Impact Fund – Frequently Asked Questions

About the Impact Fund

Q: **What is the Impact Fund?**

A: To bridge the gap between research and real-world change, the Impact Fund (IF) funds activities to strengthen or show impact from existing research. The IF has a streamlined application process with quick turnaround times. We are in Pilot phase 2 of the Impact Fund. During the pilot, applicants can ONLY apply via an invitation from the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO).

Q: **How can the Impact Fund amplify impact from my research?**

A: If you aim to strengthen uptake of your research or influence policy, the IF can support the following:

- **Research translation** such as creating user-friendly tools, policy briefs, adapting research outputs for different audiences, or collaborating with implementation partners to put findings into practice.
- **Engagement and communication** such as organizing knowledge-sharing events, created targeted communication materials, building networks with practitioners, or creating platforms for dialogue between researchers and users.
- **Theory-Based Impact Evaluation:** This option supports rigorous evaluation using theory-based methods (such as contribution analysis, Bayesian updating or process tracing) to assess your intervention's causal contribution to outcomes. This option requires a thorough description of the planned method and data sources in this application. If you select this category but do not describe a clear methodology, we cannot assess this portion, and your application may be rejected.
- **Sustainable impacts** including local capacity building, creating sustainable knowledge platforms, or establishing long-term partnerships with implementing organizations to help research inform practice.
- **Conference participation (to influence policy or practice)**: IF considers funding participation in high-profile conferences, especially for researchers in the Global South or early career researchers. Conference applicants should provide a strong justification, such as why funds are not available elsewhere, and/or why attending would be necessary to achieve impact. It is helpful to highlight relevant stakeholders or plans to encourage use of research.

Q: Will the projects currently funded through the Impact Fund be publicised? If so, where?
A: An Impact Fund website, accessible through the GRTD website is in progress, and we intend to publicise the fund and its awardees there.

Q: How many proposals will be funded?
A: We expect to fund between 7 to 9 proposals, subject to budget.

Q: Will there be future opportunities to apply for the Impact Fund?
A: Yes, the fund is expected to scale early next year, pending evaluation of the pilot phase. Applicants may be able to resubmit if not successful in this round.

Eligibility

Q: What are the eligibility criteria?

- **Connection to FCDO**: Applicants can ONLY apply via an invitation from the FCDO. For the pilot phase, research should have been completed in the past 2-3 years. Research partially funded by FCDO is also eligible. The organisation is not required to have been a lead organisation for past FCDO research.
- **Additionality**: The project should not duplicate existing FCDO funding and projects cannot be an extension to the research activities. Extensions of existing impact activities - such as adapting existing tools to new audiences or further coproduction and dissemination activities, can be eligible.
- **Impact Potential**:
  - Projects should show potential for real-world impact through research translation, engagement and communication, theory-based evaluation, and/or sustainable impacts.
  - Your proposal can include multiple types of impact (e.g. research translation & engagement and communication). Or, you can focus more narrowly on one impact area (e.g. a targeted workshop or conference participation). It is not required that your proposal cover multiple impact areas.
- **Timeframe**: For Pilot phase 2, activities should be completed by February 2027. Shorter-term activities are encouraged.

Q: Can I apply for funding for a new research project or an extension to my research activities?
A: No, the IF does not fund new research projects or provide funding to extend research activities.

Q: Can one organisation submit more than one proposal?
A: Yes, but selection will aim for variety, so multiple projects from one organization are less likely to be selected.

Q: Can a report/publication based on an FCDO-funded program be submitted if the program was not a formal research project?
A: The proposal must be based on research funded by RED. Some FCDO programmes have RED components, which are eligible.

Q: What does “builds on existing FCDO research” mean?
A: Applicants must have worked on research projects funded by FCDO RED. Work funded by policy teams is not eligible.

Funding Details

Q: How much funding is available for a project?
A: The IF offers flexible funding options of up to £30,000. We particularly welcome smaller applications with shorter timelines and smaller budgets.

Q: Are there expectations or eligibility differences regarding budget splits, especially with different costs in HICs (High-Income Countries) and L&MICs (Low- and Middle-Income Countries)?
A: Indications of divisions of funding across partners in different countries are welcome. The budget template is set up to indicate budget splits. Disproportionate costs in the UK vs. other countries can affect budget balance, so applicants should justify and articulate UK costs. The partner institution should have an equitable role in the budget.

Q: Are indirect costs reflected in the budget? How are costs assessed?
A: Yes. We have two preferred routes for indirect calculations as well as third alternative option.

