

UKRI-GCRF Network Plus call for Gender and Intersectionality and for Education as a Driver of Sustainable Development Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

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About the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF)

What is GCRF?

The [Global Challenges Research Fund](#) (GCRF) is a five-year £1.5 billion fund and a key component in the delivery of the [UK Aid Strategy](#), tackling global challenges in the national interest. The fund aims to ensure that UK research takes a leading role in addressing the problems faced by developing countries through:

- Challenge-led disciplinary and interdisciplinary research
- Strengthening capacity for research and innovation within both the UK and developing countries
- Providing an agile response to emergencies where there is an urgent research need.

Does GCRF replace other research funding initiatives focused on international development challenges?

No, GCRF is not replacing any existing initiatives, and is part of a suite of implementation mechanisms announced as part of the UK Aid Strategy. ESRC funding to address development challenges will continue to be awarded through schemes such as the Newton Fund, our strategic partnership with DFID, and other multilateral programmes with other UK research councils. The scientific and geographic focus, as well as eligibility and delivery mechanisms, for each of these schemes may differ, and applicants should make sure they submit their proposal to the most appropriate scheme.

Official Development Assistance (ODA)

What is ODA?

ODA stands for Official Development Assistance. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) sets the international standard for defining and registering ODA. The DAC defines ODA as “those flows to countries and territories on the DAC List of [ODA](#) Recipients and to multilateral development institutions which are:

- provided by official agencies, including state and local governments, or by their executive agencies
- each transaction of which: a) is administered with the promotion of the economic development and welfare of developing countries as its main objective; and b) is concessional in character and conveys a grant element of at least 25% (discounted at a rate of 10%)”

What is the DAC list and which countries are on it?

The DAC List of ODA Recipients shows all countries and territories eligible to receive ODA. These consist of all low and middle income countries (LMICs) based on gross national income (GNI) per capita as published by the World Bank, with the exception of G8 members, EU members, and countries with a firm date for entry into the EU. The list also includes all of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) as defined by the United Nations. The DAC List presents countries and territories in groups, but all countries listed are eligible to receive ODA and therefore relevant to GCRF funding.

The DAC revises the list every three years. Countries that have exceeded the high-income threshold for three consecutive years at the time of the review are removed.

The current [DAC list](#) is available online.

Does my proposal meet ODA requirements?

Only grants that comply with ODA requirements can be funded under GCRF calls. The definition of ODA eligible research provided by the [OECD](#) makes clear that the primary purpose must be to promote the economic growth or welfare of developing countries.

When trying to decide whether an activity meets ODA requirements, it is important to focus on the questions typically asked by the OECD. Questions you may wish to consider when writing your proposal include:

- Is the project addressing the economic development and welfare of an ODA-eligible country?
- Is there a development need that my project or activity is addressing?
- Are the countries involved on the DAC List of ODA Recipients, or will countries on the DAC list directly benefit from the research?
- Would this project or activity be applied in an ODA-eligible country – in which case when, how and with whom?
- What would the impact of the project or activity be, and who would benefit?
- How does the project or activity contribute to sustainable development?
- What would success for this activity look like?
- How would success or impact be measured?

Applicants should ensure they have considered existing advice on ODA requirements. Any queries about the ODA eligibility of projects should be raised with the ESRC contact named in the call specification before submitting an application.

How do I demonstrate that my proposal meets ODA requirements?

Applicants must clearly demonstrate how they meet ODA requirements throughout their 'case for support' and 'pathways to impact' attachments. In addition, all proposals must include a one-page attachment addressing the following three questions:

1. Which country/countries on the DAC list will directly benefit from this proposal?
2. How is your proposal directly and primarily relevant to the development challenges of these countries?
3. How do you expect that the outcome of your proposed activities will promote the economic development and welfare of a country or countries on the DAC list?

The research councils reserve the right to reject applications that do not respond to all three questions. We expect applicants to refer closely to ODA guidance as part of preparing their proposal.

Does my research have to take place in a DAC list country?

Whilst the expectation is that the majority of research will take place in a DAC list country, we recognise that there will be cases where research relevant to DAC list countries will take place elsewhere. The key to ODA compliance is what the primary purpose of the research is, and where the benefits of the research are expected to be experienced. Where research is conducted, or where research participants are from, are not necessary or sufficient indications of whether or not research meets ODA requirements.

The primary purpose of any GCRF research must be to promote the economic development and welfare of a country or countries on the DAC list. Any benefit to the UK or any other non-DAC list country can only be a secondary consideration: the primary benefit must be to a country or countries on the DAC list. Not all research conducted in DAC list countries will meet these criteria, but some research involving non-DAC list countries may. Applicants will therefore need to carefully consider how they demonstrate ODA compliance regardless of where their proposed research takes place.

