

# COLLABORATION KICKSTARTER

**A seed fund for engaged research with communities**

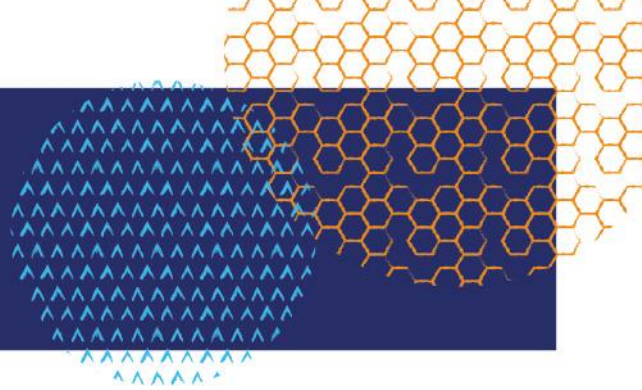
## **Co-production document**

The Collaboration Kickstarter is a new approach to seed funding for the public engagement team at Imperial College London. It aims to support Imperial researchers and community partners to deliver research collaboratively. In the following, we outline the principles, aims, and process for the fund in its pilot year, where we will try out our new approach, awarding funds of up to £10,000 to a small portfolio of projects that demonstrate an ambition to work with more participatory approaches to research.

In this spirit, we have co-produced our fund. The result is this coproduction document, itself a collaboration between Imperial researchers, engagement practitioners, and community members with experience of engaging with Imperial research.

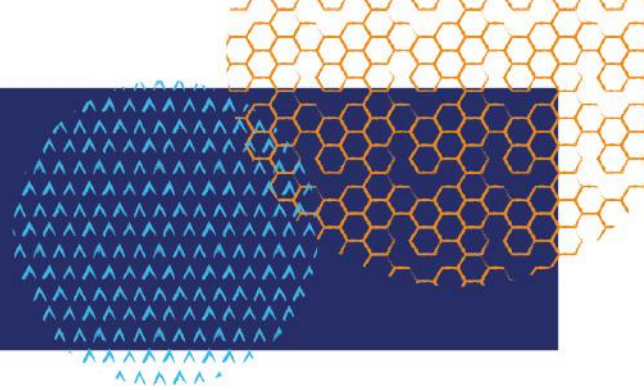
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## Societal Engagement



### Principles of the fund

1. The journey itself is part of the destination. This pilot is about discovery and learning and the legacy of this 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 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 seed 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 pilot 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.



## Aims of the fund in its pilot year

The fund aims to support participatory and co-produced approaches to research in which communities can influence the direction that research is taking.

### We have designed two key aims of the fund in its pilot year:

1. Develop a broader culture of participatory and coproduced 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 achieve this, we aim to:

- Trial 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.
- Explore how to build trust and transparency around the ethical and equitable use of data.
- Gather evidence that can be used to make the case for longer term funding and that can be useful to a broad range of stakeholders.

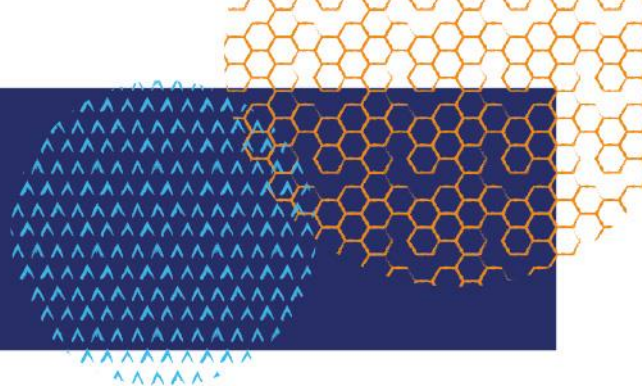
## Objectives of the fund in its pilot year

Based on the aims above our objectives for the pilot year are as follows:

1. Fund 4-8 small scale (i.e., costing £5-10,000) participatory and/or co-produced research activities between January and July in 2025.
2. Establish a framework for reflecting on what we have learned and evidencing its value between August and December 2024.
3. Produce an impact and evaluation report in partnership with the co-production team in July 2025.

