Private: Astronomy observation and theory 2021

Opportunity status: Open

Funders: Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC)

Funding type: Grant

Publication date: 10 December 2020

Opening date: 2 December 2020

Closing date: 4 March 2021 16:00 UK time

Last updated: 14 December 2020

Start application

You can apply for either a consolidated grant or a consortium grant to support your institution’s research programme covering all aspects of astronomy and astrophysics beyond the solar system.

This funding covers three years of research activity starting from April 2022.

If you are joining a department that holds a current consolidated or consortium grant, you may be eligible for funding through the new applicant scheme.

This funding opportunity is part of the STFC astronomy research grants assessed by the Astronomy Grants Panel.

For solar physics and planetary science, see the related Solar and planetary studies opportunity.

Who can apply
For consolidated or consortium grants

You can apply if your group applied to the 2018 round and it’s now time to refresh the support for your research activities.

Groups usually apply for a consolidated grant or consortium grant every three years. Funding from this year’s round will support projects starting from 1 April 2022.

New groups: check your eligibility

If your group has not been funded by this grant before, you need to contact the STFC astronomy awards team before starting your application. The team will check your eligibility and advise which grant is appropriate.

Find out more about types of grant in the full astronomy research grant application guidelines 2021 (PDF, 498KB).

See general STFC eligibility requirements.

Who is not eligible

Any group that:

- has been awarded a consortium or consolidated grant within the last three years
- has applied within the last three years, but did not secure funding
- is proposing a research programme outside the remit of astronomy and astrophysics beyond the solar system.

For the new applicant scheme

You can apply for this scheme if you:

- are a newly appointed academic member of staff who has joined a department between consolidated or consortium grant submissions
- are eligible for STFC research funding
- can show there are insufficient funds within the existing consolidated or consortium grant to support your research
- do not hold a fellowship.

You will need to submit a pre-proposal before applying. See ‘How to apply’ for more details.

What we're looking for

We are looking to fund projects that cover all aspects of astronomy and astrophysics beyond the solar system.

Key themes
Proposals could include projects relating to:

- stellar physics, including star formation and extra-solar planetary systems (studies of the Sun as part of a programme of stellar physics may fit here)
- studies of transient phenomena
- the interstellar medium and galactic astronomy
- extra-galactic astronomy and cosmology
- the astrophysical aspects of particle astrophysics, including dark matter, cosmic rays and gravity
- novel technology or instrumentation research and development applicable to the above areas
- laboratory astrophysics, including software development, relevant to the above areas.

Find out more about the scope of this opportunity in the full astronomy research grant application guidelines 2021 (PDF, 498KB).

**Researching gravitational waves**

Please check the following guidance to see if your research is within the remit of astronomy: STFC gravitational waves remit (PDF, 52KB).

**Support for technology development projects**

We support proposals at technology readiness levels (TRL) 1 to 4 or equivalent.

For funding opportunities that support higher TRL proposals, see the UK Space Agency. For definitions of TRL see the STFC Project Research and Development scheme.

**What you can request to fund**

You can request support for investigators, researchers, technicians and associated students involved in the research programme.

You should be realistic about the number of posts this funding can support. We advise you to mostly request support for existing posts and only request a small number of additional posts.

**Equipment**

You can request funding to pay for equipment, or that contributes to its total cost. Equipment can be shared across a number of projects or be for a specific task.

STFC will usually contribute around 50% of the cost of equipment items, although this will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

STFC will contribute 100% of the cost only if the support is for instrument development and you have permission from the office to apply for this level of funding.

For more guidance on requesting resources see the full astronomy research grant application guidelines 2021 (PDF, 498KB).
See also the STFC research grants handbook.

New applicant scheme

There are additional terms for this scheme:

- You cannot be funded on more than one grant. For example, if you hold STFC-supported resources at your previous university, you should negotiate the relocation of those resources.
- You must be the sole investigator.
- You can only apply once at any institution for the new applicant scheme.
- You can apply for funding for a minimum of a year and a maximum of three years (or until the issue of the department's next consolidated or consortium grant).
- You can apply for limited resources to allow you to begin to establish a research programme.

Out of scope

For research in the area of solar system science you should apply under the separate Solar and planetary studies funding opportunity.

If your research activities have significant overlap between solar system science and extra-solar science, in rare cases you may be able to request resources under both funding opportunities. The panel will examine these cases closely.

How to apply

Applying for a consolidated or consortium grant

You must apply by using the Joint Electronic Submission system (Je-S).

When applying select:

- council: STFC
- document type: Standard Proposal
- scheme: Standard

For information on how to complete your proposal, read the full guidance.