Are proposals relevant across more than one country eligible?

Yes, proposals may be relevant to one or multiple countries on the DAC list.

Are there priority countries on the DAC list for GCRF?

There are no priority countries within GCRF. All countries on the DAC list are eligible except those which are flagged as likely to graduate from the DAC list during the course of the proposed research project.

What happens if a country is flagged as likely to graduate from the DAC list during the course of the proposed research project?

The DAC list includes footnotes which indicate which countries are likely to graduate from the list and when, subject to certain conditions. If a country is flagged as likely to graduate it should not be the primary focus of a proposal, although it can be included as an additional case study or comparison. In such proposals the primary purpose of the research should be to promote the development and welfare of a developing country **not** due to graduate from the list.

Can my impact-generating and knowledge exchange-related activities focus on international organisations and/or international non-governmental organisations (INGOs)?

The impact-generating and knowledge exchange-related activities must be focused on a DAC list country or countries, and if the applicants intend to generate impact via international organisations or INGOs they should explain why this is likely to lead to greater impacts than working directly with stakeholders in-country. Impacts should be targeted at specific DAC list countries and should not depend on the trickle down of a global public good.

Is research on refugees in non-DAC list countries eligible?

Research on refugees in non-DAC list countries may be eligible if it otherwise falls within the scope of the call.

For research to be ODA eligible, the primary purpose of the research must clearly promote the economic development and welfare of a developing country or countries. Therefore where the research takes place or where the subjects participating in the research are from does not automatically make a project ODA-eligible

If you aim to carry out research on refugees in non-DAC list countries, you must follow the following OECD's ODA criteria for it to be deemed eligible:

- The research focuses on refugees and/or asylum seekers (as defined in page 12 of the OECD's guidance [here](#)) from DAC list countries
- Research on refugees will only be deemed as ODA compliant if it focuses on the temporary sustenance of the refugees, i.e. the first 12 months from the date of their application for asylum, or, alternatively, their date of entry into the country through a resettlement programme, or their date of entry into a country upon the acceptance of an application for family reunification
- Research will not be deemed ODA compliant if it is focused on the more permanent nature of refugees (i.e. passing the 12 months' threshold), on promoting their integration or settlement into the economy of the host (non-DAC list) country, for the resettlement of refugees to another donor country, for voluntary repatriation (after the first 12 months) or for the return of rejected asylum seekers

Please note the above list is not exhaustive. For the complete criteria, please see the [OECD DAC High Level Communique](#) If you have any doubt, please do get in touch with the ESRC office.

Eligibility

Does the lead research organisation have to be based in the UK?

Yes. Research proposals must be led by a UK principal investigator based at a research organisation that is [eligible for UKRI funding](#). Proposals can be submitted by researchers who are not established members of the proposed host institution. By submitting the proposal, the research organisation is confirming that, in the event of an award, they guarantee to provide facilities for the PI (as if they were an established member of staff) for the duration of the award.

Are there limitations to the number of Co-Is or partners and is there a limit on individuals from the same institution?

There is no limit to the number of co-investigators or partners. There is also no limit to the number of individuals from the same institution being included on the proposal.

Are early-career researches (ECRs) eligible to act as PI or Co-I? Is there any requirement of previous experience of leading Networks?

Whilst there are no stipulations about the amount of experience required to lead a Network Plus proposal, the principal investigator would be expected to have an appropriate level of experience to lead a grant of this value. Given the scope, complexity and value of a Network Plus project, we would normally expect to see ECRs in a more supportive role.

Can I include researchers from outside the UK as co-investigators?

Academic researchers (at PhD or equivalent status) from an established overseas research organisation of comparable standing to a UK research organisation will be eligible to be listed as an international co-investigator under GCRF Collective Fund Programme calls.

Please refer to [ESRC's international co-investigator policy](#) for further information, noting that the 30% cap on costs will not apply (this is explained in detail in the call specification.)

What are the eligibility criteria for international co-investigators?

ESRC would not expect to see costs of more than 30% of total costs requested go to non-UK non-DAC-list countries. We strongly encourage international co-investigators from countries not on, or likely to graduate from, the DAC list to make a significant contribution to their own research costs. Please see the [Costs incurred by non-UK institutions and partners](#) document for more information on non-UK non-DAC list organisation costs.

What level of indirect costs can I claim for International co-investigators?

