

Public Policy Challenge Fund 2023-25

Guidance for applicants

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1. Summary

Launched in 2021, the Public Policy Challenge Fund enables researchers at the University and partners in the policymaking community to collaborate in tackling public policy challenges. It contributes to the aims of the [Oxford Policy Engagement Network \(OPEN\) Strategy](#) by facilitating policymakers' access to the best available evidence and expertise from across the University and supporting the use of research evidence and expertise in decision-making, offering opportunities research and policymaking partners to learn through experience, to develop more of the relevant skills, and to broaden and deepen their networks.

The OPEN Steering Group is inviting proposals from academics and researchers in any department or faculty at the University, regardless of career stage or level of experience in policy engagement, so long as they have a contract of employment that lasts at least six months beyond the end date of the proposed project. Other fixed-term researchers may apply as co-applicants, as may DPhil students if they will have submitted their thesis and be awaiting their Viva at the point the proposed project will start. Researchers with college-only contracts must apply via a faculty or department. **All applications must include at least one non-academic partner in the policymaking community. Researchers and policymakers alike are welcome to [consult the University's Policy Engagement Team](#) for support in identifying potential partners.**

To increase equality of opportunity across research disciplines and reduce the effect of unconscious bias as to the relative importance of different policy priorities, the Steering Group will apply an element of randomisation to determine which of those proposals assessed as fundable receive funding. Applications from researchers in the Humanities and Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences Divisions are particularly encouraged.

This new call puts an increased emphasis on learning outcomes, inviting applicants to set out clear plans for monitoring, evaluation, and learning – their own, as well as that of other researchers and policymakers.

Applicants can apply for awards of up to £50,000 to cover costs to be incurred between 1 August 2023 at the earliest and 31 July 2025 at the latest. Those proposing projects lasting more than 12 months should not expect to carry over funds requested for the year to 31 July 2024 to the following year. **All project activity must be completed and all funding spent by 31 July 2025.** £500,000 in total is available for projects in the scope of this call.

Applications should be made using the [Internal Research Award Management System](#) (IRAMS). Applicants should follow the guidance below and consult their departmental research support team in the first instance, ensuring they comply with any departmental eligibility criteria, approval processes, or guidelines. Questions regarding the scheme in general, application process, and eligibility, should be addressed to researchandpublicpolicy@admin.ox.ac.uk.

To discuss ideas for a proposal, applicants are encouraged to contact the relevant divisional contact within the Policy Engagement Team to arrange a consultation.

Division	Contact
Humanities	Sarah Eichhorn, sarah.eichhorn@socsci.ox.ac.uk
Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences	Sarah Eichhorn, sarah.eichhorn@socsci.ox.ac.uk
Medical Sciences	Naomi Gibson, naomi.gibson@medsci.ox.ac.uk
Social Sciences & GLAM	Will Pryor, william.pryor@socsci.ox.ac.uk

Deadline: 12:00 BST, Monday 10 July 2023

2. Key dates

Action	Date
Call opens	11 May 2023
Application deadline	12:00 BST, 10 July 2023
Applicants notified of funding decision	w/c 24 July 2023
Earliest project start date	1 August 2023
Latest project end date	31 July 2025

3. What can the Challenge Fund be used for?

Previous Challenge Fund awards have involved policy partners in local and central government, parliament, and civil society, and addressed a range of public policy challenges, including those related to climate change, the economy, health, international development, migration, and peace and security. They have involved research partners from diverse disciplines.

The Challenge Fund may be used to support new partnerships and activities, or for development of ongoing collaboration. The latter must clearly demonstrate the added value of further funding and the potential for timely impact.

The following kinds of activity are some of those that may be supported:

- New research, produced in partnership with policymakers, enabling better understanding of local, regional or national challenges, enabling the policymaking community to inform the research agenda, and both partners to apply research to policy challenges;
- Seminars or workshops that enable researchers and policymakers to share evidence and expertise, and which support the uptake of research evidence in policymaking;
- Activities aimed at enabling researchers to deepen their understanding of how research can inform policymaking, and develop the skills to catalyse it;
- Activities aimed at improving dialogue between researchers and policymakers;
- Academic placements in the policymaking community, and placements of members of the policymaking community at the University;
- Co-design of tools and resources that emerge from research that can maximise the use of research outputs in the policymaking community.

