Public and Community Engagement with Research **Seed Fund Evaluation**

Final report

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About this evaluation

CONTEXT

Since 2015, the University of Oxford's Public and Community Engagement with Research (PCER)* team has been running a small internal funding scheme, called the PCER Seed Fund, to support activities that purposefully engage the public with the University's research.

GOALS

In May 2023, the team commissioned Science Practice to conduct the first external evaluation of the Seed Fund in order to:

- Identify characteristics and trends in applications and funded projects
- Understand perceptions and indicators of the fund's operation and impact
- Provide recommendations for how the fund could better support researchers and realise PCER outcomes in future, including future monitoring, learning, and evaluation considerations

Overall, we aimed to identify larger changes and smaller tweaks that could be made in response to particular challenges, and to highlight additional strategic considerations to enhance the fund going forward.

* Formally the PER Seed Fund. The title of the fund changed to the PCER Seed Fund in 2022 to reflect the new team name.

Contents

Five evaluation questions and 11 sub-questions were specified in the evaluation Request for Quotations. These questions serve as the guiding framework for this report, shaping the way we have organised and presented the information.

Approach

Evaluation approach

Our evaluation approach combined data-driven discovery based on existing applicant and grantee submissions and post-project evaluations, engagements with PCER stakeholders through interviews, a survey and workshops, and process modelling of the fund's past and current models.

EVALUATION COMPONENT	OUTPUTS
Reviewing & modelling the funding process To understand changes over time and documented challenges.	(Miro, process maps)
Interviews To unearth perceptions and identify known challenges/opportunities for improvement.	
• With the PCER team	(Summary)
• PER Leads/Research Impact Facilitators from each division	(Summary)
• With academic researchers who previously applied	(Summary)
Survey To understand applicant and awardee experiences and perceptions of the fund.	(Summary)
Interim report To share draft topline insights and recommendations based on qualitative analysis from modelling, interviews, and survey.	(Report)
Workshop on the fund's decision-making process To immerse the PCER team and Divisional Leads/Facilitators in the mechanics of the decision making process and options for how it could be refined.	(Workspace)
Data extraction & analysis To understand characteristics and trends in incoming applications and funded projects supported by the fund since its inception.	(Airtable)

Data-driven discovery

To investigate the characteristics and trends in applications and funded projects, we extracted and analysed data from:

- **264 applications** received over 8 academic years
- **127 funded projects** over this same time period
- **Evaluation report excerpts** for all funded projects

This method helped us answer research questions 1, 2, and 3.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Did the PCER Seed Fund result in a diverse cohort of applicants and high quality PER proposals and projects that made a difference?
2. What were the benefits and challenges of the fund?
3. What typology can be developed for understanding the similarities/differences between objectives across all applications and the outcomes of funded projects?

Engaging PCER Seed Fund stakeholders

To investigate perceptions of and experiences with the fund from the perspectives of administrators, applicants, and awardees, we engaged with stakeholders via:

- **4 interviews** with PCER team members
- **5 interviews** with Divisional PER Leads or Research Impact Facilitators from each division
- **2 interviews** with previous applicants
- **12 survey responses** from previous applicants/awardees

This method helped us answer research questions 2, 3, 4, and 5.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

2. What were the benefits and challenges of the fund?
3. What typology can be developed for understanding the similarities/differences between objectives across all applications and the outcomes of funded projects?
4. Was the decision-making a robust and fair process? Do we have the right skills and expertise to review and make funding decisions?
5. What recommendations can be made for future iterations of the Seed Fund?

Process modelling

To understand the current PCER Seed Fund funding process, understand changes to this over time, and locate challenges and opportunities within this, we identified:

- **6-stage funding process** and what happens at each stage
- **Level of involvement of key actors** at each stage
- **Pain points** presenting challenges at each stage
- **Alternative models** for key moments in the process that could be integrated into the funding process in future.

