

The University of Sydney- The Chinese University of Hong Kong Ignition Grants 2026 Guidelines for Applicants

Application Deadline: 16 March 2026 (23:59 AEST / 20:59 HKT)

1. Purpose

- 1.1. As strategic partners, the University of Sydney (Sydney) and the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) are committed to achieving impact through collaboration in research and education.
- 1.2. The Ignition Grants support researchers from Sydney and CUHK to facilitate and support collaborative projects that develop multidisciplinary cutting-edge research to create academic and societal impact. These grants are designed to provide researchers, in particular Early- and Mid-career researchers, with the opportunity to work with our strategic partner in developing joint research projects.
- 1.3. Proposals in the areas of **Climate, Environment, Health, or Sustainability** are invited.
 - The proposals should foster **multidisciplinary collaboration** that advances research and provides sustainable solutions to the proposed challenges. New and innovative proposals aligning to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and combining expertise across humanities, social sciences, sciences, engineering, and medicine are strongly encouraged. Proposals must demonstrate why the chosen teams possess the appropriate and relevant expertise to tackle the articulated problem.
 - It is expected that all funded projects will evolve into **larger scale projects, sustained by leveraging external funding**. Funded teams are expected to submit external grant applications to dedicated national/international agencies and meet other KPIs detailed in point 8 below.
 - Preference is given to applications involving new collaborations.
 - A maximum of **five (5) proposals** will be awarded from this Grant. Each successful proposal will receive up to **AUD\$20,000 from Sydney** and **HK\$110,000 from CUHK** for a total of approx. AUD\$40,000 or HK\$220,000.

2. Eligibility

- 2.1. Proposals are invited from academic staff from all disciplines at Sydney and CUHK and their affiliated Research Centres and Institutes.
- 2.2. An application must have two Chief Investigators, one from Sydney and one from CUHK. These two individuals are responsible for jointly submitting the application, verifying the accuracy of the information in the application, and ensuring that the funding, if granted, is used in accordance with the intent as stated in the application.
- 2.3. Preference will be given to teams which include PhD students, **Early- and Mid-career researchers**¹, and to projects where at least one of the Chief Investigators is within 10 years of receiving their PhD.

¹ Sydney: An individual who was awarded their PhD within the past 15 years, excluding any career interruptions such as parental leave or illness.

CUHK: Academic staff members who are Associate Professors or below.

- 2.4. Chief Investigators:
- **Sydney:** Chief Investigators must be employed on a full-time, part-time (appointed at least 0.5 FTE), fixed term or continuing basis at the University of Sydney. If on a fixed term contract, the end date must be beyond the funding period. Applicants from affiliated Research Centres and Institutes must be University Title Holders.
 - **CUHK:** Chief Investigators must be ranked at Research Assistant Professors or above holding full-time employment and are required to remain in university service for not less than a year upon completion of the proposed project.
- 2.5. Each institution must include at least one additional research staff member (excluding PhD students) in the project proposal, in addition to the Chief Investigators. There should be at least one other research staff member (i.e. not PhD student) from each institution to be involved in the proposal, besides the Chief Investigators.
- 2.6. Emeritus faculty, PhD and masters by research students, and research assistants/associates are not eligible to apply as Chief Investigators but they are welcome to join the projects as collaborators.
- 2.7. Sydney Chief Investigators may not hold more than one award from the Office of Global and Research Engagement at the same time. Those who currently hold other funding from OGRE may apply for the 2026 Sydney-CUHK Ignition Grants only if their existing project will be completed prior to the commencement of the new project. Applicants in this category are required to submit a progress report as part of their application. The report should be a single-page narrative outlining the progress to date and the unexpended award balance. The report must be attached to the application at the time of submission.
- 2.8. Previous recipients of other funding from the Sydney Office of Global and Research Engagement whose projects have finished or will have finished by the application close date may only apply for the 2026 Sydney-CUHK Ignition Grants if they have submitted their Final Report for the previous project.

