



# PCER Fund 2025/26: Call for applications

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## Key information

<b>Fund opens</b>	22 September 2025
<b>Application deadline</b>	3 November 2025
<b>Total funds available</b>	£60,000
<b>Available funds per project</b>	Up to £6,000

The Public and Community Engagement with Research (PCER) team in Research Services invites researchers and public engagement facilitators to apply for funding to support purposeful and responsible public and community engagement with research activities.

The PCER Fund is an internal grant scheme supported by the University's Higher Education & Innovation Fund (HEIF) allocation and Participatory Research Fund from Research England. It is open to researchers and public engagement facilitators at the University of Oxford at any career stage, and with any level of experience of public and community engagement with research.

## Aims of the PCER Fund

The PCER Fund supports researchers to improve their research through public and community engagement activities. We believe that engaged research is better research, because incorporating diverse perspectives improves ideas, makes findings more relevant and maximises the positive differences that research can make to the world.

The fund plays a key role in the new [Public and Community Engagement with Research Strategy](#) for the University, and its vision for a university where purposeful and responsible engagement with communities and the public is integral to our research, driving collaboration and creating positive change.

As well as financial support, the fund provides evaluation support to researchers carrying out engagement activities. The PCER Fund supports projects from all disciplines, and aims to:

- Encourage and support public and community engagement projects that:
  - expand upon **established ideas**; or
  - experiment with **innovative methodologies** and novel approaches, and enhance engagement practices; and/or
  - **develop external partnerships** for future engagement opportunities.
- Engage a **diverse range of people** with Oxford's research, including under-engaged groups, bridging the gap between research and the public and communities.
- **Develop researchers' skills** in public and community engagement with research.
- Fund projects with the potential to **make a difference** to members of the public and communities, researchers, and/or their research.

## Who can apply

Any researcher or public engagement professional at the University of Oxford from any discipline or research area can apply as Principal Investigator (PI). PIs are accountable for the project.

As PI, you can submit applications with co-applicants. Co-applicants may be other staff members (e.g., researchers, DPhil students, teaching staff, public engagement professionals, museum staff) or external partners (e.g. representatives from patient and community groups, teachers, etc).

Both newcomers and those experienced in public engagement with research are encouraged to apply.

## DPhil applicants

We welcome applications from DPhil students. As an employment contract is required to hold a budget code, any DPhil applicants must have the support of their supervisor, and they must have agreed to hold the budget for them if funded.

When applying as a DPhil, please list **yourself as the Lead Applicant/PI**, and **include your supervisor as a co-applicant** and provide their details where specified in the Case for Support form.

## Eligibility requirements

- A University cost centre is required to host an award. College-based activities are possible, but funds must be managed through a faculty or department.
- At least one applicant (either the PI or a co-applicant) must be a researcher at the University of Oxford.
- DPhils are welcome to apply but will need the support of their supervisor/PI. **DPhil applicants should ensure that their supervisor/PI supports the project, agrees to hold the budget in the event of funds being awarded, and include their supervisor as a Co-Applicant in the application in IRAMS.**
- There's a deadline for spending the funds so you'll need to make sure your project can be completed by **30 June 2026**
- Your project must be engaging the public and/or communities with your research. Before applying, please consider the information in the 'Is your project right for this fund?' section.

## Funds available

There is a total of £60,000 available for the 2025/26 academic year.

**Funds must be spent by 30 June 2026.**

## What costs we'll cover

All funds requested should be spent on the development, delivery and evaluation of your project and justified in the budget section of your application.

The kinds of costs that can be applied for may include (but are not limited to):

- Equipment and materials costs\*
- Reasonable travel costs in line with the University's [travel policy](#)
- Venue and catering costs (e.g. for engagement workshops)
- Recognising and rewarding community contributors for their time and expenses
- Promoting or advertising engagement opportunities
- Staff time and/or salaries

\*The University has equipment available to hire (free of charge) for engagement activities through the [PERShare](#) website, from cameras and microphones to gazebos and tables. We recommend exploring what is available before including costs for equipment in your application.

## Is your project right for this fund?

Please ensure you meet eligibility criteria before making an application (see 'Eligibility requirements').