This method helped us answer research questions 4 and 5.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

4. Was the decision-making a robust and fair process? Do we have the right skills and expertise to review and make funding decisions?
5. What recommendations can be made for future iterations of the Seed Fund?

Limitations

- Including data on division and department size will provide context on relative success rates. Without this data, we were not able to provide an assessment on relative success between departments.
- Evaluating the utilisation rate of other sources of internal funding will give a bigger picture on the use of funds to support PCER work within the University.
- No feedback from applicants was collected post-final report completion, this could draw interesting insight regarding the longer terms outcomes of projects and impact on researchers with what they did next.
- Likewise, it is difficult to understand ultimate impact of the funded projects on the public in the absence of follow-up engagements with individuals taking part.
- As we were not able to engage with researchers who have not applied to the fund, it is unclear if the fund is attracting all potential applications who could benefit from the fund. If there were broader project timelines, there may be an affect on the number of applications received.
- We were only able to consult two prior applicants in interviews. We only received survey responses from previous successful and unsuccessful applicants. We did not connect with any prospective applicants who had not previously applied to the fund.

Characteristics & trends

1. Did the PCER Seed Fund result in a diverse cohort of applicants and high quality PER proposals and projects that made a difference?

Question 1c. ‘What were the outcomes and impacts of the Seed Fund on the researchers involved and their research?’ is addressed in 3a.

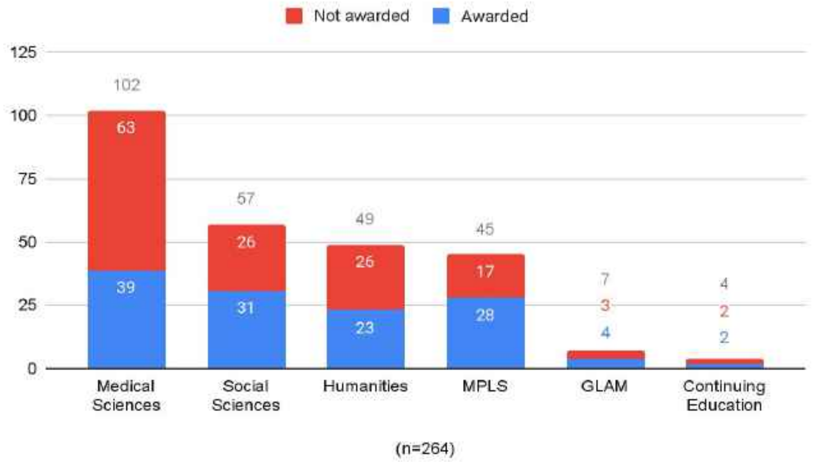
The PCER Seed Fund attracts a higher number of applicants from the Medical Sciences Division, while Social Sciences, Humanities and MPLS have relatively similar applicant numbers.

The majority of applications are focussed on piloting new activities.

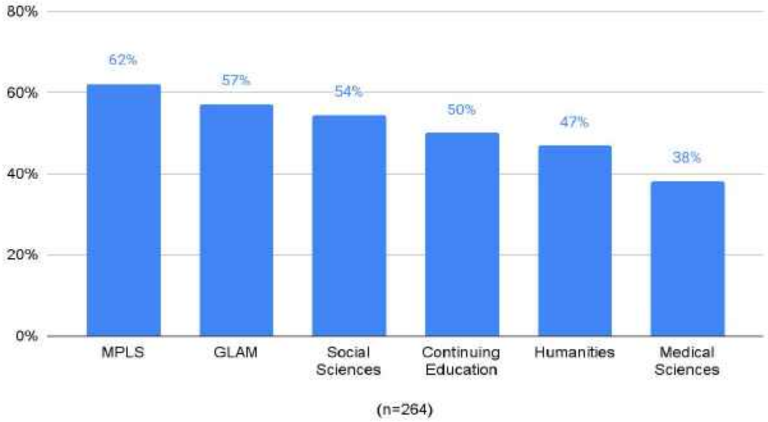
Similarly, ‘inform and inspire’ stands out as the primary project purpose. Projects frequently target children under the age of 18, which may be due to an emphasis on inspiring and informing to have an impact on the next generation of potential academics.

