

UKRI-GCRF (Re)Thinking the Off-Grid City: Human infrastructure interactions in the context of urban crises and urban change

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.

Overseas 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; and
- 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 document 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. Initial assessment of ODA compliance will take place within ESRC, though final decisions may include input from commissioning panels as well as external sources of ODA expertise. 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?

Unless otherwise stated in scheme-specific guidance, 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 allowable as ODA?

Where the research takes place or where the subjects participating in the research are from does not automatically make a project ODA-eligible. The key to ODA eligibility, as highlighted throughout the call documents, is that the primary purpose of the research clearly promotes the economic development and welfare of a developing country or countries.

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, ie 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 (ie 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 COMMUNIQUÉ](#). If you have any doubt, please do get in touch with the ESRC office.

Gender equality

Why only gender? Why are other characteristics not targeted?

Ensuring official development assistance (ODA) is provided in a way that is 'likely to contribute to reducing poverty in a way which is likely to contribute to reducing inequality between persons of different gender' is the purpose of this procedure to ensure that ODA funding provided by UKRI is compliant. However, inclusive research and innovation extends beyond gender to include other characteristics. Not only is it seen as best practice, to insure inclusive research and innovation, but it is also considered as the 'right thing to do'. Intersectionality between gender and other characteristics, such as race or age, is also something to be mindful of. For example, men in certain classes may have different experiences, requirements and needs compared to men in other classes. Being considerate to other characteristics and intersectionality is important to ensure excellent research, which is of high quality, impactful, implementable and sustainable. Being considerate to other characteristics and intersectionality is important to ensure excellent research and innovation, which is of high quality, impactful and implementable and sustainable.

Is gender just about women?

Gender equality is about ensuring the voices and needs of everyone, regardless of the gender a person may identify as. Historically, gender equality has been referred to as 'women's issues' as women have been the driving force behind gender equality policies with the focus being on enhancing the power and autonomy of women. However, to achieve gender equality, the full participation of all genders is needed. Considering gender is more about understanding local gender dynamics rather than focusing on women, especially for international development research and innovation. Recognising gender norms, identifying missed opportunities and looking for ways to work with all spans across all genders, rather than just focussing on women.

Gender isn't relevant to my project, nor is it a priority. How can I provide a Gender Equality Statement?

When designing and delivering international development research and innovation in a way that is impactful and sustainable, almost all decisions made already consider local context and dynamics – including gender – whether explicitly or not. If your research and innovation involves a project team made up of people, involves research participation, involves human samples, benefits people, impacts on people's lives, etc., then gender is relevant to your project. By providing a Gender Equality Statement, you can demonstrate how you have shown meaningful consideration to gender within their project. However, it is expected that some projects will have less impact on gender and gender relations and professional judgement of the applicants should be exercised to ensure appropriate consideration of the context and intended aims of the project. However, it is expected that some projects will have less impact on gender and gender relations and professional judgement of the

applicants should be exercised to ensure appropriate consideration of the context and intended aims of the project.

What are some of the barriers to achieving Gender equality and how might these be mitigated?

Within your proposal, you should try to identify any potential barriers to achieving gender equality and put measures in place to mitigate these. Although some barriers may be more relevant or specific to the field the proposed project is in, the local context of the research and innovation and/or the practices used, there are some common potential barriers. For example, no costs built in for care costs which may be incurred as a result of a researcher/innovator travelling overseas with a dependent when undertaking fieldwork, having an external advisory board without a gender balance, unequal or non-proportional representation of voices or participation for people of different genders. Identifying potential barriers from the offset, allows project teams to consider how to mitigate or monitor these, for example, ensuring costs associated with caring duties are costed into the application (often costs that tend to be borne by female researchers/innovators), setting targets for representation of underrepresented genders, collecting information of the gender of research participants, etc.

Eligibility and costs

Can associated studentships be funded through this call?

No, studentships costs are not eligible for this call.

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.

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.

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. Please note that in addition to our standard policy there are GCRF specific conditions (with particular reference to the costs that can be claimed, see below). It is important that applicants seeking to include international co-investigators also consult the specification of the call they are applying to.

What international co-investigator costs can I claim?

