

NATIONAL RESEARCH FOUNDATION
RIE2025 CENTRAL GAP FUND
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

A. Objectives

1. What type of projects does the Central Gap Fund support?

The Central Gap Fund (“Central Gap”) supports translational and commercialisation projects. Projects must aim to develop early technologies into working prototypes or functional processes that are closer to market, and demonstrate clear market need and demand in order to attract private sector investments and/or commercialisation receptacles.

Pure research and/or academic projects will not be supported by Central Gap.

2. What is the difference between Decentralised Gap funding and Central Gap? Can the team apply for both at the same time?

The Decentralised Gap funding is administered by A*STAR, MOE and MOH and implemented by their respective Innovation and Enterprise Office (IEOs)¹. The team should approach their respective IEOs for more information on Decentralised Gap funding.

Central Gap complements Decentralised Gap funding by providing a national-level platform to resource impactful and preferably collaborative projects. While similar in concept, Central Gap provides a central platform to resource collaborating institutes.

A Central Gap project may be equally co-funded by Decentralised Gap for the first \$500k of qualifying project costs. This is applicable if the project has not been previously supported by any translational funding from the IEO/HI or does not have a prototype.

¹ An “IEO” here refers to an office that takes on technology transfer and commercialization functions, as well as education and training for such professionals, for the Host Institution. The office of the Director of Research or its equivalent can be designated to take on the role of an IEO for the purposes of the Central Gap Projects, subject to NRF’s approval.

B. Application

3. What should the Project Leads and IEOs do before submitting the proposal?

Approach possible partner institutions

Teams are required to scan the landscape for similar and/or complementary projects, and to approach these projects for possible collaboration. The Project Lead will need to briefly describe the efforts that were made to engage these partner institutions, or why they were found unsuitable.

Conduct a preliminary technology/intellectual property (IP) scan

Teams are required to do a preliminary scan to identify existing technology and/or IPs that may affect the team's ability to protect and exploit the technology developed as a result of the project.

Negotiate and agree on all the rights prior to the commencement of project

All parties involved in the Central Gap Project should negotiate and agree upon ownership, intellectual property protection, commercialisation and revenue sharing rights in respect of the Intellectual Property arising from the Central Gap Project in accordance with internationally accepted standards and in the best interests of the parties involved and Singapore. All such rights should be negotiated, agreed upon and stipulated in a formal agreement with each party.

Develop and submit an initial business plan

The team should perform a preliminary industry and market assessment, and identify preferred pathways for commercialisation. Endorsements from potential customers and/or investors will be looked upon favourably.

There is no fixed template for a business plan. Teams which need help drafting a business plan should approach a business mentor or undergo entrepreneurial education programmes such as the Lean LaunchPad programme or relevant bootcamps before applying for Central Gap.

4. When can the team submit proposals for Central Gap?

Proposals can be submitted via IGMS (<https://researchgrant.gov.sg>) throughout the year and will be processed on a needs basis.

For detailed instructions on IGMS, please refer to the 'Training Guides' provided in the IGMS web portal.

5. The team's HI and selected IEO are of separate entities. How would the team submit the proposal onto IGMS?

The Project Lead will be required to lodge the proposal submission electronically via IGMS, and the submission should be routed for endorsement by the HI. However, the Project Lead is to indicate the designated IEO (of a separate entity) clearly in Application Form A. All information in Form A should be reviewed by the designated IEO before the Project Lead uploads it in IGMS. The designated IEO will be required to submit to NRF CIEO its endorsement and assessment of the proposal via email.

6. Which organisations are eligible to apply for Central Gap?

Publicly-funded research performers and government-linked entities are eligible for Central Gap. Entities listed below are eligible to apply for Central Gap. Applications from entities not within the list will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

List of Eligible Entities

- A*STAR Research Institutes
- Local public research centres and consortia
- Local public hospitals, public health institutions and National Specialty Centres
- Local autonomous universities, polytechnics and Institutes of Technical Education
- CREATE entities
- Research Centres of Excellence hosted by local autonomous universities
- Temasek Life Sciences Laboratory

7. Which are the designated IEOs for Central Gap and what are the responsibilities of the IEOs?

List of designated IEOs

- A*STAR Enterprise Division
- National Health Innovation Centre (NHIC)
- SMART Innovation Centre (SMART IC)
- SGInnovate
- IEOs within the local autonomous universities, polytechnics and Institutes of Technical Education

The IEO is expected to:

- Evaluate and endorse proposals;
- Act as single point-of-contact with the Central Innovation and Enterprise Office (CIEO);
- Assess and endorse (or approve²) variation requests;
- Assess and endorse progress and review reports;
- Ensure drawdown requests, claimed expenditure, etc. are in order and in line with NRF guidelines; and
- Ensure all submissions are timely.

8. If the Host Institution³ does not have an IEO, may the team apply and liaise directly with NRF?

The team should first check with CIEO⁴ whether a suitable IEO has been identified for the Host Institution (the IEO may not reside within the Host Institution). All communication should be made through the designated IEO.

For public hospitals, public health institutions and National Specialty Centres, the National Health Innovation Centre (NHIC) will act as the central IEO for the purpose of managing Central Gap projects.

For CREATE entities, the SMART Innovation Centre (SMART IC) will act as the central IEO for the purpose of managing Central Gap projects.

9. For project with multiple institutions, who will NRF liaise with?

Team with multiple institutions would need to identify the Host Institution (i.e. the lead institution) and Project Lead. NRF will liaise with the HI's IEO, who will coordinate on all matters relating to the Central Gap Project.

10. The Project Lead had previously been awarded Decentralised Gap funding and/or funding from Enterprise Singapore. Is the Project Lead eligible to apply to Central Gap?