The Challenge Fund will not cover costs related to:

- Research consultancy
- Studentships or internships for UKRI-funded DPhil students, where these are funded through UKRI Doctoral Training Grants
- Academic conferences lacking clear prospects of enabling policy engagement

4. How will applications be assessed?

The OPEN Steering Group aims to support high quality proposals which show (a) strong potential to accelerate and deliver impact in policy arising from excellent research and (b) commitment to developing productive collaboration with policy partners. The Steering Group will score applications against the following criteria:

- Relevance to at least one public policy challenge identified as such by the policy partner(s) (5%);
- Potential to advance policymakers' understanding, clarify, or expand, the range of options open to them (30%);
- Effectiveness of project design and methods, reflecting input of partner(s) throughout project (40%);
- Effectiveness of proposed arrangements for monitoring, evaluation, and learning, and the potential for other researchers and policymakers to learn from the proposed engagement (20%); and
- Value for money, including demonstrable contribution (cash or in-kind) by partners (5%).

Eligible applications will then be assigned to one of three bands, based on their average score, and be ranked within each: Band 1 (70% or above); Band 2 (60-69%); and Band 3 (below 60%). £250,000 is available in each FY. Should there be unanimity on ranking one or more applications, funding will then be allocated to such applications in Band 1 in order of ranking.

To increase equality of opportunity across research disciplines and reduce the effect of unconscious bias as to the relative importance of different policy priorities, remaining funds will be allocated on a random basis:

- Firstly, to other applicants in Band 1;
- Next to those in Band 2, until insufficient funding is available to satisfy the next applicant.¹

This next applicant will be invited to resubmit their proposal within 10 working days, with a revised spending profile, capping proposed annual costs as necessary.

Applications in Band 3 will not be funded.

Applicants will be notified of the outcome of their application by e-mail during the week beginning 24 July 2023. Feedback will be available on request.

The Policy Engagement Team would like to use successful applications as an exemplar for future applicants. Please bear this in mind if your application is successful. All sensitive data will be removed from applications before they are shared. Successful applicants will be given an opportunity to opt-out.

5. Who can apply?

Applications **must** include:

- A Research Partner – an academic or researcher employed at any department or faculty at the University of Oxford, applying via such a department or faculty, either a permanent member of staff or a fixed-term researcher (FTR) with a contract of employment that lasts at least six months beyond the planned end date of the award. FTRs with a contract of employment that lasts less than this cannot serve as a Research Partner but may serve as a Co-applicant.
- A Policy Partner – someone employed by an organisation in the policymaking community, e.g., in devolved or national assemblies; a policy professional in the civil service, or in a statutory body with responsibilities that are sectoral (e.g., a regulators), regional (e.g., a local council), or subject-matter-related; in an international or intergovernmental organisation; or in a non-academic civil society organisation with a policy-relevant mission.

Applications **may** also include:

- Co-applicants – other researchers at the University; DPhil students; teaching staff; museum staff; or research facilitators and other professional services staff; and
- Other external partners in academia, the public, private or voluntary sector.

Applications can only be submitted by the Research Partner. Awards can only be held in departments or faculties, not in colleges. Researchers with college-only contracts must apply via a department or faculty, with a member of that department or faculty as a Co-applicant.

¹ The potential benefit of this kind of approach is explored in, for example, Gladstone, J., Schipper, L., Hara-Msulira, T., & Casci, T. (2022). (rep.). *Equity and Inclusivity in Research Funding: Barriers and Delivering Change*. University of Oxford. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.5287/bodleian:KZjBY77pO>.

Retired and Emeritus Fellows, as well as Master's students, are ineligible. Project staff not currently employed by the University must be able to demonstrate their eligibility to work in the United Kingdom if required to do so as part of the project.

If the Research Partner moves to another university during the project, this funding will not move with them.

For information regarding support for finding partners, please see Section 9.

Many departments and faculties have internal eligibility criteria, review and approval processes, and other guidelines. Applicants are advised to consult their research support team at an early stage in their planning, not least to ensure they comply with these.