Applicants who include international co-investigators must fully justify the associated costs within the 'Justification of Resources' section of the proposal. The ESRC will fund 100% of justified costs incurred by international co-investigators. However, as the scheme is intended to fund work in low- and middle-income countries, high-income country applicants are advised to keep their costs claimed to a minimum. 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 **Costs incurred by non-UK institutions and partners** document for more information on non-UK non-DAC list organisation costs.

What is the eligibility criteria for international co-investigators?

Co-investigators may be based anywhere in the world, but, additionally for GCRF calls, the international co-investigator's research organisation must submit a 'Letter of Support'. This is to ensure comparability of standing between international organisations and UKRI recognised UK research organisations and to ensure commitment to the project. Further information regarding eligibility can be found in the Je-S guidance.

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 (eg staff costs, T&S, conferences) incurred by that organisation. Please note that overhead/indirect costs cannot be claimed for co-investigators from developed (ie not on the DAC list) countries or those likely to graduate from the DAC list during the course of the project.

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 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.

How do I include international costs on a grant?

These are indicative ways of including international costs on a grant. Other ways may be permissible on a case by case basis, please check with the office if unsure.

For surveys:

- If the survey is being undertaken by an in-house, overseas, team at the institution of an overseas coinvestigator, the cost needs to be included within the directly incurred costs. This is effectively like an overseas Co-I having research assistants working on a survey.
- If a survey is being tendered by an overseas team OR a UK team it would be costed at 100% FEC. Regardless of where the fieldwork takes place it is not a

direct cost associated with an international co-investigator, rather it is a cost that has been subcontracted out to an expert third party for a specific purpose.

- Where a survey is not being done in house we expect it to go to tender regardless of where it is being done/ led from:
- Costs within proposals to meet externally commissioned surveys are fully allowable. However if proposals include costings for surveys planned to be done using internal resource, such costs will need to be fully justified and benchmarked.
- Large surveys over £10,000: based on the expectation that they will be done by specialist survey companies, ESRC requires that such surveys will be subjected to external competition to ensure best value for money through competitive purchasing processes.
- When surveys are commissioned via this sub-contractor route and the work is done by third parties, these costs are eligible for fEC exception funding at 100%. Where it has been agreed that large surveys should be performed by an in-house team, costs are funded at the standard 80% fEC funding rate.
- [Research Funding Guide](#)

For research assistants:

- If Research Assistants are based overseas for their work on a grant, but recruited and employed by a UK institution, they will be paid at 80% fEC.
- If Research Assistants are recruited at a co-investigator's institution and supported by them, they count as part of the co-investigator costs.

For travel and subsistence:

- Any other costs relating to overseas work but incurred by the UK institution eg organising a workshop, UK attendee travel to that workshop, international attendee travel to the workshop reimbursed by the UK; all come out of the 'UK' portion of the grant. Even though the funds relate to non-UK activities the costs are being incurred by the UK institution and are not specific costs directly incurred through the involvement of the international co-investigators (ie co-I travel costs etc.)

For consultants:

- If there is a consultant overseas (for reasons explained in our [international coinvestigator rules](#)), they will be paid at 80% fEC and the consultants are not listed as 'Co-investigators'.

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 third sector 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). Government departments and businesses are not eligible to directly receive funds on the awards.

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. Government departments and businesses are not eligible to directly receive funds on the awards.

Sub-contracts – Sub-contracts are eligible costs on proposals submitted to this call but should only be used for the procurement of goods and services. Sub-contracts are not permitted for research partners providing intellectual input into the project, where a research partner or Project Partner relationship is more appropriate.

If you are unsure where an organisation fits within the above categories, please contact for gcrf-off-gridcities@esrc.ukri.org further guidance.

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

Unless otherwise stated in scheme-specific guidance, it will not be a formal requirement for GCRF calls 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.

Do international partners need to attain matched funding from equivalent funding organisation 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 apply for more than one GCRF call?

Yes, but you must have the capacity to undertake all projects applied for, should they be successful.

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, 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, ie 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.

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 subcontract it will be awarded at 100%. If a UK partner is managing a subcontract it will be awarded at 80%. The most appropriate country should be chosen to manage the sub-contract based on the overall governance arrangements.

This call is being run by ESRC. Does this mean the primary focus has to be social science?

No. ESRC is running 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 specification and will be rejected if they don't.

How can I check 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 GRCF 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 check the scope of other [ESRC and UKRI GRCF investments](#).

Additionally you can view all research council funding on [Gateway to Research](#).