3. Duration

- 3.1. Projects may run from 1 May 2026 until 30 April 2027.
- 3.2. Funding from Sydney **must be expended and charged to the nominated project account of the Chief Investigator by 1 December 2026.**
- 3.3. Funding from CUHK must be expended by **30 April 2027.**

4. Timeline

Applications open	28 January 2026
Applications close	16 March 2026 23:59 AEST / 20:59 HKT
Applicants notified	Late April 2026
Projects to start from	1 May 2026
Sydney funds must be spent by	1 December 2026
CUHK funds must be spent by	30 April 2027
Latest date for projects to end	30 April 2027
Final reports due	1 August 2027
Final reports update	1 August 2028

5. Eligible Expenditure and Activities

5.1. Expenses/activities that **will be considered** for funding include:

- Airfares: Only travel on economy class return airfares will be considered; applicants should indicate who is travelling and their career stage in the budget;
- Other travel expenses (e.g. train, rental car);
- Costs for hosting a seminar/conference or workshop (should not exceed 50% of total budget).
- Accommodation and subsistence;
- Salary of short-term research assistants and clerical support staff at CUHK;
- Consumables (a detailed justification of the consumables to be purchased should be included in the Comments section of the online application form); and
- Publications and printing costs.

5.2. All travel activities must comply with the guidelines of the respective universities:

- **Sydney:** All travel must comply with the [Travel Policy 2018](#) and follow all relevant processes and policies, including travel insurance as outlined on the [Travel intranet page](#). Sydney researchers should refer to www.smarttraveller.gov.au for the latest visa and travel advice.
- **CUHK:**
 - The costs of accommodation and subsistence are capped at the per diem allowance designated for the city to be visited. The rate of per diem allowance can be found on the [CUHK Finance Office website](#).
 - CUHK award holders will be responsible for arranging the practicalities of the visit, if applicable. They include but are not limited to, traveling plans, visa application, accommodation, and personal health and hospitalisation insurance coverage as required.
 - For outgoing visits, CUHK award holders will normally be covered under the “[CUHK’s Group Travel Insurance \(Staff\)](#)”. Award holders are advised to purchase additional travel insurance as deemed necessary².

5.3. Activities that **will not be considered** for funding:

- Hiring of research fellows or research assistants at Sydney;
- General teaching;
- An individual staff member’s research projects, unless as catalytic funding for the establishment of an international research collaboration with the prospect of external funding;
- Event registration fees;
- Website development;
- Salaries or salary supplementation, and honoraria;
- Scholarships or course fees for students;
- Bench fees;
- Mobile phone cards;
- Entertainment costs; and
- Computers, including laptops (excluding access to high-performance computers or other specialised applications that are justified by the project) and basic computing facilities such as printers, word processing and other standard software.

6. Submission Requirements

6.1. All applications must be jointly submitted by a Chief Investigator from Sydney and a Chief Investigator from CUHK online via the Funding Schemes Site at <http://sydney.edu.au/award-schemes> with the following elements:

² CUHK award holders are responsible for purchasing adequate insurance to cover for their visits. CUHK is not liable for any loss, damage, cost, or expense whatsoever incurred by or attributable to any action or omission by any of the award holders.

- Ignition Grants Application Form (online)
 - Details of team involved and the role and contribution of each member
 - Project details (title, abstract, description in layman’s terms)
 - Expected outcomes
 - Selection criteria (see point 7)
 - Project timeline
 - Project budget

- CV of the Chief Investigator of each university (maximum two pages in length for each CV) which should include:
 - Qualifications, current position, and employment history
 - 10 career-best publications
 - Awards and relevant presentations
 - Current grant income
 - Collaborative track record (limited to 200 words)

- A brief letter of support in English on official letterhead from any additional institution/ organisation (other than Sydney or CUHK) that intends to formally collaborate.

- All applications require the endorsement by the relevant Sydney Head of School, and CUHK Heads of Departments/Units and Faculty Deans/Directors of Institutes. Both Chief Investigators from Sydney and CUHK must complete the endorsement forms and have them uploaded to their application before final submission. **It is highly recommended to provide the Head with the Endorsement Coversheet and a downloaded copy of the completed online application well in advance of the application deadline to ensure sufficient time for endorsement.**
 - **Sydney:** Endorsement by the relevant Head of School. A pre-filled Endorsement Coversheet is automatically generated by the application system after completion of the Ignition Grants Application Form (online) and sent to the Sydney Chief Investigator’s email for this purpose. The signed coversheet must be uploaded **before** submission. Digital signatures are acceptable.
 - **CUHK:** An Endorsement Coversheet, completed by the CUHK Heads of Departments/Units and Faculty Deans/Directors of Institutes to confirm their intention of renewing the applicants’ contract, if applicable, and their support for the application. To download the Coversheet, please click [here](#). Note that a partially pre-filled Endorsement Coversheet will be generated and sent to the CUHK CI after the online application is completed.