- For UK Universities and Higher Education institutions, we use the TRAC methodology which is a standardised approach for UK HEIs.
- For non-UK HEIs, we ask that you use the NPAC calculation to work out indirect costs. This is a way to provide both transparency and fairness on the indirect costs for partners.
- Some partners aren't able to use, or would prefer not to, use NPAC to calculate indirect costs. For example, some partners are smaller and aren't able to provide audited accounts (and therefore we wouldn't be able to trace costs back). In these cases, we allow for a set indirect rate of a maximum of 15%

Q: Are Full Economic Costs paid?
A: Yes.

Q: Will HIC salaries be allowed in applications for this fund?
A: Relevant expertise and HIC time are supported if justified. Benchmarks are used for day rates, and indirect costs are reflected separately. Projects are not penalized for including HIC costs if realistic.

Q: Are applicants permitted to include publication fees in their budgets?
A: We encourage open access publications, and permit applicants to make a case for publication costs.

Q: Our consultant rates are lower than the ones stated in the RCC rate card. Should we adjust our costs to the rate ceilings indicated?
A: Applicants should use their actual consultant rates. The RCC shared rates for benchmarking purposes – it is fine for them to be lower.

Q: How much detail should applicants share in the partner tab of the budget template?

A: It is acceptable to condense the expenses into single lines in the tab (e.g. domestic travel, subsistence), but you can also add rows and provide more description if you wish, e.g. to help evidence the value for money or equity and diversity argument in your application.

Q: How should applicants record spending on partners that goes through the lead institution.
A: Partner spending should be recorded in the partners tab if it is spending done by another institution. The RCC classifies a partner as being an organisation participating in a substantive capacity in the research project. If it's not a partner, but a direct cost (e.g. a consultant hired by the lead for a discrete piece of work, where they don't require a full partner budget), this can be included in the lead partner's budget.

Q: What if only the lead partner is the direct beneficiary of the FCDO funding, do I still fill the partner sheet?
A: The contracting process is only with one lead partner and is therefore the direct beneficiary. With this in mind, if there are partners on the project, we still require that partner budgets are detailed and included on the budget template.

Q: Must all the 6 budget sheets/sections be filled, or you fill as appropriate?
A: Please fill as appropriate.

Q: We've got two partners. Do we duplicate the partner tab or put them both on one tab?
A: You can do that, yes.

For a brief breakdown of eligible costs, please see Appendix A.

Application

Q: How do I apply?
A: Applications must be submitted on the RCC Grant management system (SmartSimple) and via FCDO invite. The application requires a detailed proposal outlining objectives, deliverables, approach to strengthen impact, and budget.

Q: Is there a deadline? What is the timeline for this phase of the fund?
A: Applications for the FCDO RCC Impact Fund Pilot Phase 2 will be due 20 October. Projects must end by February 2027. Announcements will be made in November with contracting planned to end before Christmas. Projects should start soon after contracting, within 8 weeks after application acceptance.

Q: Is there flexibility on the deadline?
A: Unfortunately, no.

Q: Does the IF project PI need to be the same as the PI for the original FCDO-funded research?
A: No, they do not need to be the same, however there should be a connection with the original project.

Q: What supporting documents do I need to submit with my application?
A: Required supporting documents include (see below for applicable sections):

- CV for each project lead (max 3 pages per CV)
- Documentation about your original FCDO-funded research project for which your Impact Fund proposal relates
- Project budget using RCC budget template

A. Optional supporting documents include (see below for which sections they apply):

- Theory of change visual diagram (max 1 page)
- Gantt chart
- Letter(s) of support from proposed partner(s)

Q: How do I edit a previous proposal for resubmission?
A: You will have to submit a new application, as the application form has changed. You can create a PDF of your previous application for reference.

Q: Should applicants cover multiple support areas or focus on one?
A: You are not required to cover multiple areas; focusing on one is acceptable.

Q: How do I fill out the application form?
A. Fill out the following sections:

1. **Contact information**: Organisation information, applicant's contact information, organisation profile including leadership details, verification of funding eligibility, roles and responsibilities of core team members, and information about previous FCDO-funded research project and programme to which your Impact Fund proposal relates.
    a. <u>Required documents:</u>
        i. CV for each project lead (max 3 pages) (Supporting Documents section).
        ii. Documentation about your original FCDO-funded research project for which your Impact Fund proposal relates (Supporting Documents section).
    b. **For previous FCDO research project**, please note that this is not the name of your Impact Fund proposal. List the name of your previous FCDO research project that already received FCDO funding. We use this information to verify your eligibility for the Impact Fund.
    c. **For FCDO research programme** under which your previous project was funded. Illustrative examples (not an exhaustive list) include: Energy and Economic Growth (EEG); AHRC - Collaborative Humanitarian Protection Programme; DT Global - High Value Transport.
    d. To be eligible for funding, your previous FCDO funding must have come from the Research and Evidence Directorate (RED).
2. **Project overview**: Including title, abstract, primary category of impact, other categories of impact as applicable, and implementation timeframe.
3. **Impact potential**: Including Impact statement, theory of change, scaling and replication, and tracking and influence. If impact may be challenging to foresee or measure for your field of work, we encourage you to propose how the activity could form a starting point for longer term change.
    a. <u>Optional document</u>: Theory of change visual diagram (max 1 page) (Supporting Documents section).
4. **Feasibility**: Implementation plan, objectives and deliverables, risks and mitigation.