Diversity of Divisions

Total number of applicants per division from 2015/16-2022/23



Success rate of each division



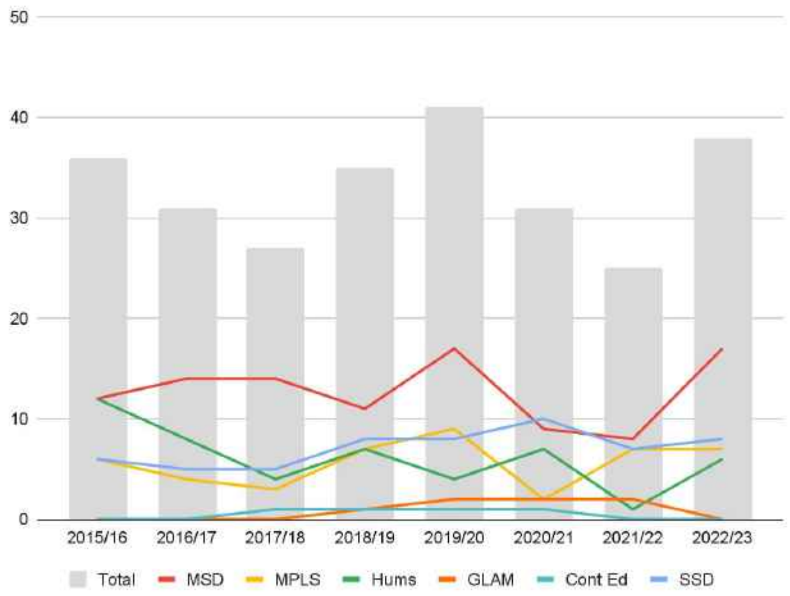
- The Medical Sciences Division submitted the highest number of applications. This is in line with our expectations given the applied nature of medical sciences and incorporation of patient and public involvement (PPI). Note, Medical Sciences is larger than the other Divisions.

  We suggest sharing these findings with the Divisional PER Leads to understand if the level of interest in the fund is aligned with how prevalent PCER is within their research cultures. Certain Divisions may benefit from targeted promotion to encourage greater participation.

1. Did the PCER Seed Fund result in a diverse cohort of applicants and high quality PER proposals and projects that made a difference?

