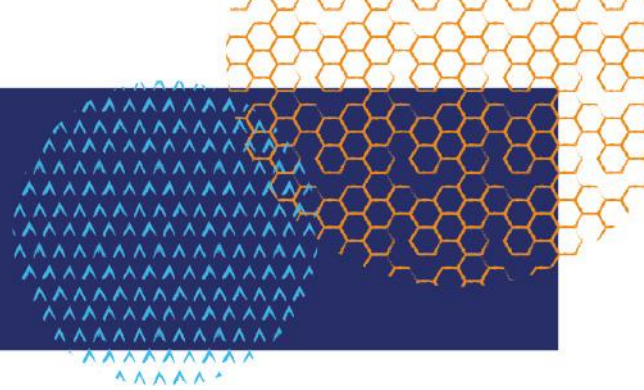




Collaboration Kickstarter

Application Guide



The Collaboration Kickstarter aims to fund participatory research undertaken by Imperial researchers and communities in Northwest London.

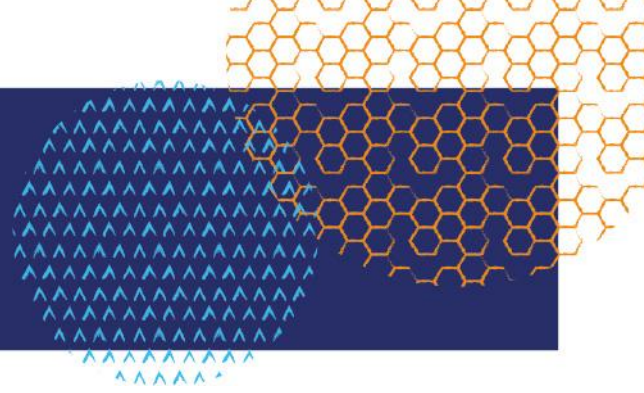
This fund was co-designed with community partners and Imperial staff who recognise that universities often hold more institutional power than the communities they work with, and we felt it was important to design a fund that seeks to shift that imbalance.

This guide explains what the fund is for, who can apply, and how we make decisions about who receives funds.

We are very happy to answer any questions and don't want anyone to miss out if something in this document is unclear. So, please get in touch with any queries. You can contact our team at societal_engagement@imperial.ac.uk

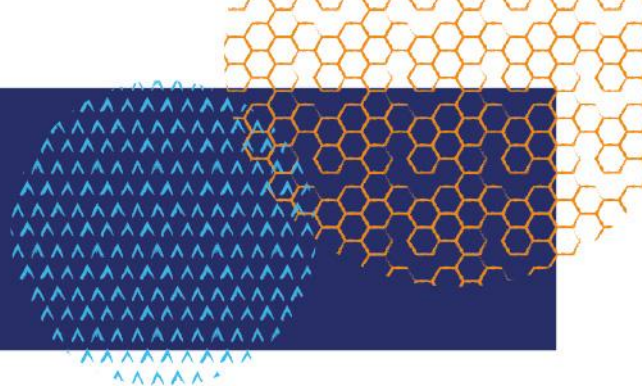
IMPERIAL

Societal Engagement



In this guide

- 1 What are participatory research approaches?
- 2 Principles of the fund
- 3 Aims of the fund
- 4 Timeline
- 5 Grant size
- 6 What will we fund?
- 7 What won't we fund?
- 8 Who can apply?
- 9 Selection criteria
- 10 Application support
- 11 Submitting an application
- 12 How we decide who gets funding
- 13 Who are the funds awarded to?
- 14 Get in touch



1) What is participatory research?

Participatory research is when researchers and members of the public work together to create new knowledge. Not just alongside each other but as genuine partners.

That usually means people with academic expertise working with people who have lived experience of the thing being researched. Together, they decide what questions to ask, how to answer them, and what to do with what they find out. Neither group is just helping the other both bring something essential.

Participatory research isn't one fixed thing. We often talk about participatory research approaches to cover a wide range of activity, from co-designing a single research intervention to building a fully collaborative project from the ground up. What matters is that decision-making is genuinely shared.

The Collaboration Kickstarter supports this kind of work. It aims to fund research that partners with Northwest London communities to share power, not just information. A project might only cover one small part of a larger piece of research and that's fine. What we care about is that the part being funded is genuinely designed and delivered together.

