

Sino-Swiss Science and Technology Cooperation, SSSTC, 2013–2016

The Sino-Swiss Science and Technology Cooperation (SSSTC) program was established in 2003 after the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the then Swiss State Secretariat for Education and Research (SER) and the Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST). This MoU has since, through the SSSTC program, served as a foundation for intensified research collaboration between Swiss and Chinese scientists. During the first active phase of the SSSTC (2008- 2012), nearly 200 collaborative projects have been awarded and some of them are still ongoing.

Building on the previous success, the Swiss State Secretariat for Education, Research, and Innovation (SERI) and MOST are committed to continue the SSSTC for another 4 years (2013–2016, see [article](#)). A call for Joint Research Projects (JRP; focus field: translational biomedicine and medical technology) proposals is planned for January 2014, which will be launched by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF). For the details of the JRP, please contact the SNSF (www.snf.ch)

Aside from the JRP, a separate budget has been allocated for other funding instruments managed by the ETH Zurich as Leading House (LH) (with the assistance of the University of Zurich as the Associated Leading House, ALH) for the SSSTC program. These instruments are:

- **Stepping Stone Symposia or other Workshops:**
This shall be an instrument to provide a platform where Swiss and Chinese researchers can explore one another's willingness to collaborate, and/or have in-depth discussions of future collaborations.
- **Exchange Grants:** provide funding for personnel exchanges, which shall enable future research collaborations.
- **Research-innovation Communities (RiC):**
This instrument shall broadly connect Swiss researchers of a given research field (or with similar goals in engaging Chinese partners) to allow efficient use of one another's resource in China. Synergy creation is an important goal of the instrument.
- **Follow-up Grants:** provide means to bring otherwise successful SSSTC projects to conclusion.

Sino Swiss Science and Technology Cooperation

2013 Call for Proposals

Call opening: December 20, 2013

Stepping Stone Symposia or Follow-Up Workshops

Budget allocated for 2014: CHF 130'000¹.

Background and Description

Stepping Stone Symposia have been instruments under the SSSTC since 2012 (www.steppingstone.ethz.ch). The goals of the symposia are, (i) to ascertain that research fields with high potential of generating Sino Swiss bilateral benefits are promoted, (ii) to ensure that, through

¹: The Leading House reserves the right to reallocate the budgets based on the demand.

²: The SSSTC and the China Scholarship Council (CSC) will first evaluate proposals separately. They will then jointly decide on 10 projects to co-fund. For projects declined by the CSC but approved by the SSSTC, the maximum project length would be 12 months, supported solely by the SSSTC.

central planning via the LH/ALH, the symposia may broadly reach qualified Swiss stakeholders, (iii) that via broad participation of researchers in a given field, a critical mass needed for building a research community may be built up, and this in turn could promote innovative ideas.

To date, five Stepping Stone Symposia have been successfully concluded: two in 2012 in Switzerland and three in China in 2013. These conferences have helped network Chinese and Swiss researchers and were met with enthusiasm. Currently, a Stepping Stone Symposium on natural products and drug discovery (June 2014 in Switzerland) is under planning (Please contact the SSSTC program office at ETH Global for further information).

Following the same principle, the SSSTC welcomes bottom-up initiatives of symposia in new areas--- social sciences included---(or workshops as a follow-up of previous Stepping Stone Symposia), provided that these workshops/symposia promote translational research (through combining research excellence and potential for innovation) and are initiated by either Swiss professors with well-defined Chinese partner institutes, or Chinese partners with support from Swiss professors. Each symposium/workshop should observe the reciprocity principle of funding as much as it is feasible and reasonable, and might receive some administrative support from the LH/ALH.

For Stepping Stone Symposia, aside from adhering to the description above, it is expected that,

1. There shall be broad participation from various universities, research institutes, and/or regions of Switzerland and that a website shall be set up to allow open registration and participation;
2. There shall be clear demonstration of industrial interest and support (this requirement could be waived for disciplines under social sciences).