Your proposal should include:

- case for support
- summary of existing support
- requested resources summary table
- facilities table
- publication statistics table
- gantt chart (not applicable for new applicant scheme)
- data management plan
- equipment quotes (if relevant)
- any additional information such as letters of support.

Attach all documents as PDFs. Read the full STFC document formatting requirements.

**Applying for new applicant scheme**

You will need to get permission from the awards team before submitting your full proposal.

**Submitting your pre-proposal**

Please send a one page pre-proposal and a brief letter from your head of department to kim.burhcell@stfc.ukri.org and chloe.woodcock@stfc.ukri.org at least two weeks before the full application deadline.

Your pre-proposal should include:

- why support from the new applicant scheme is needed and how you meet the eligibility criteria
- description of your current support from your new institution (for example, a starter package)
- brief description of the nature and strength of the scientific case you will describe in the full proposal
- indication of the requested resources and duration.

The letter from your head of department should include:

- confirmation of your employment status and timing
- (if the department holds an existing consolidated or consortium grant) an explanation of why your research cannot be supported using the spending flexibility allowed within the existing grant.

If the panel agrees that your funding is a high priority, you will be asked to submit a full proposal by the closing date.

**Preparing your full new applicant proposal**

Your full proposal should follow the guidance provided for the consolidated and consortium grants, with the following differences:

- you have one page to describe the programme in the group, or department, setting
- you do not need a Gantt chart.

**How we will assess your application**

Your proposal is assessed according to the STFC assessment criteria categories.
Proposals are assessed in September 2021 by the relevant sub-panels of the Astronomy Grants Panel (AGP):

- AGP: AO – astronomy observation
- AGP: AT – astronomy theory.

If needed, the panel may move projects between sub-panels (for example, move an AO project to the AT panel).

Each project in a proposal is assessed and ranked independently. The panel will not split projects to rank smaller work packages individually. For example, if you propose a project with more than one postdoctoral research associate, the panel will either recommend funding the whole request or not recommend funding the project.

**Responding to reviewer comments and panel questions**

You can see reviewer comments using Je-S.

The STFC research office will end your questions from the panel by email. This is an opportunity to update the panel with any relevant information.

You have 10 working days to respond to comments and questions by uploading your responses to Je-S. Responses are limited in the system and any responses that exceed the limit will be rejected.

**Finding out your outcome**

You will be informed of your outcome and receive feedback in November 2021.

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**Contact details**

For more information on this funding opportunity please contact:

- Chloe Woodcock, Senior Programme Manager, chloe.woodcock@stfc.ukri.org
- Kim Burchell, Head of Astronomy Awards, kim.burchell@stfc.ukri.org.

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**Additional info**

This funding opportunity is part of the astronomy research grants run each year by STFC.

**Aims**

The specific aims of these grants are to:
ensure that the programme supported is scientifically excellent and is clearly in line with stated council strategic science objectives
consider the strategic objectives of the UK Space Agency, address the impact agenda and be responsive to changes and new ideas
ensure that the process is transparent and accountable, particularly with respect to the means of prioritisation
ensure that the outcome, where appropriate, takes account of the council’s and the UK Space Agency’s current and planned investment in facilities
ensure that there is an appropriate balance between observations, instrumentation and theory and between the various sub-disciplines of astronomy and the development of novel, generic technologies for astronomy and space science, consistent with the overall strategy of council and the UK Space Agency.

The Astronomy Grants Panel remit and makeup

The Astronomy Grants Panel (AGP) is comprised of experts covering the following four broad science areas within astronomy:

- AGP: AO – astronomy observations
- AGP: AT – astronomy theory
- AGP: SS – solar studies and space-based solar terrestrial physics

AGP panel members.

Supporting documents

- Astronomy research grant application guidelines 2021 (PDF, 498KB)
- STFC project management framework
- STFC grants handbook
- Je-S handbook
- Data management plan
- Peer review and assessment
- Equality and diversity
- Technology readiness levels definitions: PRD scheme

Previous rounds

- Ranked list for funded projects in 2019 astronomy grants round (PDF, 80 KB)

Timeline

2 December 2020
Opening date

- 4 March 2021 16:00

Closing date

- April to May 2021

Review process

- June 2021

Respond to reviewer comments and panel questions

- November 2021

Outcome announced

- 1 April 2022

Grant starts

Related content

- Researchfish

Related opportunities

- Solar and planetary studies 2021

NOTE  This is the first phase of our new website – let us know if you have feedback or would like to help us test new developments.

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