2) Principles of the fund

- 1 Participatory research approaches are about discovery and learning. The journey itself is part of the destination, and the legacy of the work is important.
- 2 We are wary of top-down relationships and language. Our focus is on equity and mutuality, and we value different kinds of knowledge equally.
- 3 We will support activities that otherwise would not be funded and, as part of which, communities have a sense that they are having an impact on the research.
- 4 We will be ambitious, even within the limitations of funding and institutional/systemic constraints. But we do not expect anyone to work for free or over their capacity.
- 5 Our Kickstarter fund is small, so developing people's skills and building new relationships is a priority.
- 6 We will make our fund and the research it supports as accessible as possible, not relying on specific kinds of knowledge, language, or training to be included.
- 7 What we learn from our Kickstarter projects should be shareable and transferable. Our learning will become a community asset. Something that can enable others to implement their own work and continue the learning process.

3) Aims of the fund

The fund has two core aims:

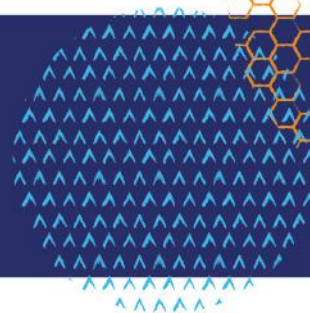
- 1 Develop a broader culture of participatory approaches to research at Imperial College London by funding research activity that demonstrates partnership and collaboration between community partners and academic researchers.
- 2 Build equitable and transparent research partnerships as a route to creating impact which benefits communities, research, and society at large.

To do this, we want to support projects that:

- Support different approaches to ensuring that research questions can be identified by the community, reflect lived experiences and hold a potential to have a positive impact on people's lives as a result.
- Support approaches that explore how to equitably build trust and transparency by ethically sharing decision making power and access to data, finances and resources.

IMPERIAL

Societal Engagement



4) Timeline

October 2026

- **12th October:** Fund opens to expressions of interest and applications from Imperial researchers and community partners.

November 2026

- **11th November:** Fund closes to expressions of interest.

December 2026

- **11th December:** Fund closes to applications.

January 2027

- **21st January:** Applications reviewed by a panel made up of three community peer reviewers, two members of Imperial staff, and one staff member from an external university.
- **22nd January:** Award letters sent to successful projects.

February 2026

- **17th February:** Welcome and Participatory Research Training with successful Kickstarter teams.

May 2026

- **5th May:** Mid-point check in meeting with successful Kickstarter teams to share challenges, learnings, and successes.

July 2026

- **16th July:** All work delivered using Kickstarter funds must be complete.



5) Grant size

We would rather fund fewer projects well than many projects poorly. With that in mind, grants of up to **£10,000** are available.

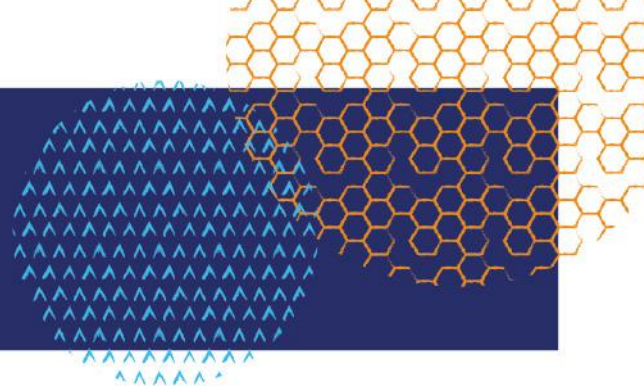
We have a maximum of **£60,000** to award and expect to fund between **6 and 8 projects**.

6) What will we fund?

We will fund projects with clear evidence of collaborative working throughout, not just at the start or end. Each proposal must name both an Imperial researcher and a Northwest London community partner as co-leads.

We are particularly interested in projects that:

- Build a new relationship between an Imperial researcher and a community organisation



- Are led by communities and where the research questions come from people with lived experience, rather than from the academic researcher.
- Involve communities with lived experience in analysing data that has already been collected — bringing their knowledge to bear on findings that already exist

You can see the kinds of projects we funded last year [here](#).

7) What won't we fund?

This fund is specifically for participatory **research**. We will not fund:

- Educational activity
- Public engagement with research (e.g. science communication, exhibitions)
- Evaluation

If you're not sure whether your idea counts as research, the [Health Research Authority guidance](#) is a useful starting point or just get in touch with us at societal_engagement@imperial.ac.uk and we'll help you work it out.

8) Who can apply?