To assess whether your project is right for this fund, it can be helpful to consider the following:

### 1. Purpose & Difference

Your project should have a clear purpose that is responding to an identified need within the public and/or community you are working with. This might include building on work that's already underway, starting something completely new, or even developing a relationship for future engagement work. The project should be clearly related to your research and have clear intended or desired objectives.

Ideally, projects should be mutually beneficial to all involved, including members of the public/ a community, researchers or the research itself.

When you think about the difference(s) your project will make, it may be helpful to consider whether it's a difference in knowledge/information, skills/capacity, or behaviour/attitudes.

Examples of what difference(s) a project could make are set out below:

Differences made to...	Types of differences		
	Knowledge/information	Skills/capacity	Behaviour/attitudes
<b>Public and community(s)</b>	Increase awareness of a research topic or outputs	Enable audiences to explore a research topic that is new to them	Stimulate new interests or increase self-confidence
<b>Researchers</b>	Increase awareness of common public attitudes towards their research topic	Enable researchers to tailor their approach in the context of common public attitudes towards their research topic	Increase fulfilment as researchers feel more connected and responsive to public

### 2. Methods & audiences

Alongside the purpose of your project and the differences you hope to make, thinking about the types of activities your project will be undertaking and who you will be working with will help you decide if your project is right for this fund.

The fund aims to support projects engaging a diverse range of people, including (but not limited to) groups who may have been under-engaged in the past, through responsible, purposeful methods.

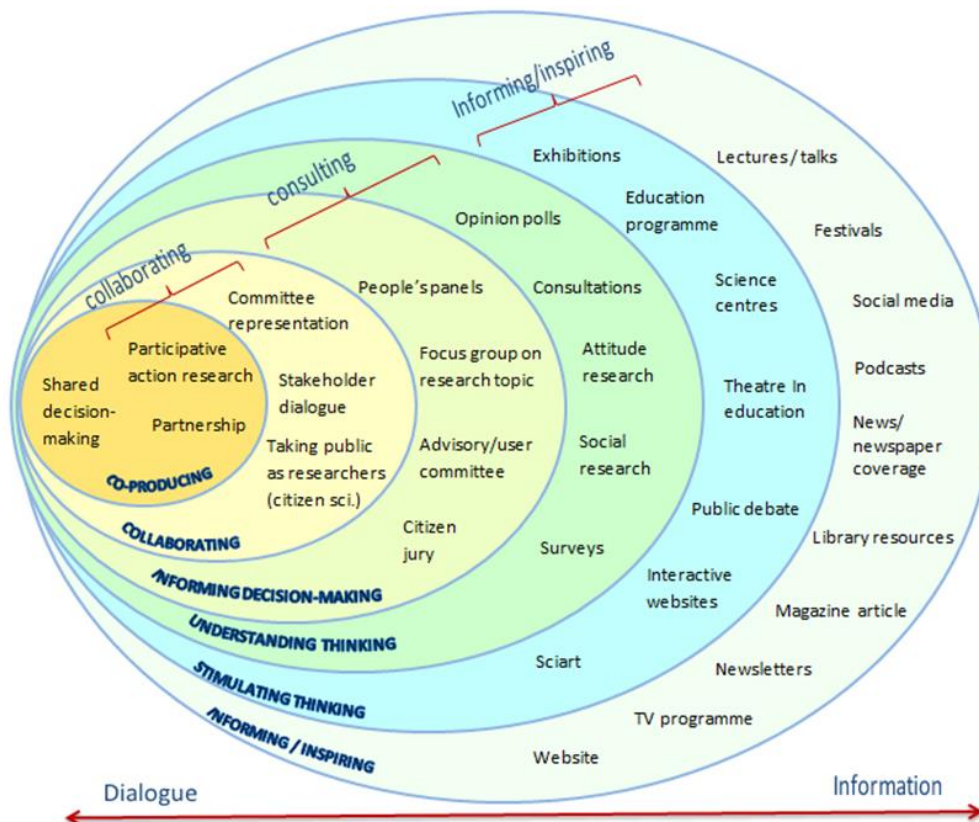
These might be new, innovative methodologies or something more tried and tested. The methods you use must be appropriate and relevant to the groups you are working with and the differences you are aiming to make.

