing of the Grant Agreement.

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 2023 Call (Science and Technology Cooperation).'*

Any websites or printed material related to the project should also include the Council logo.

During the term of Agreement and for five (5) years thereafter, the Applicant shall include and prominently feature the Council in any publicity related to the project.

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

## 7.3 Reporting

An Interim **Technical Report** and **Financial Report** are to be presented to the Council at the mid-point of the project.

On the last day of the project, the Project Contact Point is required to submit an **End of Project Technical Report**. The **End of Project Audited Financial Report** covering the work and expenditure undertaken during the entire project shall need to be submitted up to 8 weeks from the stipulated end of project date.

The Project Contact Point shall also set a schedule for periodical progress meetings with the Council to take place. During such meetings, beneficiaries should verbally update MCST on progress via a presentation.

Meetings	Project Timeline*	Reports
Progress Meeting	<b>Month 4</b>	
Progress Meeting	<b>Month 8</b>	
Progress Meeting	<b>Month 12</b>	Interim Technical and Financial Report
Progress Meeting	<b>Month 16</b>	
Progress Meeting	<b>Month 20</b>	
Progress Meeting	<b>Month 24</b>	End of Project Technical Report
	<b>Month 26</b>	End of Project Financial Report

*\*The project timeline may vary according to the project duration.*

The Interim Technical and Financial Reports shall contain the following details:

- i. An overview of project activity and achievements compared with the originally submitted application.
- ii. An account of actual expenditure over the first half of the project compared with the originally submitted overall 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 remainder of the project.
- iv. An updated forecast of projected expenditure for the remaining half of the project.

The End of Project Technical and Financial Reports shall contain details i. – iv. above as well as the financial audited reports as per below.

The audit will consist of, at least, the following checks:

- i. Accounts
- ii. Physical inventory
- iii. Timesheets and payslips / employee contracts
- iv. Receipts for all equipment and consumables
- v. Bank statements for the Project Account

The beneficiary shall appoint an auditor to conduct a detailed financial audit, following the completion of the project. The Council reserves the right to appoint an auditor to audit the Project Financial Audit as submitted.

The Council may at any time request supplementary information and documentation on the projects and may request additional progress meetings. The Council may make such additional enquiries into a project as deemed necessary. Any required documentation not submitted within Interim reports or Final Reports, or documentation not submitted within the specified timeframes, may render the whole project ineligible, and may result in the Council recovering all funds disbursed across the project.

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

## 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 the specific account. All funding payments by the Council will be deposited in the project bank account.

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

## 7.5 Project Extensions

Time extension requests are unlikely to be accepted unless these are due to extenuating circumstances that are deemed plausible and conditionally valid by the Council. Such circumstances need to be unavoidable, and partners need to provide evidence to the Council that all efforts and best practice project management have been undertaken to remedy the extraneous circumstances.

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.

## 7.6 Budget Transfers

Applicants should note that:

- Transfers of project funds between line items **over the course of the project** that are cumulatively **less than 20% of the grant value are automatically eligible** provided that:
  - i. the limits mentioned in the Rules of Participation in [Section 4](#) are adhered to;
  - ii. expenses are exclusively used throughout the project lifetime to the sole benefit of the project;
  - iii. requested costs should be eligible as per Rules of Participation.

- Should transfers of project funds between line items are cumulatively **greater than 20% of the grant value, these will be considered as significant alterations to the proposal and will not be eligible**.

*Kindly note that with respect to transfer of project funds, these should be reflected in the project progress meetings and in the Project Financial Reports, mentioned in [Section 7.3](#).*

*Kindly note that the structure of the line items will be as follows:*

- *Transfers between budget categories **will** always contribute to the 20% limit.*
- *Each manager will be considered as its own line item (transfers between managers **will** contribute to the 20% limit)*
- *Research personnel will be considered a single line item (transfers between research personnel will **not** contribute to the 20% limit)*
- *Equipment under €5,000 will be considered a single line item (transfers between equipment (under €5,000) will **not** contribute to the 20% limit) However, each piece of equipment over €5,000 will be considered their own line items (transfers between equipment (over €5,000) **will** contribute to the 20% limit).*
- *Subcontracted activities of under €5,000 will be considered a single line item (transfers between subcontracting (under €5,000) will **not** contribute to the 20% limit). However, subcontracting over €5,000 will be considered their own line items (transfers between subcontracting (over €5,000) **will** contribute to the 20% limit).*
- *Consumables of under €5,000 will be considered a single line item (transfers between consumables (under €5,000) will **not** contribute to the 20% limit). However, consumables over €5,000 will be considered their own line items (transfers between consumables (over €5,000) **will** contribute to the 20% limit).*
- *Travel will be considered a single line item (transfers between travel will **not** contribute to the 20% limit).*
- *Items listed under ‘Other’ will be considered their own line items (transfers between other costs **will** contribute to the 20% limit).*

*Kindly note that the term ‘own line item’ refers to a whole budget category whereas ‘single line item’ refers to one individual line item within a budget category.*

*Should an equipment/ subcontracting originally proposed to be over €5,000 but get reduced to less than €5,000 over the course of the project, this will still be considered as an individual line item. Should an item of equipment/subcontracting originally proposed to be less than €5,000, be increased to over €5,000 over the course of the project, this will alter to an individual line item.*

For reference purposes, please find attached the above transfers in a tabular format:

<b><i>Will contribute to the 20% limit</i></b>	<b><i>Will not contribute to the 20% limit</i></b>
<i>Transfers between different budget categories</i>	
<i>Transfers between managers</i>	<i>Transfers between research personnel</i>
<i>Transfers between items of equipment (over €5,000)</i>	<i>Transfers between items of equipment (under €5,000)</i>
<i>Transfers between subcontracted activities (over €5,000)</i>	<i>Transfers between subcontracted activities (under €5,000)</i>
<i>Transfers between consumables (over €5,000)</i>	<i>Transfers between consumables (under €5,000)</i>
<i>Transfers between items in the 'Other' category</i>	<i>Transfers between travel activities</i>

## 7.7 Supervening Circumstances

The Project Contact Point is obliged to immediately advise the Council 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.

The Council, 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 Point to respect this obligation may lead the Council to suspend or terminate funding for the project and request a refund.

If during the project a partner withdraws from the Project Consortium, the beneficiary should immediately advise the Council. In this event, the relevant articles of the Project Consortium Agreement and the National Grant Agreement shall apply.

## 7.8 Default

If the implementation of a project becomes impossible or if the beneficiary fails to implement it, the Council shall be entitled to take any action it deems necessary, including, but not limited to, the withdrawal of funding for the project and the collection of refunds of the

money already paid out. A similar course of action may be followed if a project is in default as a result of not meeting one or more of its obligations. Prior to taking any drastic action, the MCST will provide a maximum of two notices indicating a rectification period of one month each.

## 7.9 Interpretation of Rules

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

These current Rules repeal any Rules previously issued and constitute exclusively the entire Rules issued by the council.



## 8. Confidentiality of Submissions

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Unless otherwise indicated, all project application submissions except for the abstract shall be treated in strict confidence. However, all project applications will be passed on in their entirety to the external evaluators and due diligence experts, who are bound by confidentiality and who shall also be required to declare that they do not have any conflict of interest in reviewing the individual proposals. Reports compiled as mandatory deliverables of the awarded R&I project or similar reports submitted by applicants on their own accord, may, at the discretion of the MCST, be submitted in part or in their entirety to external evaluators. Evaluators are bound by confidentiality.

Kindly note that the Council 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 the Council.

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

- i. The National Rules for Participation;
- ii. 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).
- iii. 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.