- Applicants must indicate the expected expenditure for each calendar year in their budget.
 - **Sydney:** Funding from Sydney must be expended and charged to the nominated project account of the Chief Investigator by **1 December 2026**. It is recommended the Sydney Chief Investigators use the awarded funds within the allocated timeframe and spend as much as possible upfront, for example, purchasing any flight tickets well in advance with flexible options and pre-paying any budgeted accommodation.
 - **CUHK:** Funding from CUHK must be expended by **30 April 2027**.

- 6.2. A copy of the questions included in the online application form (including budget) is available for preview from the Funding Schemes Site at <http://sydney.edu.au/award-schemes>.

- 6.3. Applications can only be initiated by the Chief Investigator from Sydney using their UniKey and password. Chief Investigators from CUHK can then access and edit the applications once invited by Sydney Chief Investigators to be a “Collaborator” of the application.

- 6.4. Each Chief Investigator from Sydney and CUHK can only submit one application per round of the Ignition Grants.

6.5. Only complete submissions will be considered.

6.6. Late applications will not be considered.

7. Scoring and Selection Criteria

7.1. Proposals should be in the areas of **Climate, Environment, Health** or **Sustainability** as stated under point 1.3.

7.2. Criteria do not have weightings; proposals are assessed holistically. Each proposal will be assessed according to the selection criteria described below.

Score	Category	Justification
9-10	Excellent	Proposal successfully addresses all relevant aspects of the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor
7-8	Very Good	Proposal addresses the criterion very well, but a small number of shortcomings are present
4-6	Good	Proposal addresses the criterion well, but a number of shortcomings are present
1-3	Weak	Criterion is inadequately addressed or there are serious inherent weaknesses

Selection Criteria	Description
Quality & Relevance (300-word maximum)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearly describe the objectives and methodology to be employed with the project. The alignment with strategic priorities and the objectives of the funding scheme will be considered in combination with the soundness of the concept and credibility of the proposed methodology. (Note: Proposals should use clear writing appropriate for non-specialists and make a strong case for the importance of the project to reviewers outside the discipline. It is strongly advised that the proposals avoid jargon and unexplained abbreviations). Explain how the participants in the research team will bring together the necessary expertise to carry out the project. The 2-page CVs of the Chief Investigators will be taken into consideration.
Execution (300-word maximum)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elaborate on the workplan and milestones outlined in the timeframe (there are separate sections in the application form for an outline of activities in the Timeline and Budget). Proposed timeframes and budget estimates should be realistic and appropriate. Outline the long-term plan for engagement to attract research funding and produce publications. Proposals must include a specific and concrete plan for how the project will become sustainable. Elaborate on why the project will be competitive for future external funding. (There is a separate section in the application form in expected outcomes to list the extramural funding which will be targeted). This section should also address the appropriateness of the allocation of tasks, ensuring that all participants [including PhD or masters by research students, postdocs, EMCRs, and any researchers on Sabbatical Leave] have a valid role and there are adequate resources in the project to enable them to fulfil that role.
Impact (300-word maximum)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outline what the participants will gain from the project and how it will contribute to the discipline and field of research. Explain how the project will establish or strengthen a durable cooperation between the universities and participants.

- Explain how the project will impact beyond the academic sphere (i.e. benefit society, address global challenges, [Sustainable Development Goals](#), etc).
- Explain how the project activities and results will be communicated to different target audiences.