Some examples of the kinds of activities you could do to make those differences are:

- Co-creation of research questions with relevant communities
- Consultation or interviews with public or community contributors to inform your research
- Production of a podcast series or animations to share your research
- Bringing together diverse stakeholders to develop innovative methodologies or tools that address societal challenges

### Engagement with research activities

The Public Engagement 'onion' developed by Wellcome is a helpful visualisation of the types of activity that can be defined as public engagement with research. It also represents which activities lend themselves to 'deeper' levels of engagement, i.e., where a more rich, two-way interaction can take place; shared decision making at one end and broadcast activities at the other.



You can read a transcript of this image here: [The Public Engagement Onion — Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences Division](#)

## Participatory research

While we fund a whole range of engaged research activities, we also strongly encourage applications from participatory research projects.

Vaughn and Jacquez (2020) developed a helpful definition that offers a starting point for reflection, highlighting that in participatory research, knowledge is co-created in collaboration with those with direct, lived- and living- experience of the topic in focus:

“Participatory research (PR) encompasses research designs, methods, and frameworks that use systematic inquiry in direct collaboration with those affected by an issue being studied for the purpose of action or change. PR engages those who are not necessarily trained in research but belong to or represent the interests of the people who are the focus of the research.” (p.1)

You can read more on our website [Participatory Research Oxford](#).

## Community engagement

The term ‘community’ has very different meanings for different people. We understand it as distinct from the general ‘public’. Whilst we welcome applications from projects engaging with the general public, engaging with relevant, more specific communities can increase the potential of your project to make a bigger difference to the groups you are working with.

A community can be any group of people that is connected by place (e.g. a shared geographical location such as people who live in the same town suburb or postcode region), by practice (e.g. a shared profession or activity such as teachers, entrepreneurs), by identity (e.g. gender, ethnicity) and/or experience (e.g. parents, migrants, experience of a particular health condition), or an intersection of more than one of the above (e.g. people in a particular location, with a particular identity who have specific life circumstances). Which community or communities you decide to work with should be influenced by, and in turn influence, your research.

What is distinct about engaging with communities is the purpose and the methods or practices used to do engaged research. Community engagement should be oriented around understanding a community’s needs and improving their circumstances in a co-constructed, non-paternalistic way. As such, community engagement should be built around inclusive, participatory practices and be oriented around consulting and collaborating, rather than informing.

Often, community engaged research can be a catalyst for further activity or social action:

"[Community engagement] often involves partnerships and coalitions that help mobilize resources and influence systems, change relationships among partners, and serve as catalysts for changing policies, programs, and practices."

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Principles of community engagement (1st ed.). Atlanta (GA): CDC/ATSDR Committee on Community Engagement; 1997

## Timing

Your project activity will need to fit within the fund's timelines. Budget codes will be available in January or February 2026 and funds must be spent by 30 June 2026. For awarded projects, if activities and spending need to start before budget codes are available these funds will need to be underwritten by your department.

## Examples of previously funded projects

To help you understand whether your project is right for this fund, you may want to look at some [previously funded projects in our online library](#).

If you have any questions about any of these projects, please contact the PCER Team. Your divisional PCER Lead will also be able to help you decide whether your project is right for this fund. See 'Contact' section for details of how to get in touch.

## What won't we fund?

Projects that aim to target policy makers or engage business and industry are not eligible for the PCER Fund and should apply to the University's [Knowledge Exchange Seed Fund](#) or one of the [OPEN policy engagement funding schemes](#).

Similarly, projects that aim to reach undergraduate students, or where the primary purpose is to increase student applications to the University, are not eligible for the fund.

## How applications are assessed

After you apply, your application will be automatically submitted to your department or faculty for approval. Your application will then be assessed by reviewers using the process and assessment criteria set out below.