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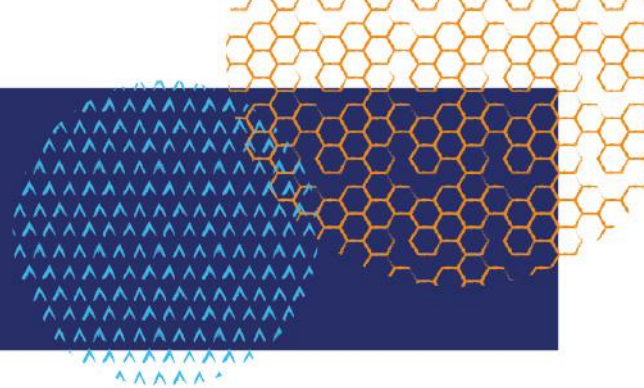
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<b>Pilot timeline</b>	
<b>August 2024</b>	
28 <sup>th</sup> August	<b>Coproduction team keeping in touch point 1</b> sharing the evaluation framework, application documents, and recruiting four community reviewers for expressions of interest (x2 reviewers) and full proposals (x2 reviewers)
<b>September 2024</b>	
25 <sup>th</sup> September	The fund will <b>launch</b> and will be open to expressions of interest from Imperial researchers and community partners.
<b>October 2024</b>	
2 <sup>nd</sup> October	Online information event about the fund. Open to researchers and community members.
9 <sup>th</sup> October	A <b>Community Connection and Collaboration</b> event will be held as part of the work designed to support the development of new partnerships.
<b>November 2024</b>	
25 <sup>th</sup> November	The window for <b>expressions of interest will close.</b>
28 <sup>th</sup> November	<b>Review of expressions of interest</b> will take place where a panel consisting of members of the public engagement team and two community partners will assess all expressions of interest and invite those with a reasonable chance of success, based on our criteria, to submit a full proposal.
<b>January 2025</b>	
10 <sup>th</sup> January	Invited applicants will have until the <b>10<sup>th</sup> of January 2025 to submit full proposals.</b>
16 <sup>th</sup> January	<b>Final review of full proposals will take place.</b>
17 <sup>th</sup> January	<b>Funds awarded.</b>
22 <sup>nd</sup> January	<b>Co-production team keeping in touch point 2.</b> <i>Sharing a list of all submitted applications as well as which projects have been awarded funds and why.</i>
<b>March 2025</b>	
19 <sup>th</sup> March	<b>Quarterly meeting with funded projects and co-production team</b> to share progress, challenges and learning, and strengthen working relationships.
<b>June 2025</b>	
18 <sup>th</sup> June	<b>Quarterly meeting with funded projects and co-production team</b> to share progress, challenges and learning and strengthen working relationships.
<b>July 2025</b>	
17 <sup>th</sup> of July	<b>Projects close.</b>
23 <sup>rd</sup> July	We will hold an <b>evaluation session for the co-production team</b> to reflect on what we have learned from the pilot, its impact and potential legacy from the work.

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### Budget

Our pilot aims for quality over quantity, preferring more resource and capacity to poorly funded projects. With this in mind, we aim to award funds of up to £10,000.

With a maximum of £45,000 available (with some of this money needed to manage and run the work) we will aim to fund between 4-8 projects, at a total cost of £40,000, with £5,000 remaining to fund the rest of our proposed activity to deliver the fund.

Activity	Cost
4-8 small-scale research activities	£40,000
Community Connection and Collaboration event Costs to cover potential venue hire and refreshments	£425
Community reviewers: Estimated cost at 10.5 hours for 4 individuals at £25 per hour.	£1,050
Co-production team keeping in touch points: Remuneration costs for co-production team to contribute to learning and reflection at key touch points throughout the pilot year.	£2,000
Evaluation session: Estimated cost of 15 community partners at £25 per hour for 3 hours + catering at £400	£1,525
	Total: £45,000



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### What types of activity will we fund?

We are looking to fund small-scale research activity, at any stage of the research cycle, that reflects the principles and aims of the fund in its pilot year. We therefore invite proposals for a range of activities including:

- **Building trust and relationships between potential academic and non-academic research partners** (as the groundwork for future participatory and co-produced research).
- **Co-producing grant proposals.**
- **Citizen science** and other methods of collecting and analysing data collaboratively.
- **Co-designing** technologies and services.
- **Co-authoring** research outputs.
- **Co-producing dissemination** and knowledge exchange activity.
- Anything else which reflects the principles and aims of the fund.