8. Expected Outcomes

Capturing the outcomes of successful projects is vital in helping to measure the overall success and impact of the Ignition Grants. Expected outcomes could include one or more of the following:

Category	Outcome
Research quality and influence	The research: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • will advance knowledge in the field which addresses an issue of importance • may result in fundamental outcomes • is innovative in concept • will use well established approaches to good effect
Publications	At least one (1) refereed publication in a nationally/internationally recognised scholarly journal (or equivalent).
External funding	At least one (1) Category 1-3 ³ national/international competitive grant submission or application for grants offered by the funding bodies in Hong Kong, for example, Research Grants Council, Innovation and Technology Commission, Health Bureau, among others. Details of the external funding bodies to which an applicant plans to submit applications must be identified within the application form, and evidence of external funding submissions will be required in the final project report.
<i>Optional</i>	
Training & education	Supervision and mentoring of PhD students/postdoctoral researchers/ECRs
Joint Workshop	Organise at least one (1) joint workshop at either institution. This may be in-person, virtual or hybrid.
Conference	At least one (1) conference presentation. This may be online.

Industry engagement is encouraged but not expected. If proposals include industry engagement, then details on the timeline, activities, and budget should be provided in the online application.

9. Assessment Process

Award selection will be made by a joint committee formed by members of both universities, which reserves final authority over the selection of projects taking into account university and faculty strategic priorities, and the availability of funds.

10. Notification of Application Outcomes

10.1. Successful applicants will receive a letter of award outlining the process to accept the award including payment. Successful applicants will be required to accept their offer as per below by the due date stated in their letter of award.

³ Category 1: Australian Competitive Grant Research Income. For example, the ARC, NHMRC, MRFF, etc.

Category 2: Other Public Sector Research Funding. Other Australian Government schemes and business enterprises and State and local governments and partly government-owned or funded bodies.

Category 3: Industry and other Funding for Research. Research grants or contract research with Australian or international industry or non-Australian Government agencies. Funding through donations, bequests, charities and foundations (both Australian and international).

10.2. **Sydney:** Successful Sydney applicants will be required to accept their offer through the Funding Schemes Site.

10.3. **CUHK:** Successful CUHK applicants will be required to complete and submit a Declaration of Acceptance to the Program Coordinator at the Office of Academic Links (oliviakwok@cuhk.edu.hk).

11. Change of Investigator

Applicants should contact the Program Coordinator at each institution. Such changes will need to be approved and documented.

12. Availability of Grants

12.1. The maximum amount that applicants can request for projects is approximately AUD\$40,000 / HK\$220,000 (AUD\$20,000 from Sydney and HK\$110,000 from CUHK).

12.2. **CUHK:** Funds not spent by **30 April 2027** must be returned to the University.

Sydney: The nominated university RC account will be linked to a new Project Code (PC) which will be created for you by the Office of Global and Research Engagement. The RC/PC account must be used solely for the purposes of this grant and may be subject to internal audit processes to ensure adherence to the guidelines. Each month, funds matching actual expenditure from the previous month will be transferred into the Chief Investigator's university project account by Corporate Finance. The transfer of funds will cease when the awarded amount is reached or **1 December 2026**, whichever comes first. Any expenditure above the awarded amount for that year will need to be cleared to another Faculty/School account (such as consulting or other as appropriate). Please be advised that **unspent funding cannot be carried over into 2027**. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that **awardees fully utilize the funds, ensure all claims are approved, and have expenditures charged to the Chief Investigator's nominated project account by 1 December 2026**. This is to guarantee the expenses count against the funding that has been awarded.

13. Financial and Reporting Obligations

13.1. The funding should only be used for the approved project and in accordance with the proposal and the budget plan. It must not be used for any other purposes and prior approval from both universities is needed for any variation in the budget items. Request for variations from original proposals must be submitted to both universities for approval.

13.2. Awardees must adhere to the purchasing guidelines of the respective universities to which reimbursement is to be sought. Major changes to the expenditure plan will require prior approval.

13.3. Awardees must submit a **Final Report** using the report pro-forma online through the [Funding Schemes Site](#). The final report must be completed by **1 August 2027** and an **update to the final report** must be submitted by **1 August 2028**.

13.4. **CUHK:** CUHK awardees will be invited to complete a survey annually for three to five consecutive years to facilitate tracking of the partnership development.

13.5. In consultation with their Finance Manager, the Sydney Chief Investigator must complete an acquittal statement and upload this with their final report. An acquittal statement template is provided with the report pro-forma online through the [Funding Schemes Site](#) which is linked to the application. This is not required by CUHK Chief Investigators.