Priority Areas

There is no priority area restriction for Stepping Stone Symposia. The LH /ALH are open to suggestions of new symposia topics.

Workshops: Currently accepting follow-up topics of the previous Stepping Stone Symposia, i.e., cancer research, neuroscience, natural products and drug discovery, and medical technology. New areas may be defined based on demand.

Deadline

None.

Grants are awarded on a first come first serve base until the funding for the budget year is exhausted.

Eligibility

For Stepping Stone Symposia:

Organizers: full professors from eligible Swiss institutions (Swiss Federal Institutes of Technology, Cantonal universities, Federal and Cantonal research institutes, Universities of Applied Sciences, and other research institutes eligible for receiving federal funding).

For Follow-Up Workshops:

Organizers: senior researchers holding permanent positions in an eligible Swiss institution (Swiss Federal Institutes of Technology, Cantonal universities, Federal and Cantonal research institutes, Universities of Applied Sciences, and other research institutes eligible for receiving federal funding) .

Grant Information

¹: The Leading House reserves the right to reallocate the budgets based on the demand.

²: The SSSTC and the China Scholarship Council (CSC) will first evaluate proposals separately. They will then jointly decide on 10 projects to co-fund. For projects declined by the CSC but approved by the SSSTC, the maximum project length would be 12 months, supported solely by the SSSTC.

For Stepping Stone Symposia:

The maximum budget is up to CHF 60'000 per conference in Switzerland and up to CHF 30'000 per conference in China. In general it is expected that the travelers should pay for the costs of their own travel and the hosts will cover local costs. Exceptions can be made for plenary speakers. 70% of the funding shall be transferred once a satisfactory website has been set up. The remaining 30% (or up to the amount that covers the full costs of the conference; whichever sum that is smaller) will be transferred after the final report (including both financial and scientific parts) has been accepted by the program office.

For Follow-Up Workshops: The maximum budget is CHF 15'000. The visitors should pay for the costs of their own travel and the hosts will cover local costs. Applicants are encouraged to seek supplemental financial support from the Swiss National Science Foundation (International Exploratory Workshop). 90% of the funding will be transferred upon the final program has been submitted to the Leading House. The final 10% (or up to the amount that covers the full costs of the conference; whichever sum that is smaller) will be transferred after the final report (including both financial and scientific parts) has been accepted by the program office.

Report forms may be downloaded separately at a later time.

Format

For Stepping Stone Symposia:

It is expected that a roundtable discussion should be an integrated part of the conference; this shall generate directions for future conference in the partner country (different from where the first conference takes place) and/or follow-up recommendation for future collaboration.

Selection Criteria

The selection criteria for Stepping Stone Symposia are:

1. People who initiate a symposium have to demonstrate their ability to broadly encourage participation of Swiss and Chinese colleagues and have good standing in the community;
2. People who initiate a symposium have to elaborate clear benefits and/or need for Sino-Swiss collaboration in the proposed fields of discipline, and how it would promote innovation.

The selection criteria for Follow-Up Workshops are:

1. Clear elaboration of specific scientific or technical questions to be discussed;
2. Clear elaboration of the selection criteria of workshop participants and their scientific qualification;
3. Clear demonstration of willingness to collaborate in the future.

Exchange Grants

News: This instrument is now co-funded by the China Scholarship Council². Chinese prospective visiting scholars should submit their applications to the CSC, and the Swiss partners should submit their applications to the SSSTC program office.

¹: The Leading House reserves the right to reallocate the budgets based on the demand.

²: The SSSTC and the China Scholarship Council (CSC) will first evaluate proposals separately. They will then jointly decide on 10 projects to co-fund. For projects declined by the CSC but approved by the SSSTC, the maximum project length would be 12 months, supported solely by the SSSTC.

Budget: CHF 240'000 for 2014¹. If an overwhelming number of applications is received, the Leading House may increase the budget per call so that the award rate would be reasonable.

Call frequency: once per year for 2014 and 2015.