6. What can be funded?

Applicants can request up to £50,000 to cover eligible costs to be incurred between 1 August 2023 and 31 July 2025. Those proposing projects lasting more than 12 months should not expect to be able to carry over funds requested for the year to 31 July 2024 to the following year. **All project activity must be completed and all funding spent by 31 July 2025.**

Eligible costs include:

- Salary costs of fixed-term researchers and project staff, e.g., research assistants
- Travel and subsistence costs for researchers, external partners or delegates
- Project costs including publishing, venue hire, transcription and IT
- Consultancy/professional fees for external partners
- Equipment

Cash or in-kind contributions to project costs from external partners are expected to amount to at least 10% of total project costs.

This funding is not provided on a full economic cost (FEC) basis. Estates and indirect costs are not covered by this funding, but all direct costs required to develop, deliver and evaluate the project are covered. If you are unsure about the eligibility of a specific expense, please contact your divisional contact in the Policy Engagement Team for guidance.

In certain circumstances it may be appropriate to cover some costs at the partner organisation, if the participation of the partner organisation is essential to the success of the project but would otherwise be prohibited by cost. Please also note that VAT cannot be recovered so must be included in the costs where necessary. If a partner is delivering services in aid of the project, any additional costs including VAT need to be checked and factored into the budget at application stage.

7. Monitoring, evaluation and learning

See Section 4 for the emphasis placed on this in assessment of proposals. Applicants are invited to set out clear plans in this respect, to enable them to learn and adapt their approach, and to maximise the potential for other researchers and policymakers to learn. Applicants are encouraged to consult the [Policy Engagement Team's guidance and resources relating to monitoring, evaluation and learning](#).

The Policy Engagement Team will work with award-holders, individually and as a cohort, to

- Maximise learning from their experience, and in finding ways to share that with others, e.g., in the context of training activities or resources, or in the form of a blog; and
- Communicate progress towards outcomes, planned or unplanned, including via the team's online presence and social media.

Reporting requirements

Timely consideration of arrangement for monitoring, evaluation and learning will also facilitate and inform the reporting that is required of all award-holders. These reports will be the key mechanism to collect critical information for reporting to Research England, and will assist the Policy Engagement Team in monitoring progress and managing any issues that arise.

A schedule of reporting dates will be provided with award offer letters. Research Partners will be contacted with an email reminder closer to the dates that reports are due for submission.

- **Mid-project report** – This should outline progress, highlight any interim lessons learned, and any challenges, which might delay or impede successful completion. This is not required for projects lasting less than 6 months.
- **End-of-project report** – The end-of-project report should evaluate the project, demonstrate the impact and benefits for both the researcher and the partner organisation, and detail any plans for ongoing engagement with the partner organisation. This report should be submitted within one month of the end of the project.
- **Impact report** – The impact report should briefly outline further impacts achieved in the six months following the project's completion. The aim is to capture any impact that has developed since the project's completion date.

8. How to apply

Researchers are encouraged to [join OPEN](#) before applying.

Applications must be made using the [Internal Research Award Management System](#) (IRAMS). This is a four-part process:

1. Complete the online section of the application on IRAMS.
2. Download and complete the Case for Support template from IRAMS.
3. Combine the Case for Support with the other supporting documents into a single PDF.
4. Upload the single PDF to IRAMS, which should comprise:
 - a. Case for Support, with all relevant fields completed
 - b. Letter(s) of support from external partner(s)
 - c. Letter of support from the Head of Department or Faculty
 - d. Breakdown of costs presented as an X5 admin output

Statement(s) of support from Policy Partner(s)

- A statement of support (max. one A4 page) should be provided by the Policy Partner identified in the Case for Support. This should:
 - Summarise the nature of the public policy challenge that the project aims to tackle;
 - Demonstrate that they understand and are committed to the project's goal;
 - Indicate their role in proposed activities and in achieving proposed outcomes; and
 - Indicate how they expect to benefit from the engagement (e.g., in terms of learning, or deepening networks)
- In cases where obtaining a statement of support from the Policy Partner is considered problematic at the proposal stage, applications may be submitted without one, though any award would be conditional on provision of one.
- Statements of support from other partners may be provided.

Letter of support from Head of Department or Faculty

- A letter of support (max. one A4 page) should be provided by the Head of Department or Faculty. It should demonstrate their support for the project and include details of how the department or faculty will support delivery.

