

\$50m boost for urban development research

■ BY ESTHER TEO

SUSTAINABLE urban development research has received a \$50 million shot-in-the-arm with the announcement that the National Research Foundation (NRF) is to help fund five research projects.

Four of the research programmes are from Nanyang Technological University, while the fifth is the brainchild of National University of Singapore academics.

The money will go towards pushing the knowledge frontier forward in areas such as sustainable urban waste management, efficient sunlight harvesting and engineering biofuels.

The grant is part of NRF's Competitive Research Programme (CRP) funding scheme, which attracted 68 preliminary proposals submitted by researchers from local universities, polytechnics, public research bodies and private companies.

Twelve were selected to be developed into full proposals for international peer review, with five finally recommended for funding by the International Evaluation Panel (IEP).

The CRP funding scheme provides up to \$10 million per proposal over a period of three to five years and funds a broad range of research programmes.

The initiative is credited with strengthening internationally competitive high-impact science and technology here.

NRF chief executive Francis Yeoh said that the

CRP grants had built up a sizeable body of researchers working on cutting-edge issues, and that this greatly enriched the breadth and depth of the research landscape.

"Early results have been promising – we look forward to significant research breakthroughs coming out of this programme that will result in major economic or societal benefit," he said.

IEP chair and former director of the United States National Science Foundation Rita Colwell said that as a small, densely populated nation, Singapore was well-placed to develop solutions to the global challenges of urbanisation faced by mega-cities around the world.

"The theme was an excellent choice. The awarded R&D projects are very impressive," Dr Colwell said.

"I hope the results of their research will help Singapore and other cities in the world deal with the complex challenges of rapid urbanisation in a way that will allow large urban centres to achieve an even higher standard of living."

CRP grant calls are announced twice a year and, to date, 25 awards totalling about \$250 million have been disbursed over the past five rounds.

Past research projects funded by the grants have led to a range of discoveries, such as the generation of antibodies used to detect tuberculosis.

NRF said that it is planning a review of the scheme before any further grant calls so that it can evaluate its effectiveness and implement improvements.