## Assessment criteria

Panels reviewing applications will consider whether a project:

### **1. Is meeting a need that is important to the groups involved, and is connected to applicant's broader research (Q3 of application form)**

Reviewers will consider questions like:

- *Why is this project needed?*
- *Is the project addressing an important issue for the group(s) involved?*
- *Is this connected to the applicant's broader research?*

### **2. Could make a positive difference to the engaged group(s), the research and/or researchers (Q5, 6, 7)**

Reviewers will consider questions like:

- *Is the project activity likely to improve the research?*
- *Will it make a positive difference for the group(s) involved, like learning new things, getting better at something, or changing how they think or act?*
- *Could this project help researchers gain more knowledge or skills?*

**3. Uses methods that are relevant and appropriate to the difference(s) the project aims to make and the engaged group(s) (Q8, 9)**

Reviewers will consider questions like:

- *Do the planned activities seem suitable for the group(s) involved?*
- *Is it clear how the activities could lead to the difference(s) the project aims to make?*
- *Do activities seem well planned, and achievable in the timeframe?*
- *Are engaged groups consulted throughout the project?*
- *Does the choice of engaged group(s) make sense to the difference(s) the project aims to make?*

**4. Is engaging responsibly with the group(s) involved (Q8, 9, 10)**

Reviewers will consider questions like:

- *Where applicable, does the applicant already know the group(s) involved? Have they talked to them to make sure they support the activity?*
- *Will applicants work ethically with group(s)? For example, will they explain what will happen with the information or data given by participants? Are they aware of any risks to participants and handling these carefully?*
- *Will the group(s) be paid or rewarded for their time, contributions, and expenses?*
- *Are the project activities inclusive and accessible, from recruitment to communication with the group(s)?*
- *Does the applicant consider equity and diversity?*
- *Does the applicant show respect for the group(s)' specific context, culture, and power dynamics?*

**5. Will be able to know if they have made the difference(s) they aim to make (Q11)**

Reviewers will consider questions like:

- *Do applicants have a plan to find out if they have made the difference(s) they aim to make?*
- *Will they involve engaged group(s) in any evaluation of the activities and/or difference(s) made?*

**6. Could make a long-term difference to the engaged group(s) and/or research (Q12)**



Reviewers will consider questions like:

- *Could the project have a long-term effect on the engaged group(s)? Is there a plan to stay in touch with them about this work?*
- *Are there any materials from the activities, like resources or videos, that can be used in the future?*
- *Is there a chance the activities could continue after the funding ends?*

## **7. Is achieving good value for money (Q13)**

### **The review panels**

Applications will be assessed against the criteria by members of two separate groups of reviewers:

- Public & Community (P&C) Panel: community members external to the University who have experience engaging with research (more details about this panel and its activity in the ‘More information about this scheme’ section).
- Internal reviewers: public engagement professionals across the University, including divisional PCER leads, Public Engagement Facilitators and researchers.

Each application will be read by at least two members from each group, who will provide comments and feedback.

### **Decision-making**

Following review members of both groups of reviewers will meet at a recommendations panel meeting. The agenda for this meeting and the final decision-making process is determined by the number of applications received at the deadline.

#### **If 25 or fewer applications submitted**

The recommendations panel will discuss the applications and recommend which should receive funds.

#### **If more than 25 applications submitted**

A lottery system will be used if we receive over 25 applications. The recommendations panel will meet to agree which applications to enter into the lottery. Following the meeting, the lottery will be run as follows:

1. One proposal will be drawn at random from each division
2. Proposals will continue to be drawn from the remaining pool of applications until all the available budget is allocated

### **Ratification and feedback**

The final decision is made by the Academic Champion for Public and Community Engagement with Research, who will usually ratify the recommendations of the final recommendations panel or

result of the lottery. Where the Academic Champion reverses a recommendation, a clear explanation will be provided to the panels.

**All applications will be reviewed and all applicants will receive feedback on their application.**

Unsuccessful applications can reapply when the Fund next opens. They would be expected to address reviewers' feedback in their resubmission.

We aim to communicate funding decisions to applicants within five weeks of the deadline. In cases where we have a larger than expected number of applications this timeline may be extended.

## How to apply

You should apply through the University's [Internal Research Award Management System \(IRAMS\)](#), where you will find the Case for Support form available to download and complete (also available at [PCER fund | University of Oxford](#)).

In IRAMS you must submit your details and a budget breakdown and upload your completed Case for Support as a PDF. Your application will be automatically submitted to your department or faculty. We may contact you during the decision-making process to discuss aspects of your application.