The Exchange Grants are meant to be an instrument for encouraging follow-up activities after Stepping Stone Symposia and Follow-Up Workshops. These grants shall enable mid-term (6-24 months) personnel exchanges that may pave way for future more ambitious or more engaging joint research projects. These grants shall provide a mechanism for Swiss researchers to stay in contact with Chinese colleagues and start pilot research activities.

Reciprocity is one of the funding pillars for the SSSTC program. It is expected that the Chinese partners will bear the local costs of Swiss researchers' research stays in China.

Priority Areas

The priority area is currently translational biomedicine. This could include related sub-disciplines in biology and chemistry, medical technology, and clinical research. The China Scholarship Council, CSC, will not accept applications in other fields. Applications outside of the defined priority areas may be funded by the SSSTC, but will be of lower priority than those from the translational biomedicine fields.

Further priority fields may be defined by the SSSTC as the program progresses.

Application Deadline

March 30, 2014

March 30, 2015

(CSC deadline: April 5, 2014. For other application details, please contact CSC office in China)

(To be determined: 2016)

Duration²

6-24 months.

Eligibility

Senior researchers holding permanent positions in an eligible Swiss institution (Swiss Federal Institutes of Technology, Cantonal universities, Federal and Cantonal research institutes, Universities of Applied Sciences, and other research institutes eligible for receiving federal funding) are eligible to apply.

Grant Information

The SSSTC Exchange Grant is intended to subsidize the living costs (CHF 2500 per month) for Chinese visitors (PhD students/post-doctoral students) coming to Switzerland for research purpose. If the visiting students receive employee status in the Swiss institutes, the SSSTC will pay for social costs (AHV, etc.) up to CHF 250 per month for up to 12 months. Please specify your budget request in the application form. The travelers (or their institutes) are responsible for their own health insurance and travel costs.

For Swiss students (PhD or post-doctoral) carrying out research stays in Chinese partners' laboratories, roundtrip economy tickets for flights to China up to CHF 2000 per trip may be granted.

The SSSTC will supply a living cost supplement for each Chinese visiting student/postdoc of CHF 2500 per month for the first three months. From the fourth month on, the CSC will provide a scholarship in accordance to the regulations of the Chinese government (CHF 1900 per month for PhD students and

¹: The Leading House reserves the right to reallocate the budgets based on the demand.

²: The SSSTC and the China Scholarship Council (CSC) will first evaluate proposals separately. They will then jointly decide on 10 projects to co-fund. For projects declined by the CSC but approved by the SSSTC, the maximum project length would be 12 months, supported solely by the SSSTC.

CHF 2000 per month for postdoctoral students). The SSSTC will top off the scholarship so that the selected candidates will continue to receive the same level of support, i.e., at CHF 2500 per month from month 4 to month 12. After the first 12 months, the selected candidates will be financially supported solely by the CSC.

Financial Arrangement and Reporting

A Grant Agreement shall be signed between the SSSTC/ETH Zurich and the Swiss applicant once his/her project has been approved. Although it is expected that the Chinese partners may be responsible for parts of the reports, it is the Swiss applicant's responsibility to ensure that an annual (for multi-year projects) and/or a final report are filed. 90% of the funding will be transferred after the conclusion of the Grant Agreement between the Leading House and the Swiss applicant and about one month before the start of the project. The final 10% will be transferred after the final report (includes both financial and scientific parts) has been accepted by the program office.

Report forms may be downloaded separately at a later time.

Selection Criteria

(Not necessarily listed in the order of priority)

1. Scientific merit, significance, feasibility, and potential impact of the proposed research;
2. Clear elaboration or research plan for the visitor;
3. Clear demonstration of bilateral support;
4. Qualification of the students for the proposed research;
5. Clear elaboration of complementarity of the expertise of the partner groups.

Intellectual Property

Applicants must consult both the host as well as the guest institution concerning their internal regulations on intellectual property. For market oriented/industrial projects, it is important that a consensus document has been signed by all parties or is in preparation.