Applications per year

Applicants by division per academic year

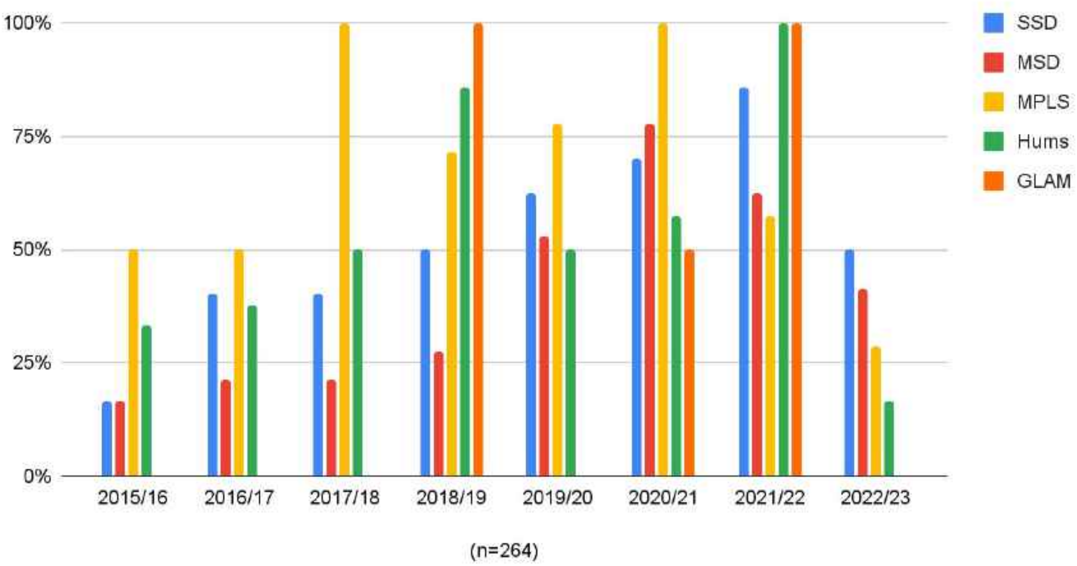


(n=264)

- During interviews, it was noted that there had been a lower number of applications from the Humanities division. Looking at the eight years reveals a more nuanced picture. There seems to be a pattern of fluctuation rather than a consistent increase or decrease over the years. In the 2021/22 round, only one application was received, but this figure increased to seven in 2022/23.
- An average of 33 applications were submitted across all divisions each year.
- Medical Sciences (MSD) consistently had the greatest number of applications, with an average of 12.75 over all periods. Social Sciences (SSD), Humanities, and Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences (MPLS) had an average of 5–7 applications per year. Gardens, Libraries and Museums (GLaM) and Continuing Education (Cont Ed) averaged less than one application per year.
- While the number of GLAM PIs has been low, GLAM researchers/facilitators have often been listed as co-applicants.

Awards per year

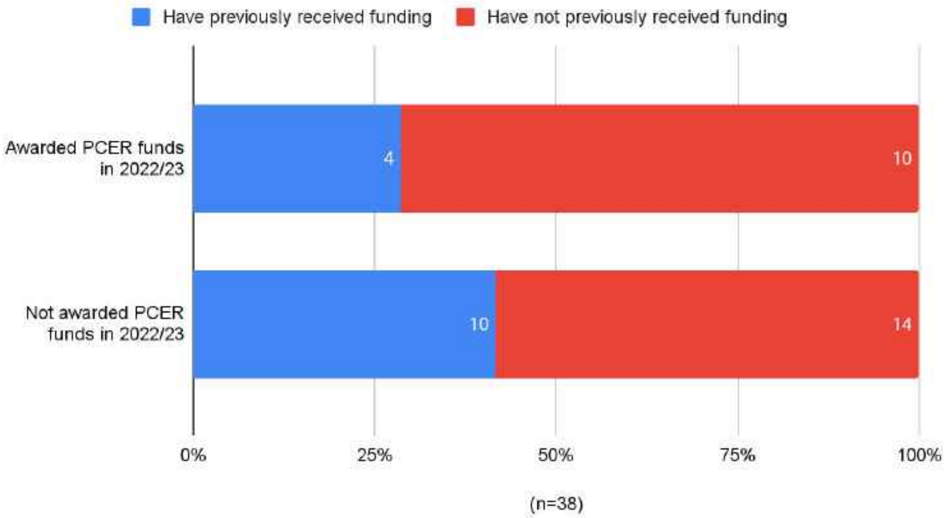
Divisional success rate per academic year



- Divisions with yearly application averages greater than 5 achieved a minimum of 17% success each year of the fund.