Applicants should only fill in budget details in IRAMS for the first financial year (Year 1). More budget lines will appear as you enter budget information.

All awardees will be required to attend an evaluation workshop and submit a final report of their project.

For any questions around submitting your application please contact Faye Shelbourne ([publicengagement@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:publicengagement@admin.ox.ac.uk)) in the Public and Community Engagement with Research Team in Research Services.

## Application support

When preparing your application, the following resources may be helpful:

- FAQs and resources for planning public engagement with research activities can be found on the [PCER Fund Padlet](#).
- Responsible Knowledge Exchange, Engagement and Impact Framework: <https://www.socsci.ox.ac.uk/rkeei>
- Participatory Research Oxford resources: <https://www.ox.ac.uk/research/using-research-engage/public-engagement/participatory-research>

For support in planning your project and preparing your application, we suggest speaking to the Public Engagement Lead in your division (see 'Contact' section).

## Key dates

There is currently one application deadline confirmed for the 2025/26 academic year, in Michaelmas term. The PCER team is exploring possibilities of a further deadline in Trinity term 2026 and will provide an update on this if it is confirmed in 2026.

	Michaelmas term 2025
Application deadline	3 November 2025
Funding decisions	8 December 2025
Evaluation workshop	22 January 2026
Evaluation Plan deadline	20 February 2026
Spending deadline	30 June 2026
Closure of Project Budget codes	31 July 2026
Final Project Report deadline	1 September 2026

We aim to share budget codes with successful applicants within 6-8 weeks of announcing funding decisions. However, we cannot guarantee budget code timeframes as this process is not managed by the PCER Team. If there are any delays in getting your budget codes to you and your project is likely to suffer as a result, your department may be able to underwrite your costs.

## More information about this scheme

The PCER Fund supports key aspects of the wider University Public and Community Engagement with Research Strategy in many ways. The fund:

- Supports a **broad and inclusive definition** of public and community engagement for the University, by funding and showcasing a diverse range of engagement activities, including PPIE.
- **Integrates engagement** into the University's research, by providing support (financial and wider) for researchers to do so.
- **Connects the University's engagement work**, by working closely with divisional PCER Leads to increase visibility across the cohort of awardees.
- **Prioritises and rewards responsible engagement**, especially through working with the Public & Community Panel.

## The Public & Community Panel

In the 2024/25 academic year the PCER team worked with a panel of 13 local community members to help shape the fund and decide who gets funding. They brought their experience of engaging with research and wider perspectives to key stages of the fund. We're pleased to continue to work with the Public & Community Panel in 2025/26 to include community voices and perspectives in deciding which projects are funded.

The panel will review applications, providing feedback to applicants and contributing to the final decision-making process (see 'How applications are assessed' section for more detail).

## Our commitment

To encourage and support applications, as fund holders we (the central Public and Community Engagement Team in Research Services) agree and commit to:

- Support researchers and public engagement professionals at the pre- and post-application stage.
- Use an accessible application form and facilitate an equitable application process.
- Provide timely information and ensure that all communications are clear and effectively tailored to reach potential applicants.
- Embed monitoring and evaluation into our funding scheme, enabling us to reflect on outcomes and foster continuous learning and improvement.
- Ensure the purpose of the fund is aligned with the University's Public and Community Engagement with Research Strategy.
- Involve community members in decisions about which grants are awarded.

## Contact

If you have any questions about this fund, please contact Faye Shelbourne (publicengagement@admin.ox.ac.uk) in the Public and Community Engagement with Research Team in Research Services.

For support in planning your project and preparing your application, we suggest speaking to the Public Engagement Lead in your division:

- Humanities: [Karen Houghton](#), Head of Impact
- Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences: [Dr Michaela Livingstone-Banks](#) (Head of Public and Community Engagement with Research)
- Medical Sciences: [Naomi Gibson](#) (Public and Policy Engagement Facilitator)
- Social Sciences: [Aileen Marshall-Brown](#) (Head of Engagement)
- Gardens, Libraries and Museums (GLAM): [Dr Harriet Warburton](#) (Head of Research and Impact Management)