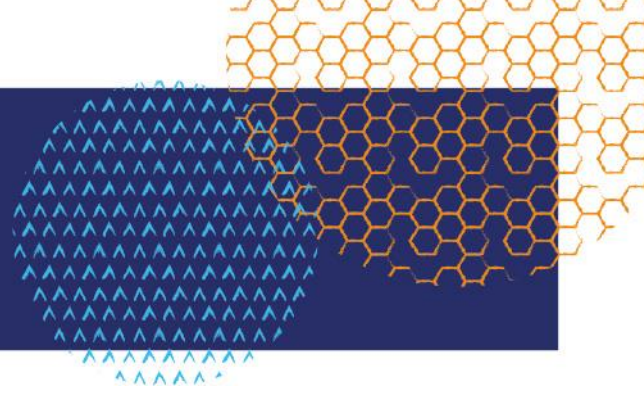
### What won't we fund?

Our seed fund exists to support participatory and co-produced research. Our aim is to support work that would not ordinarily get funding. This therefore means we will not fund educational activity, non-participatory (i.e., that is not co-designed/co-created/co-produced) forms of public engagement with research or evaluation, as other funding streams already exist that can support this kind of work.

### Who can apply? And what do we mean by “community” partner?

We welcome applications which have collaboration at their heart. So, we seek proposals where the applicants include both a named Imperial researcher and a named community partner.

We hold a deliberately broad definition of “community partner” and ask applicants to simply make the case that your particular partnership is appropriate, relevant, and will deliver small-scale research activities in line with the aims and principles of the fund in its pilot year.



## Selection Criteria: how do we make sure the grants support participatory research and co-production?

Below are four questions we will use as our assessment criteria and scoring framework when we decide whether to fund a proposal.

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

- Is this proposal submitted jointly by an Imperial College Researcher and a Community Partner?
- What are the project aims, who will they benefit and how?
- Does this project demonstrate collaboration beginning to end?
- Does this project demonstrate mutual benefit? (Skill sharing etc.)

### 2. Is the project achievable within time and resource constraints?

- Does this project explain clearly how funds will be used?
- How much of the funding is going to community partners and do they have a say over how it is spent?
- Does this project properly value the time of community partners (£20-£25 per hour) and/or actually fund the cost of delivery rather than relying on “in-kind” contributions?
- Is the timeline feasible?

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

- Does this project present a plan to manage and safeguard data?
- Will data be accessed, collected, and analysed by everyone who participates in the project?

### 4. Will this project contribute learning to our pilot and develop shared knowledge and learning around how to co-produce research?

- Are we avoiding duplication if we fund this project? Our focus is on quality. Less is more.
- Is it clear how this project or activity will help us learn about how to co-produce research together longer term?

## Our application process

### Expression of interest and matchmaking

Lots of Imperial researchers and community members may want to apply for seed funding but not all will have an existing community or research partner. At the **Expression of Interest stage** of our process, we will give potential applicants the opportunity to signal initial interest even where they do not currently have a partnership in place. In these cases, the Public Engagement team can try to help find suitable partners. Whilst brokering new relationships may not always be possible, it is in line with our principle to make our fund as accessible as we can and will likely offer many opportunities to learn from our pilot.

The expression of interest stage will be light touch and cover:

- The project’s aims.
- A description of project roles (What work will community partners be doing; how will researchers be involved etc.)

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- What benefits the project will bring to those participating and more broadly.

Whilst the fund is open to expressions of interest, we will host a **Community Connection and Collaboration event**, where interested researchers and community members can have an opportunity to network and get a sense of where areas of interest overlap.

### Reviewing expressions of interest

The Public Engagement team and two community reviewers will then review expressions of interest. We have incorporated this stage to both manage expectations and be mindful of the labour intensity of writing a full application. We do not want to waste applicants' time where their initial idea is not strong/does not match our fund aims well. The review panel will consider:

- If the project has established a partnership between an Imperial researcher and a community partner.
- Whether the proposed activity is in line with the aims and principles of the fund.
- Whether it seems feasible within time and resource constraints.

Expressions of interest that are considered to have a good chance of being awarded funding will then be invited to submit a full proposal. We will, however, make it clear that an invitation to submit a full proposal does not necessarily mean that the team will receive funding.

### Submitting an application

For the full seed fund proposals, we will ask applicants to demonstrate how the proposed activity meets the funding criteria. This will include:

#### Evidence of collaborative working throughout

This section should demonstrate that the proposed activity is a partnership between Imperial researchers and community members. Explaining why their partnership is relevant, appropriate, and capable of conducting the activities proposed.