Previous awardees and type of activity

Applicants previous funding history

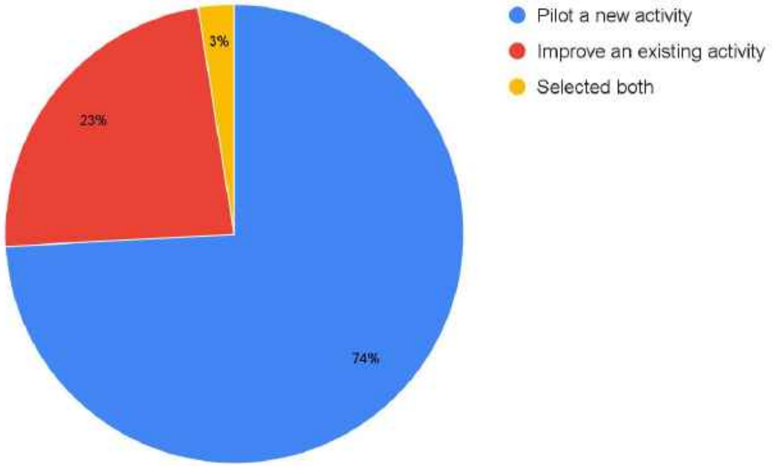


Data only available for 2022/23

- 71% of applicants who were awarded PCER funds in 2022/23 had not previously been awarded funding.
- The four recipients of the PCER seed fund who had received funding previously, obtained the prior funding from the following sources: Wellcome Trust, NIHR, British Ecological Society Outreach Grant, Oxford PER Seed Fund, British Rising Star Engagement Award.

Previous awardees and type of activity

Intended use of requested funds



(n=197)

Data only available for 2017/2018–2022/23.

- 74% of applicants applied to pilot a new activity compared to 23% for improving an existing activity.
- Of the applicants proposing to pilot a new activity, 78% requested full project cost coverage from the PCER Seed Fund.

Target audiences in applications

- Researchers defined their target audiences according to a diverse range of factors and specificities, reflecting the nuanced nature of research engagement. The variability in their approaches highlights the multifaceted nature of audience selection. For instance, while some researchers opted for highly specific audiences, such as school children in Year 10 and 11 attending a particular school, others adopted a broader perspective, such residents of certain neighbourhoods.

- The diversity in target audiences included considerations such as:

  - Interest areas: Some researchers honed in on the interests and passions of their audience, aligning their engagement strategies with the subject matter or themes that resonated most with their intended participants. In some instances, researchers did the opposite and intentionally targeted those who are not normally engaged in the topic with the hopes of sparking interest or inspiration.

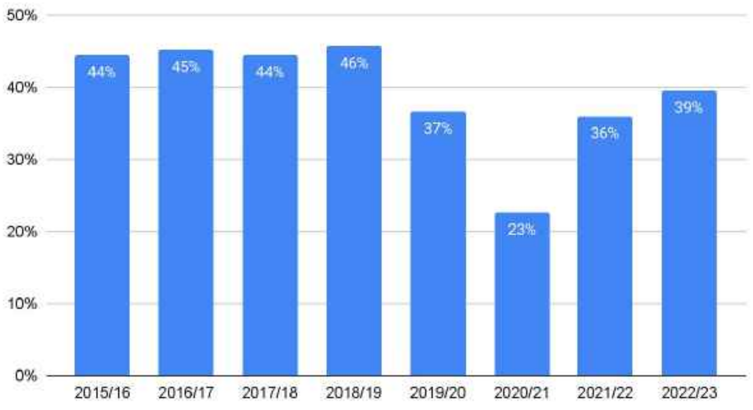
  - Cultural factors: Some considered cultural and ethical backgrounds, or languages spoken, as a way of distinguishing their audience group.

- At times, researchers chose to target audiences associated with particular institutions or events. For example there were 37 applications, over all years, that had ‘Visitors/Members of an institution (museum/gallery/theatre/heritage site)’ as their target audience, and similarly ‘Visitors to an exhibition/festival/event’ was selected 18 times across the years.

- Most non-UK target audiences were from a single non-UK country or a combination of one non-UK country and the UK. However, one applicant and three projects distributed their audiences across multiple non-UK countries.

