



The ASPIRE League Partnership Seed Fund

Guidelines for Applicants

Deadline: May 10, 2026

The ASPIRE League was set up in 2009 as a consortium of five leading science and technology universities in Asia with a vision to promote innovation in the region through the advancement of science and technology.

About the Seed Fund

In 2019, the ASPIRE League launched the **ASPIRE League Partnership Seed Fund** to foster deeper research collaboration within the League by building on the research strengths of member universities to create greater impact. The scheme encourages researchers from member universities to collaborate on research topics of mutual interest, with the aim to subsequently make joint external funding applications and build valuable long-term relationships.

For the Eighth (2026) Round, the participating universities are:

- Institute of Science Tokyo (Science Tokyo)
- Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST)
- Nanyang Technological University (NTU)
- The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST)

The Seed Fund is open to faculty members of ASPIRE League member universities only. In the spirit of the Seed Fund, each proposal should try to engage as many participating universities as possible; the minimum is two for an application to be considered. Tsinghua University (Tsinghua) will not be able to participate in the 2026 Round. However, faculty from participating universities may invite Tsinghua faculty to join their respective proposals. An invited Tsinghua faculty member may join a proposal using his/her own funds.

How to Apply

Any interested faculty member of a participating university may initiate an application by inviting a faculty member(s) from another participating university(s) to participate in a proposal. If multiple faculty members from a single university are involved in the same proposal, they should select from among themselves a “Lead Collaborator,” who will be the group’s coordinator.

The Lead Collaborators from participating universities of each project should identify among themselves the Principal Investigator (PI). The PI will be responsible for submitting the proposal on behalf of the group.

The PI should also work with other Lead Collaborators to develop a concrete plan, including deliverables, with a project period of 12 to 18 months.

Transfer and Use of Funds

For each selected project, each participating university will award the stipulated funding (between US\$5,000 and US\$8,000) directly to its own researcher(s).

The funding is intended to support participating universities’ own faculty members for travel costs related to the project, or to organize symposiums/workshops locally. It does not cover salaries, honorarium, equipment, scholarships, conference attendance fees, or tuition fees.

The use of funds will be governed by each participating university’s respective rules and regulations. In principle, the funding must be spent within 12-18 months from the date the research project commences; the actual period shall be governed by the respective participating university’s regulations.

Eligibility

Full-time tenure-track (including tenured) faculty members from all disciplines of participating universities are welcome to apply. Non-tenure-track positions (e.g., research or teaching tracks) are generally not eligible unless explicitly approved by the applicant's home institution.

Resubmissions

Previous Seed Fund awardees may only apply again after submitting the Final Report and delivering the required presentation at the annual ASPIRE Forum for their preceding project.

Proposals that substantially replicate an earlier funded project (i.e., involving the same PI and Lead Collaborators **and** a highly similar research topic) will not be considered. Proposals demonstrating a substantive change in either the research topic or the team composition may be deemed eligible at the collective discretion of the participating universities.

Application Submission and Deadline

Only one application should be submitted per proposal by the PI using the application form (attached). Each application should include the following information and supporting documents, and be sent in one PDF file to aspireseedfd@ust.hk:

- Project title, objectives and potential impact; activities to be undertaken.
- Expected joint outputs, e.g. anticipated joint publications, applications for external funds, etc.
- A clear budget plan, e.g. costs for flights, accommodation, etc., with a clear breakdown of the proposed cost to be borne by each participating university. It is expected that a similar level of activity will take place at each participating university and applicants are advised, where possible, to split the overall project costs more or less equally among the universities involved.
- CVs of the PI and Lead Collaborator(s) together with their selected list of publications.
- A support letter from the head of the home department/school (if required by the applicant's university).

The submission deadline is **May 10, 2026 (Sunday)**.

Applicants will be notified of the results in August 2026.

Evaluation Criteria

Each proposal will be considered by a joint assessment process and evaluated on the following criteria (with equal weighting):

- Quality of proposed activities
- Impact of proposal (including academic gain)
- Ability to leverage future external funding

Reporting

An Interim Report on project progress is required by May 31, 2027, for submission to the ASPIRE Forum held in July 2027. A Final Report detailing activities undertaken, deliverables (against the funded proposal), and potential for further collaboration and joint external funding, should be submitted within one month of the project's completion. The PI will be invited to present the completed project at the ASPIRE Forum ensuing project completion.

Report submission: aspireseedfd@ust.hk

Completion of both the written Final Report and the presentation at the ASPIRE Forum is mandatory. Failure to fulfill these requirements will render the PI and associated Lead Collaborators ineligible for future rounds of the Seed Fund.

Intellectual Property

Researchers participating in the Seed Fund will be bound by the intellectual property terms as set out in the ASPIRE League Memorandum of Understanding, signed by the five member universities. The IP terms are as follows:

“The member universities shall respect each other’s rights to intellectual property. Further, the intellectual property rights (IPR) that arise as a result of any ASPIRE League activities such as joint research projects shall be determined between the relevant universities on a case-by-case basis in such a manner as being consistent with laws and regulations of related countries and the IPR policies of the universities.”

For Enquiries:

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