The overhead/indirect rate for DAC list country co-investigators is up to 20% of the total direct costs (e.g. staff costs, T&S, conferences) incurred by that organisation. Please note that overhead/indirect costs cannot be claimed for co-investigators from developed (i.e. not on the DAC list) countries or those likely to graduate from the DAC list during the course of the project.

Is it necessary for the lead UK research organisation to have Co-Is from other UK research organisations, as well as international research organisations?

The Network Plus can be made up of any mix of appropriate academic partners and co-investigators, either based in the UK or overseas. However, please note that the principal investigator must be from a UK HEI eligible for UKRI funding.

Can international NGOs be included as co-investigators?

Unfortunately, international NGOs are not eligible to be included as co-investigators on proposals, however they can be included as project partners or employed on a consultancy basis.

How can I include a UK non-academic (business, third sector or government) partner?

When a principal investigator includes a business, third sector or government body co-

investigator on their application, they must ensure that all associated costs are fully justified within the Justification of Resources attachment. The ESRC will fund 100% of justified costs; however, the project costs associated with these types of Co-I contributions must not exceed 30% of the overall cost of the grant (at 100% fEC). Applicants should note that where a proposal includes a combination of UK business, third sector and government body co-investigators the combined costs of all co-investigators must not exceed the 30% maximum limit.

How can I include an overseas non-academic (business, third sector or government) partner?

While non-academic partners from outside the UK, including DAC list countries, are not eligible to be included as co-investigators, they can be included as project partners or employed on a consultancy basis. These should be entered on the proposal as Other DI Costs at 80% fEC. It will be up to the project team to decide on and justify the specific required involvement within the proposal.

Do I need to include a collaborator based in a country on the DAC list?

For this call it will not be a formal requirement to include a collaborator based in a country on the DAC list. However, we strongly encourage partnerships and collaborative relationships with partners based in DAC list countries where these are substantive and add value. Partnerships may build on existing relationships or represent the development of a new collaborative relationship. The principal requirement is for meaningful, quality collaborations or partnerships, demonstrated through clear leadership roles across the proposed partnership, and balance and proportionality in partners' roles and responsibilities.

Where international partnerships are included, there must be a strong underpinning research ethic based on mutual respect and understanding for different cultural, ethnic, social and economic beliefs and practices.

Can associated studentships be funded through this call?

No, studentships costs are not eligible for this call.

Can I apply to more than one GCRF call?

Yes, but you must have the capacity to undertake all grants applied for, should they be successful, without exceeding your contracted hours.

Can I apply as a principal investigator more than once to this call?

No, applicants can only be principal investigator on one application to this call. There is no restriction on the number of applications an individual can be co-investigator for, but they must have the capacity to undertake all projects applied for, should they be successful.

What level of institutional support is required for this GCRF proposal?

The level of institutional support for GCRF calls is the same as standard research council proposals, i.e. the research council provides 80% of the fEC and the research organisation provides the remaining 20%. For this call, international co-investigator costs will not have a 30% upper limit, where fully justified. Please see the call specification and associated documents for more information on this.

Costs

Do international partners need to attain matched funding from equivalent funding organisations in their country?

No. There is no requirement in GCRF for matched funding from the country or countries involved. If partner organisations wish to contribute to the costs of an award this should be stated clearly in the 'project partners' section.

Can I include costs for international consultants in my proposal?

Yes, costs associated with international consultants may be included on proposals. It is expected that in most cases a consultant will not make a significant scientific contribution to the project overall, rather that they will facilitate the research. However, there may be cases when it is not viable for a researcher to participate unless they do so as a consultant. Please refer to the [international co-investigator guidance](#).

All overseas consultants should calculate costs at a daily rate appropriate to the going rate for their level of expertise in their country. These costs should be claimed at 80% fEC.

If a subcontractor is based overseas, can I claim the costs associated with them at 100% fEC?

The costs for subcontractors are tied to the country managing the sub-contract. Eg, if a non-UK research partner organisation is managing a sub-contract it will be awarded at 100%. If a UK partner is managing a sub-contract it will be awarded at 80%. The most appropriate country should be chosen to manage the sub-contract based on the overall governance arrangements.

Is capital or infrastructure expenditure eligible for this call?

No, capital or infrastructure expenditure is not an eligible cost for this call. Individual items of equipment above £10,000 are not an eligible cost for this call. Small equipment and consumables may be requested where appropriate, as long as individual items are below £10,000 and they are fully justified in the Justification of Resources.

Is the salary of the PI/Lead applicant for UKRI-GCRF Network Plus call eligible to be included?

Yes, PI salary costs can be claimed for within this call.

Network Plus Model

Is it possible for an application to combine both the themes of Education and Gender and Intersectionality in a single proposal?