Most common target audiences

Percentage of applications that target children under the age of 18



(n=264)

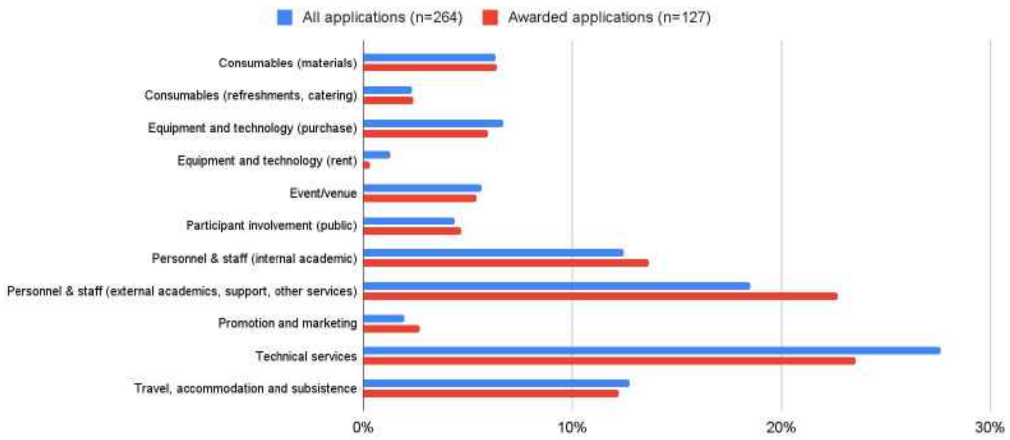
- Children under the age of 18 were one of the most popular target audiences with 40% of all applications over the years including children in their target audience.
- The drop in 2020/21 may be related to the disruption to schools during COVID-19.

Other common target audiences over all years include

Audience	Percentage of applications targeting this audience
Citizens/General public/Wider audience (not specified)	19%
Families	17%
Patients	15%
Visitors/Members of an institution (museum/gallery/theatre/heritage site)	14%
Teachers/Educators	12%
Online public audience	11%
Charity/NGO/Civil Society Organisation	9%
Medical practitioners/Healthcare professionals	8%
Visitors to an exhibition/festival/event	7%
Cultural/Ethnic Community Group	7%
Neighbourhoods/Residents/Local community	7%
Not normally engaged/non-specialists	7%

Proposed use of funds

Proposed use of funds, all applications vs awarded applications

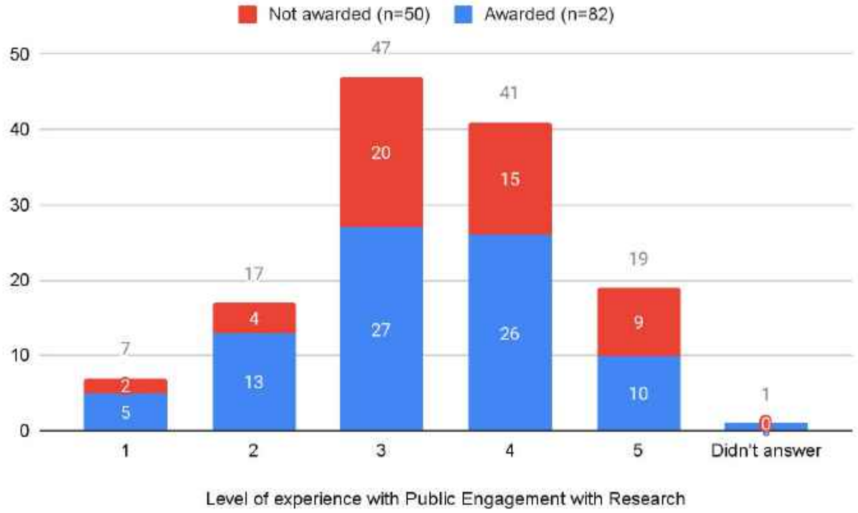


- The majority of proposed fund usage across all applications and awardees was allocated to technical services. Examples of technical services include licenses (e.g., Adobe Suite), transcription, printing, and various media production activities such as animation, website development, app development, video production, and photography.
- Funds to cover participant involvement were low. Low funding for participant involvement risks exclusion, particularly for marginalised or underrepresented groups, as it may limit engagement to those who can afford to contribute their time and resources.