13.6. **Sydney:** Failure to submit a completed report will result in all members of the project team being ineligible to submit future funding applications and mention of the Ignition Grant will be removed from their University of Sydney online Academic Profile.

CUHK: The Chief Investigators will not be considered for future applications for the Ignition Grants if a completed report is not submitted.

13.7. The activation of research funding accounts is not tied to ethics/other approvals being obtained. It is the responsibility of Chief Investigators to ensure that no work requiring approval is commenced until such approvals are in place.

14. Research Integrity and Ethics

14.1. All applications and the funded research projects must comply with the relevant research integrity and ethics requirements and policies of both universities and the laws of the jurisdiction.

14.2. **Sydney:** Please contact Research Integrity and Ethics Administration in the Research Portfolio to obtain ethical approval as appropriate. Ethical approval is evidenced by the submission of a completed Research Proposal Clearance Form with Ethics Reference Numbers, signed by all Sydney Chief Investigators and their respective Heads of School. All applications and the funded research projects must comply with the University's Research Data Management Policy and Procedure. Sydney applicants are strongly encouraged to consider whether data sharing is required, or the nature of any data that needs to be accessed from CUHK. Please contact Manager, Research Data Governance if advice is needed.

14.3. **CUHK:** The University's policy on research ethics is outlined in the University's [Policy on Research](#). Please contact the Research Office if advice is needed.

14.4. It is the responsibility of Chief Investigators to ensure that no work is commenced until such approvals are in place.

15. International collaboration policies and procedures

15.1. All applications and the funded research projects must comply with the relevant international collaboration policies and procedures of both universities and relevant laws and guidelines of both governments.

15.2. **Sydney:** All applications and the funded research projects must comply with the University of Sydney's relevant policies and procedures, including and not limited to International Collaboration Principles, Staff and Affiliates Code of Conduct 2021, External Interests Policy 2010. Please visit the ["International collaboration page"](#) in the Staff Intranet to ensure the project meets the standard set by the University, and complies with Australian law and government guidelines, carry out due diligence checks, receive all necessary approvals and make any required notifications or declarations.

16. Intellectual Property

All activities in connection with any Projects will be conducted in accordance with the following key principles specified in the Memorandum of Understanding signed by both universities unless otherwise agreed in writing between the universities:

- any intellectual property created in the course of a project (Project IP) will be owned by the Institution who creates such Project IP, or where created jointly, owned jointly by the Institutions as tenants in common in shares equal to their respective inventive contributions to such Project IP;
- each Institution grants to the other Institution a free, non-exclusive, perpetual licence, without the right to sublicense, to use its Project IP for the purposes of undertaking the project and for its general purposes of research, teaching and publication; and

- where relevant or necessary, any commercialisation activities in respect of jointly-owned Project IP (including whether patent applications related to the jointly-owned Project IP will be prepared and filed) will be as negotiated and agreed between the Institutions.

17. Extensions

Only under exceptional circumstances will extensions be approved. Requests for extensions must be submitted to the Program Coordinators in writing at least 2 months before project end date and include a revised budget and timeline of activities for consideration.

18. Marketing and Communications

Awardees may be contacted by Sydney Marketing and Communications and CUHK Office of Academic Links for the purposes of promoting their successful funding application and informing others of their research.

19. Publications

19.1. Any publications (e.g. abstracts, articles) or dissemination (e.g. public presentations) arising from activities supported by the Ignition Grants should acknowledge assistance received. The standard acknowledgment is “The University of Sydney – The Chinese University of Hong Kong Ignition Grants”.

19.2. Publications should appear in internationally recognised scholarly journals and should be published within 18 months after the end of the project.

19.3. Copies or notifications should be submitted to the Office of Global and Research Engagement at Sydney and the Office of Academic Links at CUHK.

Further Information

For further information please contact the Program Coordinators:

<p>The University of Sydney Patrick Wang Senior Global Research Partnerships Officer Office of Global & Research Engagement Email: ip.ipdf@sydney.edu.au</p>	<p>The Chinese University of Hong Kong Olivia Kwok Programme Manager (Global) Office of Academic Links Email: oliviakwok@cuhk.edu.hk Phone: +852 3943 1315</p>
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