No. Applications must address either the Gender and Intersectionality or Education as a Driver of Sustainable Development thematic areas of focus of the call. However, please note that applications should reflect the interdisciplinary requirements of the call.

This call has been launched by ESRC. Does this mean the primary focus has to be social science?

No. ESRC is hosting this call on behalf of UKRI for administrative purposes. Proposals involving any disciplines covered by UKRI are welcome. However, proposals must fit the call remit as described in the call specification and will be rejected if they don't.

What are the key components of a Network Plus proposal?

A Network Plus proposal should facilitate the development of partnerships between academics, NGOs, policymakers and practitioners in both the Global North and South, allowing for integrated and cross-cutting activities. The networks will map current research activity, seed-fund small projects, run thematic workshops and rapid response reviews, and build interdisciplinary capacity.

The Network Plus should undertake three core activities:

- Engagement and networking
- Synthesis of research outcomes
- Commissioning of small grants through a flexible fund.

Please refer to the call specification for further details.

How specific does the focus of the Gender and Interdisciplinarity Network Plus need to be in relation to the GCRF Challenge portfolios?

The proposal should address more than one of the GCRF Challenge portfolios, however we do not expect all six to be included. A clear explanation as to why the chosen portfolios are relevant and how proposed work could influence GCRF more widely in terms of transferable lessons or activities should be included in the application.

How can I check what has been funded under GCRF on these areas and if my proposal duplicates an existing ESRC investment ?

Successful proposals must add value to the current ESRC and UKRI GCRF portfolio. Applicants must take account of current and past GCRF research already funded by UKRI. If you wish to explore whether there is any risk that your proposal will appear to the panel to duplicate an existing investment in area of research and approach, you can refer to the scope of [other ESRC investments](#) and [UKRI GCRF investments](#). Additionally you can view all research council funding on [Gateway to Research](#).

How do I make it clear in my application which Network Plus I am interested in?

Please ensure that when entering "Project Title" under the Project Details section on the Je-S application document that the first word of the document is either **Gender** or **Education** to identify which theme you are applying to. Please refer to the call Je-S guidance for further information.

Why are the 'Gender and intersectionality' and 'Education as a driver of sustainable development' Network Plus themes being run under the same call?

The call brings together two GCRF Network Plus activities which are being administered by ESRC on behalf of UKRI. The two strands are not directly linked beyond this. As such, the call will have two separate thematic areas of focus, and applicants can apply to one theme or the other.

What are the assessment criteria for the Network Plus grants?

The applications will be assessed against the following criteria:

- Capacity-building and international partnerships
- Contribution to the promotion of welfare and economic development of people in low and middle income countries (GCRF criterion)
- Management capability and strength of the proposed network
- Quality and coherence of the proposed activities
- Design and methods, including data and information management
- Value for money and sustainability
- Outputs, dissemination and impact
- Research ethics.

Applications will undergo peer review before being considered by a specially convened panel of academic and non-academic experts at a meeting in September 2019. The panel will be asked to assess the proposals against the fit to the call and the assessment criteria. There will then be an interview panel for the shortlisted projects, date to be confirmed. The panel will then make formal recommendations to the funders. The funders may wish to apply some conditions on grants, and there may be subsequent negotiations on the details of the support offered. Funding decisions are expected to be communicated to applicants in September 2019 and awards are expected to commence on 1 November 2019. However, these dates are subject to change.

Is the ESRC able to offer specific advice as to whether specific subject areas are within the scope of this call or as to how a Network Plus is set up?

Unfortunately we are unable to enter into discussions about how to develop research ideas or offer advice regarding which strand to apply to, as this could give an unfair advantage against other applications. We strongly advise applicants to approach their Research Office or Research Department for further support and advice.

What capacity-building requirements are there for these calls?

Proposals to this call are strongly encouraged to identify capacity-building activities as part of, and not separate to, the stated approach. The focus should be on the quality and impact of the Network Plus, and how increasing capacity contributes to this. Examples of building capacity include:

- opportunities for those with relevant skills who have not previously worked on development-relevant research projects to orient their research towards global issues
- support and mentoring for more junior team members
- co-design of research and implementation with developing country partner staff.

Please note that studentships are not eligible under this call.

Further [information on capacity-building in relation to GCRF](#) is available on the ESRC website.

Will the number and diversity of collaborators and DAC List countries included in

my Network Plus influence my chances of being successful?