- During application reviews, we observed instances where funds were requested for personal compensation or department buyouts, some of which were approved. Interviews revealed that some researchers had unclear perceptions about fund usage guidelines, especially regarding such expenditures. **To improve clarity, we recommend providing additional guidance on permissible uses and restrictions of funds.**

Level of experience with PCER

Applicants' self-assessed level of experience with PCER

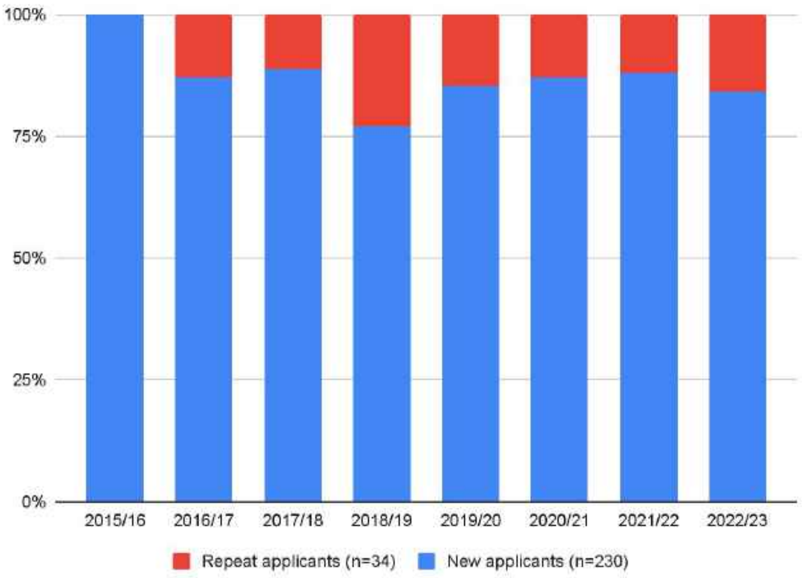


Data only available for 2018/19–2021/22.
Value Range: Level 1 (no previous experience) to Level 5 (very experienced).
Level of experience was self-assessed in application forms.

- Two thirds of applicants between 2018/19–2021/22 chose either 3 or 4 to represent their level of experience. This could be due to central tendency bias, whereby respondents often opt for the middle option when uncertain what either extreme includes.
- This trend remained consistent making it difficult to ascertain whether applicants' level of experience with PCER evolved over the years.

Repeat applicants

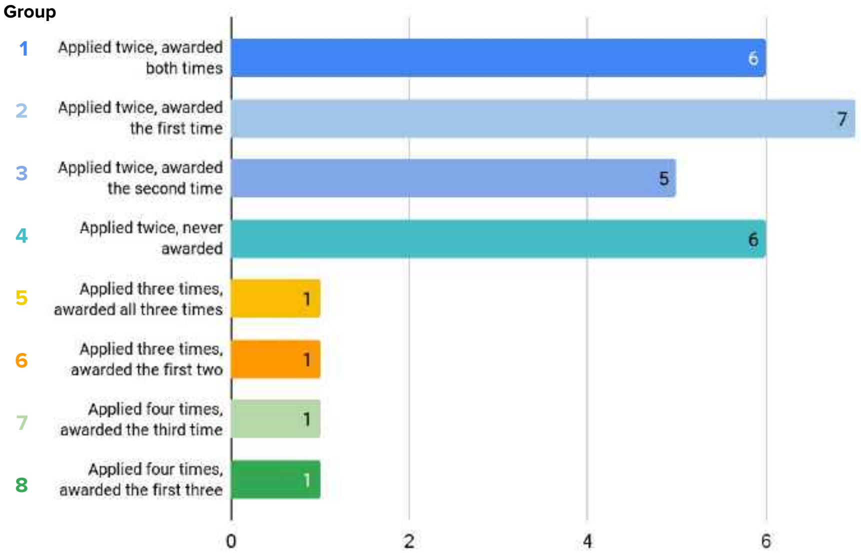
Share of first-time applicants (new) vs. applicants who have previously applied (repeat), per year