    a. <u>Optional document</u>: Gantt chart (Supporting Documents section).
5. **Additionality**: Including what is new about your proposed Impact Fund project and value addition from your previous FCDO-funded research project.
6. **Equity and Partnerships**: Including how your team will ensure equity and inclusion, and proposed partners.
    a. <u>Optional document</u>: Letter(s) of support from proposed implementation partner(s) (Supporting Documents section).
7. **Budget and Value for Money**: Budget breakdown and value for money statement.
    a. <u>Required document</u>: Project budget using 3ie budget template, upload under Budget and Value for Money section.
8. **Declarations**: Declaration of accuracy and compliance with 3ie funding agreement requirements and Impact Fund eligibility criteria.
9. **Supporting documents**: Upload required and optional supporting documents as indicated above.
10. **Feedback**: Short survey of your experience using the grant management system.

Q: How do I fill out impact potential when planning a theory-based evaluation?
A: Describe your methodology, approach, and how your project informs theory-based evaluation.

Selection criteria

Q: How are applications evaluated?
A: Applications are evaluated on five key criteria:

1. **Impact Potential** (35%): Clarity and significance of expected outcomes.
2. **Feasibility** (25%): Practical and robust implementation plans.
3. **Additionality** (20%): Creating new value beyond existing work.
4. **Equity and Partnerships** (10%): Capability to ensure equity and inclusion and deliver impact. Capability to deliver impact is evaluated in part through the Roles and responsibilities section of the application and CVs.
5. **Budget and Value for Money** (10%): Efficient use of resources to maximise impact per pound invested.

Q: When will I know if my application is successful?
A: Applicants will receive decisions within up to 6 weeks of submission.

Post-Award

Q: When can I expect my grant to start if my application is approved?
A: We anticipate responsive engagement with successful applicants to award the grant as soon as possible. We generally expect grants to be underway within 8 weeks of application approval. Pilot Phase 2 projects should be completed no later than February 2027.

Q: What are the reporting requirements for funded projects?
A: Grantees will design their deliverables schedule with the RCC. Teams will be required to deliver progress report(s) and a research uptake case study. Templates for these outputs

will be provided by the RCC. Other outputs will be determined depending on the activities planned under the grant and will likely include a final report.

Q: Is there guidance on theory-based evaluation?
A: No specific FCDO guidance. Approaches like contribution analysis, process tracing, and QCA are acceptable.

Appendix A

Eligible Costs

To be eligible, costs must:

- Be **actually incurred** by the recipient
- Be incurred **within the grant period**
- Be **included in the approved budget**
- Be **necessary** for project implementation
- Be **verifiable** and recorded in line with accounting standards
- Be **compliant** with national laws (e.g. tax, labour)

Direct Programme Costs

These are costs directly linked to project delivery:

- Salaries of project staff
- Travel and subsistence
- Project materials and supplies
- Workshops, training, and dissemination activities
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Capital expenditure (e.g. equipment over £500 with >1 year life)
- Communications and branding (if required by FCDO)
- Technical consultants and advisors
- Grantee audits (if required by FCDO)

Non-Project Attributable Costs (NPAC)

Also known as overheads or indirect costs:

- HR, finance, and admin support
- Premises and utilities
- IT systems and general equipment
- Governance and organisational management
- Must be calculated using a 3-year average and absorbed within the total budget

Ineligible Costs

These costs are **explicitly disallowed**:

- Costs not related to the project
- Costs incurred **outside the grant period**
- Costs **not included** in the approved budget
- **Contingency or unallocated funds**
- **Fines, penalties, or litigation costs**
- **Alcohol, entertainment, or gifts**
- **Excessive or unjustified travel or subsistence**

- **Marketing or fundraising costs**
- **Interest payments or bank charges**
- **Costs already funded by another donor**
- **Unjustified capital purchases** (e.g. luxury items, personal devices)