The fund is open to Imperial researchers from any discipline — including PhD students¹ — working with a community group or organisation based in one or more of the following Northwest London boroughs:

- City of Westminster
- Kensington and Chelsea
- Hammersmith and Fulham
- Ealing
- Hounslow
- Hillingdon
- Barnet
- Brent
- Harrow
- Camden
- Islington
- Haringey
- Enfield

We take a broad view of who can be a community partner. Previous successful applicants have included:

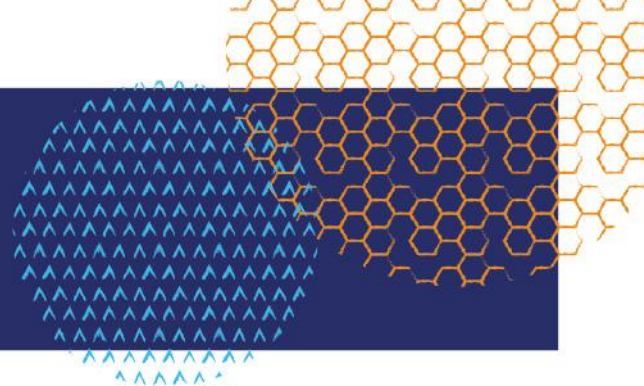
- Local branches of national charities and their members/service users
- Non-profit and community interest organisations
- Grassroots community groups and residents' associations
- Groups of individual community members with shared lived expertise

We ask that applicants make the case for why their partnership is a genuine community partnership, rooted in Northwest London, and how the work fits the aims and principles of the fund.

¹ PhD applicants must demonstrate that Kickstarter funds will be used to support research activity that is in addition to or develops ideas from your PhD project. We cannot fund work that is required for the delivery of your PhD research.

IMPERIAL

Societal Engagement



If you're not sure whether your organisation qualifies, please get in touch with us at societal_engagement@imperial.ac.uk. We are very happy to arrange a conversation to answer any questions.



9) Selection criteria

We share our assessment criteria openly so that applicants know exactly what we're looking for. We use four questions to assess proposals:

1 How well does it fit the principles and aims of the fund?

- Is it submitted jointly by an Imperial researcher and a community partner?
- What are the project aims, who will benefit, and how?
- Does it demonstrate genuine mutual benefit, not just benefit to the research?
- Is collaboration evident throughout, from the way the proposal was written to how the project will be delivered?

Please look back at the aims and principles at the beginning of this guide and consider how well your planned project aligns with them.

2 Is it achievable within the time and resources available?

- Is it clear how funds will be used?
- How much of the funding goes to community partners, and do they have a say over how it is spent?
- Does it properly pay for community partners' time — rather than relying on unpaid contributions?
- Is the timeline realistic?

We would like to emphasise how important this point is. Six months is not a long period of time to deliver participatory research. You do not need to deliver an entire research project in that time. Please consider carefully what you can achieve that will be meaningful and set your collaboration up to deliver work together longer term.

3 Is it clear how resources will be used to build trust?

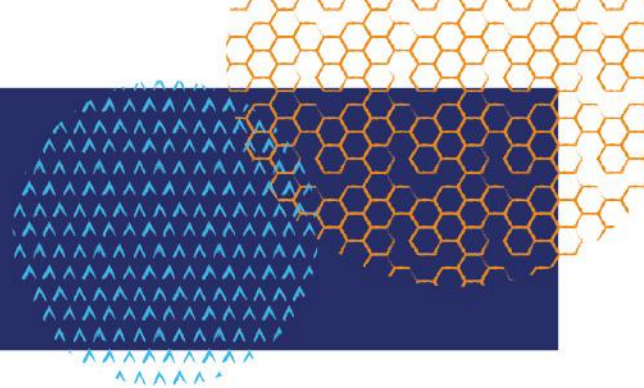
- Is there a clear plan for managing and safeguarding data?
- Will data be collected, accessed, and analysed by all partners, not just the academic team?
- Have partners agreed upfront how data and findings will be used and who benefits?

Make sure to give yourselves enough time to build trusting relationships as partners. The relationships are more important than the money!

4 Will it contribute to shared learning at Imperial and in local communities?

- Does it avoid duplicating work already being done?
- Is it clear how the project will help us all learn how to do participatory research better, over the long term?

Whenever we do participatory research, we always learn a lot about how to do it well. Think about how you will capture this learning and how it can be shared with others.



10) Application support

If you are a community group or organisation with a research idea you would like to explore with an Imperial researcher, you can [submit an expression of interest](#) and a member of our team will be in touch.

If you're an Imperial researcher with an idea for a Kickstarter project, we strongly encourage you to get in touch before applying by contacting societal_engagement@imperial.ac.uk.

If you are a member of the community or an Imperial researcher and you haven't yet found a partner to work with you should still get in touch! We can't always guarantee we'll be able to make a match, but we'll do everything we can to help.

11) Submitting an application

To apply to the fund, [complete the application form on the website](#). Application forms should be submitted to societal_engagement@imperial.ac.uk by **11th December 2026**.