It should explain clearly how their work has been undertaken collaboratively and how they will continue to work collaboratively going forward (e.g. will there be a principal investigator/co-investigator, who will this be, how will this relationship work and so on).

#### Aims for impact and legacy

This section should explain how the proposed activity will provide mutual benefit to researchers and community partners. This will also include how awarding funds to the project will build towards:

- Further work together in the future (where relevant)
- Broader learning around the co-production of research which can inform the seed fund after its pilot year.

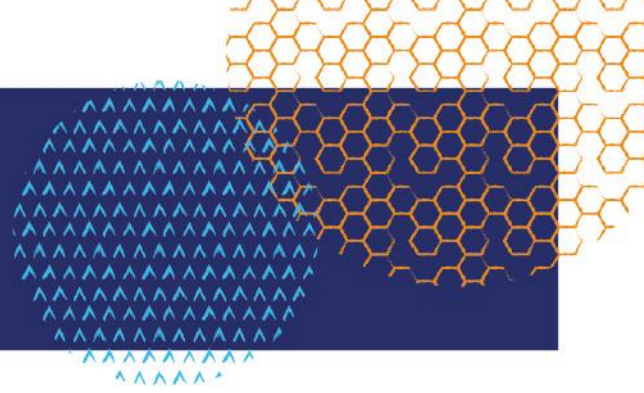
#### A data management plan (where applicable)

Where teams would be collecting data, they should explain clearly that they are only collecting necessary data, how they will safeguard and store data, and what data will be used for in the short, medium, and long term.



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In cases where data is being collected, it will also be necessary for teams to gain research ethics approval and should factor this into their project timelines. The Public Engagement team can advise on this process.

### **A breakdown of the funds requested**

Applicants will be asked to explain how funds will be spent, including explaining how they have costed for community partners' time and contributions (we will provide guidance on this).

## **Giving people the support they need as part of the application process.**

### **Application Guide**

The web page for the seed fund will host links to an application guide which will include:

- Fund principles, aims and objectives.
- What our selection criteria will be when deciding who to award funds to.
- Advice on how to acknowledge and where appropriate remunerate community partners for their time, skills and expertise.
- Hints and tips on how to fill out the application form (section by section).

We will invite community partners and researchers to explain what support would enable them to apply for seed funding. Both the web page and the application guide can provide links/contacts for the Public Engagement team who can provide one-to-one support and advice calls to help make our application process as accessible as possible. This will include updating a list of 'Frequently Asked Questions' on the website so that everyone can benefit from one-to-one advice sessions

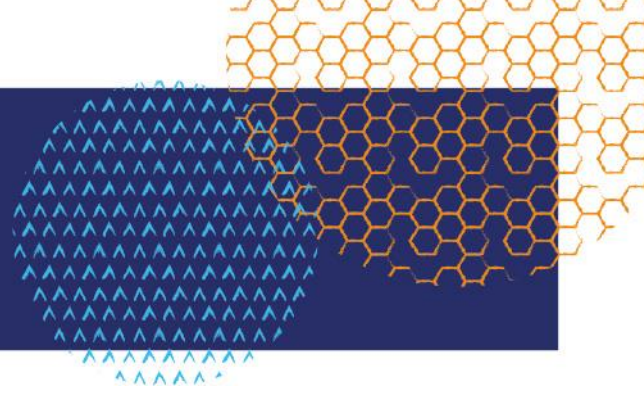
### **Non-written expressions of interest**

In line with our ambition to make seed funding as accessible as possible, expressions of interest do not rely solely on written contributions and instead welcome other formats such as video applications.

## **Making decisions on who gets funded**

Proposals will be reviewed by a panel that includes:

- Two members of the Public Engagement team
- An Imperial researcher
- An external reviewer from another University
- Two community peer reviewers.



For our pilot, we have discussed not duplicating work and trying to fund work that otherwise would not get funding so that we can learn as much as possible. To meet these ambitions, we will take a 'portfolio approach' to awarding funding. This would mean that rather than deciding to fund only those projects that score most highly against our selection criteria, we will try to fund a diverse set of projects.

Diversity of projects, here, will refer to:

- Research topic/theme/area.
- Where on the research cycle activity is taking place.
- Type of community partner (e.g., charity, local authority, community organisation).
- Career stage (early career vs senior academic etc.).
- Demographic considerations (which communities does the project engage with)
- Geographical location of project work.
- Size of funds requested (medium pots vs large pots etc.)

