

Funding scheme to support the use of vacant government sites opens for application by non-government organisations

The Development Bureau (DEVB) today (February 21) launched a funding scheme for application by non-government organisations (NGOs) to pursue basic restoration works on vacant government sites to take forward worthy projects for the community.

A spokesperson for the DEVB said, "The funding scheme represents the Government's strengthened efforts in promoting gainful use of vacant government land in support of a variety of socially beneficial initiatives.

"We are adopting an inclusive approach to capitalise on 'community wisdom' in implementing this funding scheme, so as to facilitate NGOs to launch worthy projects as early as possible, with tripartite collaboration among the Government, NGO-applicants and professional bodies."

The funding scheme would provide successful NGO-applicants with subsidies to support one-off, basic and essential restoration works required to make vacant government sites, including vacant school premises on government land, fit for use. Such works may include slope upgrading, site formation, erection of temporary structures (e.g. those using modular integrated construction methods), provision of sewerage/drainage or pedestrian/vehicular access, renovation of dilapidated premises, installation of fire safety equipment or barrier-free facilities and more.

The financial subsidy for each approved project is capped at \$60 million. The Finance Committee of the Legislative Council approved on January 25 the creation of a non-recurrent commitment of \$1 billion for the Government to implement this funding scheme.

The funding scheme does not change – in fact it supplements the current mechanism for handling applications for use of vacant government sites. Before making an application under the funding scheme, an NGO-applicant must have secured in-principle approval from the Lands Department (LandsD) or a relevant authority for renting a vacant government site under the existing mechanism. Also, the NGO-applicant must be a charitable institution or trust of a public character exempt from tax under the Inland Revenue Ordinance; or a company incorporated under the Companies Ordinance as limited by guarantee whose objects and powers do not include distribution of profits to members; or a non-profit-making society registered or body established under any legislation in Hong Kong; or take the form of a social enterprise.

The funding scheme is open to application from NGOs that have secured approval or at least in-principle approval for the grant of short-term tenancies on or after the announcement of this initiative in the 2018-19 Budget on February 28, 2018, for the use of vacant government sites and where works have yet to commence.

The DEVB will chair an inter-departmental Assessment Committee to vet funding applications and oversee the implementation of the funding scheme. The Assessment Committee will draw upon representatives of relevant government bureaux and departments as members.

A list of vacant government sites under LandsD management and available for short-term tenancy application by NGOs for community, institutional or non-profit-making purposes is available on the LandsD "GeoInfo Map" website (www.map.gov.hk/gm/map/search/faci/___VGS?lg=en). The application form and guide to application for this funding scheme have been uploaded onto the DEVB's website (www.devb.gov.hk/en/issues_in_focus/index.html).