There is no prescribed model for the exact size, scope and nature of the Network Plus. However the expectation is that each Network Plus will facilitate the development of partnerships between academics, NGOs, policymakers and practitioners in both the Global North and South, allowing for integrated and crosscutting activities. The roles of the team and organisations included in the proposal should be clearly justified and able to fulfil the core activities as stated in the call specification, and appropriate management and communication strategies set out. Assessment will consider the degree and quality of engagement with appropriate developing country partners and demonstrate how the range of relevant partners will be beneficial to the award and be ethical, equitable and sustainable beyond the initial award. Further information about the assessment criteria for this call can be found in the Call Specification document.

Should a project include an advisory panel or committee?

It is recommended that projects convene an inclusive advisory committee to support and advise the leadership team throughout their award, with consideration to equality and diversity issues.

What are the expectations of the leadership team for a Network Plus Grant?

Please refer to the 'Leadership' section of the call specification.

How should I provide evidence of relevant leadership and management?

As set out in the call specification, the proposal should outline a clear management structure for the Network Plus, detailing how the network will be managed day to day. We encourage applicants to include an academic network coordinator as part of the leadership team.

Flexible Funds

What is meant by commissioning of small grants through a flexible fund?

The Network Plus model is a flexible mechanism whereby funding of up to £4.75 million is allocated to the successful lead research organisation to support a cross-institutional leadership team and international and non-academic partners. Through devolved funding the model allows for a proportion of these costs to be allocated to flexible and agile activities that can respond to emerging priorities.

Please see page 6 of the call guidance for full details of what can be included.

All projects commissioned through this route must demonstrate how they are ODA-compliant and meet the overarching aims of the project. Responsibility for the funding of these grants will be devolved to the leadership team and lead RO, subject to reporting on quality assurance and ODA compliance to the ESRC. Inclusion of costs for this strand of activity in Network Plus applications should be set out in the budget section of the Je-S form and in the Justification of Resources attachment.

What proportion of funds for each Network Plus grants can go towards conducting primary research?

Funding for individual projects for innovative projects / activities to conduct new research should not exceed £100k (TBC). Any projects exceeding £30k must be commissioned through open, peer-reviewed calls that are referred to the ESRC – who will support dissemination – before they are issued. Please see the call specification for further information about this aspect of the call.

Who is eligible for the flexible funds?

We have not set any limitations or criteria for the funding of small projects within the Network Plus. The commissioning of these small grants is flexible and at the discretion of the Network Plus leadership team to set the criteria, in conjunction with the host Research Organisation, who will administer these strands of funding. However, members of the core Network Plus leadership team are not permitted to apply for funding through this channel.

The call specification states that the ‘core network leadership team’ cannot apply for funding distributed by the Network Plus. Is this the principal investigator and the co-investigators and would other researchers at their institutions be eligible to apply?

The leadership team would include the principal investigator and any co-investigators named on the proposal. The call process for flexible funds must be transparent with a clear demonstration of impartiality. Where there is any involvement of participants from related ROs who could be considered conflicted, institutionally or otherwise, appropriate steps must be taken to ensure independent and impartial assessment and decision making. Plans for conducting this process should be set out in the proposal, and we would expect there to be further discussion between ESRC and successful applicants in this eventuality.

Can the network members do any funded research from the awarded money?

The Network Plus model of funding is intended to facilitate the development of partnerships in order to synthesise existing research outcomes and identify areas that would benefit from further research – this is the ‘network’ component. The ‘plus’ component is the commissioning of small scale, collaborative research projects using devolved funding.

There are other forthcoming GCRF Collective Programme calls which have a research focus. Several of these have an education theme. Please see the [UKRI GCRF Collective Programme](#) website for further information.

Will non-academic UK and international organisations be eligible to apply for funding distributed by the Network Plus?

Yes, UK and overseas non-academic organisations can apply for the flexible funds. However, as noted in page 6 of the call specification, all projects commissioned through this route must be ODA compliant and meet the overarching aims of the project.

Is it possible to make any changes to the composition of the Network Plus members after the application has been submitted?

We would not expect to see changes made to the composition of the Network Plus after the application has been submitted that fundamentally change the nature or capacity of the Network Plus. This would include changes to the principal investigator. Changes to the composition of the Network Plus after application submission would need to be agreed by the ESRC and may necessitate the involvement of the assessment panel.

The Expression of Interest Document does not constitute a formal application submission and we might expect to see the composition of the networks evolve between this and the final application.

Is it possible for the application to build on the work of already funded networks or research?

It is possible for the Network Plus to build on the work of already funded networks or research. However, this must be clearly specified in the application with details of funding already received. The application must clearly justify how the Network Plus builds upon

existing research or networks to meet the call objectives.

Where can I find further information about the agenda and slides from the Town Hall event in February?

Further information including slides and video footage of presentations is available [here](#)