The proposal form asks you to show how your project meets the fund's criteria. The four things we are most focused on are:

Evidence of collaborative working throughout

Show us that this is a genuine partnership not a traditional research project with community participants. Explain why this partnership is a community partnership, how the proposal itself was produced collaboratively, and how you will continue working together throughout the project and beyond.

Impact and legacy

Explain how the project will benefit both the community and the research. Tell us how it builds towards something longer term — beyond the scope of this fund — and how it will contribute to broader learning about how to do participatory research well.

How data will be managed and shared

If you are collecting data, explain how it will be collected, accessed, and analysed by all partners — not just the academic team. Be clear about what data you are collecting, why, how it will be stored safely, and what it will be used for in the short, medium, and long term.

If data is being collected, you will need research ethics approval. Factor this into your timeline. The Public and Community Engagement team can help you with this process.

A breakdown of how funds will be used

Tell us how the money will be spent. Be specific about how you have costed for community partners' time and contributions, and explain how decisions about spending have/will be made jointly.

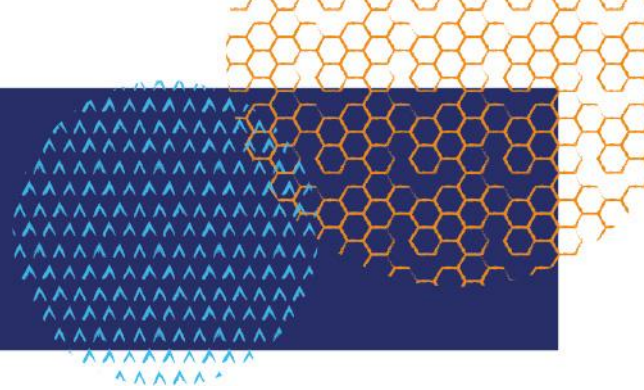
12) How we decide who gets funding

Proposals are reviewed by a panel that includes:

- A member of the Public and Community Engagement Team
- An Imperial Participatory Researcher
- Two community peer reviewers from the funds Co-Production Team

IMPERIAL

Societal Engagement



- An external community peer reviewer
- An external participatory researcher from another institution

All reviewers have equal standing in the panel and equal say in decisions.

We take a portfolio approach to funding. This means we don't just fund the highest-scoring proposals. We try to fund a diverse set of projects across:

- Research topic and area
- Stage of the research cycle
- Type of community partner (charity, local authority, grassroots group, etc.)
- Career stage of the researcher
- Which communities the project works with
- Geographic location within Northwest London
- Size of grant requested

We are not targeting specific areas in advance. The portfolio will take shape based on what we receive. The aim is to avoid duplication and to fund work that is genuinely varied.

Review takes place in two stages:

Stage 1: Each proposal is scored against the selection criteria.

Stage 2: Mid to high-scoring proposals are considered together, with a view to building a diverse portfolio. The panel discusses which combination of projects best serves the aims of the fund.

Unsuccessful applicants will receive feedback explaining why their project wasn't funded. We see this as part of our commitment to building capacity, not just a rejection letter.

In some cases, the panel may offer a smaller development grant to a project that shows promise but isn't felt to be quite ready by the panel.

13) Who are the funds awarded to?

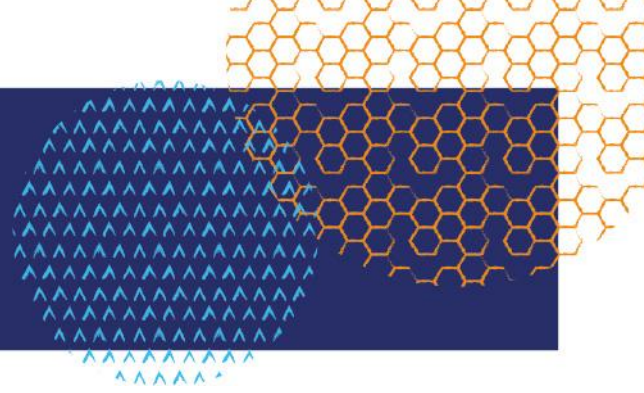
By default, funds are awarded to the Imperial researcher named on the application. Community partners can then be paid from that budget as facilitators, consultants, or for their time and expertise. **Decision-making about how the money is spent should be shared between all partners.** The fact that funds sit with an Imperial researcher does not mean Imperial controls the budget.

We recognise that not everyone can accept monetary payment. In these cases, we are open to finding other ways to acknowledge people's time and skills. Please talk to us about this.

In some cases, and where it is stated in the proposal, funds can be awarded directly to a community partner organisation. Please note that organisations without a written constitution and a bank account will not be able to receive funds directly.

The Public and Community Engagement team can support with payment processes.





14) Get in touch

If you have any questions about the Collaboration Kickstarter, please get in touch at societal_engagement@imperial.ac.uk.