² Within specified limits. Details can be found in the Award Guidelines.

³ "Host Institution" means the body or institution or administering organization employing or hosting the Project Lead.

⁴ The Central Innovation and Enterprise Office (CIEO) is the programme office administering Central Gap.

The Project Lead and team members have to declare all current and prior funding sources in their application, and it would be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

Teams that have incorporated a company (for the same technology) and received funding from Enterprise Singapore (or equivalent) will not be eligible for Central Gap.

11. What is the funding quantum supportable for each project?

Central Gap provides funding support for projects of quantum up to S\$2M (inclusive of 30% Overheads) for a period of up to 2 years. Projects of larger quantum may be considered on a case-by-case basis and if awarded, will be subject to appropriate stage-gating. Requested quantum of funding must commensurate with the expected impact of the project.

For projects that had previously received translational funding from the IEO/HI or had developed a prototype, the co-funding requirement may be waived, subject to NRF's approval. Otherwise, the funding support is as follows:

- i For projects with approved qualifying costs less than or equal to S\$500K: The IEO/HI and Central Gap will equally co-fund the qualifying costs.
- ii For projects with approved qualifying costs greater than S\$500K: The IEO/HI will co-fund S\$250K, and Central Gap will support the remaining qualifying costs.

12. Does Central Gap support developmental activities overseas or by private entities?

Inter-institution and public-private collaborations are encouraged. However, Central Gap will only be able to support local developmental activities by the publicly-funded research performer and/or government-linked entity.

13. How long is the term of a Central Gap project?

Each project can be supported under Central Gap for up to 2 years. Extensions of up to 12 months (cumulative) will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

14. Is collaboration a requirement for Central Gap?

Collaboration is preferred, but not a requirement.

15. Is having an industry partner a requirement for Central Gap?

It is strongly recommended for the team to engage industry partner(s) that will be committed to help with the commercialisation of the technology.

16. Why is an experienced business development resource in the team required?

One objective of Central Gap is to catalyse the commercialisation of research outcomes into applications. The business development resource will provide the necessary expertise to achieve the commercial and industrial outcomes expected of a project supported by Central Gap.

17. Can the team propose new impact metrics aside from those listed in 'Application Template Form A'?

The list of possible impact metrics and associated tracking indicators provided is non-exhaustive and meant to serve as a reference only. The team should identify and propose impact metrics suitable for their project. The impact metrics proposed must capture the expected socioeconomic impact of the project on Singapore.

C. Selection of Proposals

18. How will proposals be evaluated?

Proposals will be reviewed and evaluated by a Standing Oversight Committee (SOC) with inputs from subject matter experts. The SOC will be guided by five main criteria; i) project scope, ii) commercialisation potential, iii) team, iv) technical innovation and v) institutional support. Shortlisted teams may be requested to present their proposal to the SOC.

More details on the evaluation criteria can be found in the Application Guidelines.

D. Awarded Projects

19. Can the executive summary of the Application Template be made confidential?

No. The executive summary is made public to encourage collaboration and attract investment. The team should not include confidential information in the executive summary.

20. Why do certain positions require Singapore citizens or Singapore Permanent Residents to be hired?

One of the objectives of Central Gap is to build STEM and I&E capabilities and manpower in Singapore. Hiring and grooming Singapore citizens and Singapore Permanent Residents for certain roles are necessary to achieve this objective. However, we understand that certain positions require in-depth expertise in a particular technology field, which may not be available in Singapore. In such cases, we are prepared to hire international talent, with the broader objective of building capabilities in Singapore as a whole.

21. I have some funds left in my Central Gap project. May I purchase new equipment or consumables for my next project using the remaining budget?

No. All equipment purchases (based on invoice date) must be for the purpose of the awarded project. Teams are encouraged to purchase the equipment within the first half of the project. Equipment purchased near the end of the project will be reviewed by NRF.

22. What are the reporting requirements for an awarded project?

Teams are required to submit Yearly Progress Reports (within 2 months from the end of each financial year. i.e. by 31 May), a Final Report (within 3 months after the project end date), and a Post-project Review Report (1 year after the project end date). The team may be required to present their Post-project Review Report to the SOC.

The Host Institution and IEO shall also keep and maintain full and detailed records and accounts relating to the project, including all items of expenditure incurred, and submit a Final Statement of Account within 6 months from the project end date.

Teams do not need to submit a Yearly Progress Report for first FY of the project if the project start date is less than 3 months from the end of the first FY.

23. What is the fund disbursement structure?

Fund disbursements will be made quarterly based on the financial year starting 1 April. Disbursements are made on a reimbursement basis.

Requests for disbursements to be made on an advancement basis must be made during proposal submission. Requests will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

24. What are the audit requirements?

Audit reports covering each FY must be submitted to NRF 6 months from the end of each FY (i.e. 30 September).

The final audit report, covering the term of the prevailing FY to the project end date, should be submitted within 6 months from the project end date together with the Final Statement of Account. Please refer to the Application Guidelines for details on the audit requirements.

25. What is the audit frequency if my entity has performed an entity audit?

The audit submission will be on a reduced frequency. In the event of an award, more details on the audit requirements will be included in the Letter of Award and its annexes.

26. Must NRF approval be sought for all project variations?

No. The authority to approve variation requests (within specified limits) is delegated to the respective IEOs. Variation requests beyond the approval authority of the IEO must first be assessed and endorsed by the IEO before seeking approval from NRF via IGMS. Please refer to the project administration guidelines for details.

27. Who may I contact if I have further queries?

The respective IEOs are the first point of contact for queries relating to Central Gap. Please also contact the National Medical Research Council (NMRC) for projects relating to clinical trials.