By aiming for diversity, we may stand to learn more from the work we fund.

What the portfolio will look like, however, will emerge based on the proposals we receive. This means that rather than targeting specific research areas, types of community organisation (etc.) we will see what kinds of proposals we receive and try to avoid funding similar kinds of projects. We will make this approach to awarding funds transparent at the expression of interest stage and publish our rationale publicly following the review.

A portfolio approach will mean that review will take place over two stages:

**Stage 1:** reviewers score proposals against our selection criteria to assess how well each project aligns with the aims and principles of our fund.

**Stage 2:** reviewers then consider those projects that are most aligned and award funds whilst attempting to not duplicate work, considering funding a diverse range of research areas, community partners, locations etc. based on the applications we have.

Unsuccessful proposals will receive feedback from the review panel about why their projects were not awarded funding with a view to sharing learning and building capacity to apply for funding elsewhere or in the future.

A clear statement will also be made that all intellectual property remains with applicants who are not awarded funds.

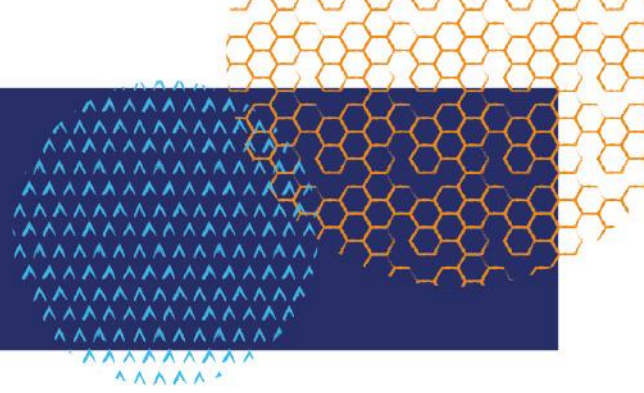
### Recruiting community peer reviewers

Community partners from the co-production team will be invited to express an interest in reviewing proposals to the fund. As members of the co-production team, we all have relevant experience for reviewing proposals.

Four community partners will then be selected by lottery to join the review panels. Two for the expression of interests and two for the full proposals. Community peer reviewers will be remunerated for their time at £25 per hour.

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Community partners with an interest in joining the panel cannot also submit applications for funding. All panel members will also be asked to make any relevant declarations of interest (i.e., do they know members of an applying research team or community body) and where necessary they not review specific applications where there is a risk of conflict of interest.

### **Awarding funds**

We have stated that, where appropriate, community partners should be acknowledged and remunerated for their time, skills, and expertise.

Funds will be awarded to the Imperial researchers named on the proposal. Community partners would then be paid as external facilitators, consultants, participants etc. as appropriate (e.g. community partners raise invoices). This would require that community partners be set up on Imperial systems. The Public Engagement team can facilitate this process.

We also recognise that not all community partners will be in a position to accept “payment” (without it affecting benefits for example). In these cases, we will explore alternative means of acknowledging people for their time and skills.

In some instances, and where stated in proposals, community partners may be awarded funds directly. Please bear in mind that organisations without a written constitution and bank account will not be able to receive funds directly.

### **Impact Report**

At the close of the pilot in July 2025, the Public Engagement team will produce an impact report that details where seed funding was awarded and the success rate of applicants, evaluation and reporting from funded projects, and any impact and legacy that resulted from seed funding.

This report will then be brought to the co-production team for review. Creating an opportunity to provide insights, reflections, and so that we can share learning in a mutually beneficial way.

### **Communication strategy**

Communication materials will be designed internally by the Public Engagement team based on the guidance provided by the co-production team. The fund will be promoted both internally, within Imperial, and externally within community networks in the tri-borough area<sup>1</sup> (i.e., the boroughs of Westminster, Hammersmith and Fulham and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea). This will include social media and newsletters, on screens and posters around the College and in community partner premises, via community partners such as local authorities, charities, and community groups.

Any ideas about where to spread the word about the fund are very welcome!

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<sup>1</sup> Whilst the communication plan is limited to the tri-borough area for the pilot stage, applications from outside this area will still be eligible, allowing space for the most appropriate partnerships for the delivery of research to apply for funding. This can support our aim to develop a broader culture of participatory research at Imperial and is in line with our decision to allow applicants to make their own case for the appropriateness of their community partnerships.