Research-innovation Community (RiC)

Total budget allocated: CHF 800'000¹.

Deadline:

Pre-proposal: March 30, 2014

Full Proposal: by invitation only; deadline to be specified.

Research collaboration depends heavily on human relationship. For long distance collaborations, such as in the case of China, the human factor and local knowledge are especially important. It is envisioned that Swiss researchers/institutes shall organize themselves into "Research-innovation Communities (RiC)" for the purpose of information exchange, exploring different directions and models of collaboration with Chinese partners, etc. A successful RiC shall define unique strength in Sino Swiss collaboration, explore potential synergy, and ultimately produce results beyond what individual contacts may achieve.

In order to use resource more efficiently and to streamline administrative process, a RiC shall be a self-organizing body with a committee of scientific leads (minimum of 2-3 professors, or research division heads from industries) that allows the participation of researchers from other Swiss universities, research institutes, and enterprises as members. The scientific leads shall formulate important research (or education, or innovation) questions and decide on instruments that shall promote best practices in

¹: The Leading House reserves the right to reallocate the budgets based on the demand.

²: The SSSTC and the China Scholarship Council (CSC) will first evaluate proposals separately. They will then jointly decide on 10 projects to co-fund. For projects declined by the CSC but approved by the SSSTC, the maximum project length would be 12 months, supported solely by the SSSTC.

Sino Swiss collaboration. Standard instruments for bilateral cooperation such as small, research-focused workshops, personnel exchange, may be funded through a RiC. Other more creative instruments should be briefly described in the pre-proposal and clearly elaborated in the full proposal.

In summary, a Research-innovation Community:

- Shall aim at exploring synergy in research and/or innovation through sharing experience and resource of their “China-Knowhow” among members;
- Shall consist of a group of scientists with common research interests/focuses;
- Shall be led by a small group of scientific leaders, which through the engagement of their own teams, acts as the core of the community and sets the direction of the community;
- Shall be member-based. Each member should be willing to make some financial contribution complementary to that of the SSSTC support.

Eligibility

Senior researchers holding permanent positions in an eligible Swiss institution (Swiss Federal Institutes of Technology, Cantonal universities, Federal and Cantonal research institutes, Universities of Applied Sciences, and other research institutes eligible for receiving federal funding) may apply as project leaders. Support from participating member institutes is, however, essential.

Grant Information

The allowable budget depends on the collaboration models. In general, it shall follow the SSSTC funding principles, i.e., reciprocity, limitation on living costs, etc. Examples of funding models are: project focused workshops, short-term exchanges of personnel for pilot experiments, etc. Other well-justified funding models are also possible.

Evaluation

Both pre- and full proposals will be evaluated by the LH/ALH plus other scientific and/or administrative advisors when necessary. The evaluation criteria are (not in order of priority):

- Sound management concept, which is necessary for project distribution within the community;
- Demonstration of inclusion for a broad spectrum of Swiss stakeholders of the community;
- Sound justification of the requested budget;
- Clear elaboration of synergy to be gained within the community through collaboration with Chinese partners, or
- Clear elaboration of the need for exploring the opportunity in collaboration with potential Chinese partners.

Follow-up Grants

Total budget allocated for 2013-2016: CHF 90'000¹.
Grants are awarded on a first come first serve base.

This instrument provides funding for personnel exchanges or publication costs for previous successful SSSTC projects. The purpose of this funding is to allow fruitful projects that are near completion to be brought to an end. Eligible projects may apply to the program office at the Leading House as the needs arise. There is no set deadline or application schedule for this instrument. [Each previous SSSTC project is eligible for one follow-up award.](#)

¹: The Leading House reserves the right to reallocate the budgets based on the demand.

²: The SSSTC and the China Scholarship Council (CSC) will first evaluate proposals separately. They will then jointly decide on 10 projects to co-fund. For projects declined by the CSC but approved by the SSSTC, the maximum project length would be 12 months, supported solely by the SSSTC.