Costing

- Applicants should provide as much detail as possible in IRAMS about Contributions from Other Sources, including cash, as well as time invested by partners and other in-kind contributions.
- The online application form in IRAMS requires a financial breakdown of the project. For each budget line please describe the costs being requested in the corresponding 'Description' field, and if appropriate, provide a justification. Once the 'Purpose' is entered for three budget lines, more budget lines will become available on the online form.
- Please provide an FEC costing. This should be presented in the form of an admin output from the University's costing and pricing software, X5. Applicants should ask their research administrator or finance officer to produce the X5 costing.
- The total requested in IRAMS should match the PRICE on the X5 costing output.
- Projects must be completed and all funds spent by 31 July 2025. Costs may be attributed to Year 1 (to 31 July 2024) or Year 2 (to 31 July 2025) only. Those proposing projects lasting more than 12 months should not expect to be able to carry over unspent funds requested for Year 1 to Year 2. No extensions can be given beyond 31 July 2025.

Departmental/faculty approval

- Applications are automatically submitted to your department for approval via IRAMS.
- Where proposals include staff time for researchers based in a different department to the Research Partner, a statement (e.g., e-mail) indicating departmental approval of this should be provided by the Head of Administration and Finance in each department involved.
- Applicants should check with their department for internal approval procedures and deadlines. Some departments require significant notice to check and submit proposals, so applicants are advised to seek guidance from their departmental administrator as soon as they consider making an application.

9. Where to get support

Applicants are encouraged to consult their departmental research support team in the first instance, not least to ensure they comply with any departmental eligibility criteria, approval processes, or guidelines. Applicants with questions regarding the scheme or application process, including queries relating to eligibility, should email researchandpublicpolicy@admin.ox.ac.uk. If you'd like to discuss ideas for a potential application, please email your divisional contact in the Policy Engagement Team to book a 20-minute consultation.

Division	Contact
Humanities	Sarah Eichhorn, sarah.eichhorn@socsci.ox.ac.uk
Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences	Sarah Eichhorn, sarah.eichhorn@socsci.ox.ac.uk
Medical Sciences	Naomi Gibson, naomi.gibson@medsci.ox.ac.uk
Social Sciences & GLAM	Will Pryor, william.pryor@socsci.ox.ac.uk

10. Guidance and resources

- From the University's Policy Engagement Team:
 - [How can I engage with policymakers?](#)
 - [How does UK Government work and what do policymakers look for?](#)
 - [How do I engage with the UK Parliament and how do parliaments work?](#)
 - [How do I build policy engagement into project design?](#)
 - [How do I engage with policymakers internationally?](#)
 - [How do I monitor, evaluate and learn about policy engagement?](#)
- From elsewhere:
 - ['Engaging with local government: A Guide for Academics'](#) (University of Cambridge)
 - ['Guidance on Planning and demonstrating Effective Policy Engagement'](#) (Arts & Humanities Research Council)
 - ['How to engage with policy makers: a guide for academics in the arts and humanities'](#) (Institute for Government, Arts & Humanities Research Council)
 - [ESRC Guidance for Collaboration](#)
 - [ESRC Impact Toolkit](#)

- [Policy Impact: A 'how to guide' for researchers](#) (University of Cambridge)
- [Rebuilding a Resilient Britain](#): outputs from a programme in July 2020, convening researchers, funders and policymakers to identify evidence and uncover research gaps around cross-cutting Areas of Research Interest (Government Office for Science)
- [Research England's Knowledge exchange pages](#)
- [Routes to policy impact](#) (University of Nottingham)
- [Science for Policy Handbook](#) (Elsevier)

11. Get inspired!

- [Oxford's Experience in Policy Engagement](#) – news, stories, and advice from policy-engaged academics at Oxford
- [Social Sciences Division impact case studies](#) – lay summaries of successful impact stories
- [ESRC IAA funded project summaries](#) – short summaries of projects funded to date
- [TORCH KE Fellowships and other projects](#) – run by the Humanities Division
- [Oxford Impacts case study series](#)
- [Oxford's KE and Impact pages](#)
- [ESRC Celebrating Impact Prize](#) - watch winners' impact videos
- [ESRC Impact case studies](#) – read case studies or watch videos
- [LSE Impact Blog](#)
- [Transforming Evidence](#) (blog)
- [Universities Policy Engagement Network](#) (blog)