- The proportion of repeat applicants compared with new applicants was highest in the 2018/19 and 2022/23 years.
- In 2018/19, 23% of all applicants had previous applied. In all other years, following the first year, applicants accounted for 11–16% of all applications received.
- Looking across all years, 50% of repeat applicants were successful (110 of 230), and 48% of new applicants were successful (17 of 34). **This suggests that the review process is not biased toward either new or repeat applicants.**

Repeat applicants

Number of repeat applicants grouped by how many times they applied and when they were successful



- 28 applicants applied as the Principle Investigator (PI) more than once between 2015/16-2022/23 with some applying over numerous years. This comprises 24% of all applications received. Note, this analysis doesn't capture researchers who are involved in other applications as co-applicants.
- Four applicants in Group 1 and two applicants in Group 2 submitted a second proposal that **built on their previously funded project**. Two applicants in Group 2 proposed similar approaches for a related topic.
- Three applications in Group 3, and all in Group 4, **submitted nearly identical applications** for their second attempt. Two applicants in Group 4 transitioned from video-based projects to virtual reality projects.
- All in Groups 5, 6, 7 & 8 submitted proposals that either built on their initial funded project, or proposed a similar approach on a slightly different topic. Given the specialisms of academics and the discussions in interviews regarding potential needs for follow-on funds, this is to be expected; researchers who tend to pursue public engagement projects tend to have this integrated into their research practice more broadly.

Archetypes

Based on survey and interview data, we identified the following categories of applicants who submit to the PCER fund. These archetypes could be used in future to tailor the fund's strategy in order to increase applications from a particular group or provide special support to another.

Early-career researcher

Developing skills and building confidence.

Establishing a foundation in their research practice.

Familiarising with ways of conducting participatory research and public engagement.

Practicing different research methods and approaches.

Budding practitioner

Refining their practice and further developing their skills.

Conducting follow-on research or advancing the scope of work.

Pushing a method further or trying a different route.

Conducting a larger-scale study.

Perennial

Continuing in a line of work they are familiar with.

Working from known methods and established processes.

Experimenter *(could be at any career stage)*

Conducting innovative* research or experiments.

Exploring new ideas, approaches or avenues of research.

Propelling an approach or method into new territories.

Taking a creative-spin on an existing approach.

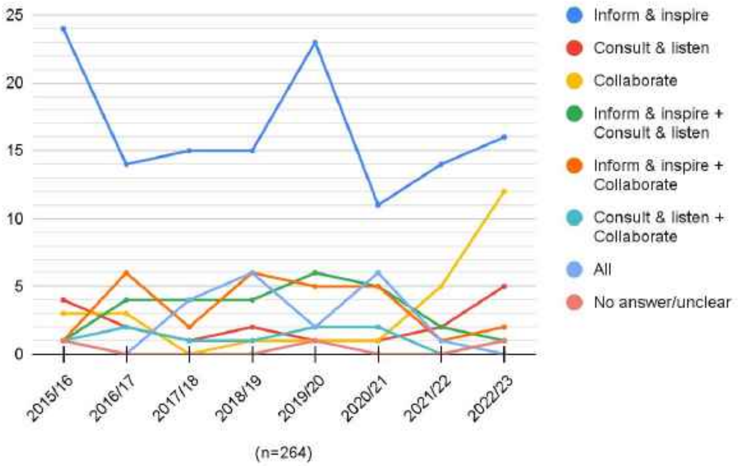
**We've interpreted innovative as the novelty of the method, topic, and/or target audience.*

1b. Did the proposals include engagement activities with a clear purpose, including, potentially, being linked to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and did the proposals outline the difference they aimed to make?

Key purpose of the activity

In the application form, applicants are asked to specify the key purpose of their activity. Below we analysed how popular each option is. Note that it is hard to answer whether or not the purpose is *clear*, as applications are asked to choose from a predefined set of options.

Most common purpose, per year

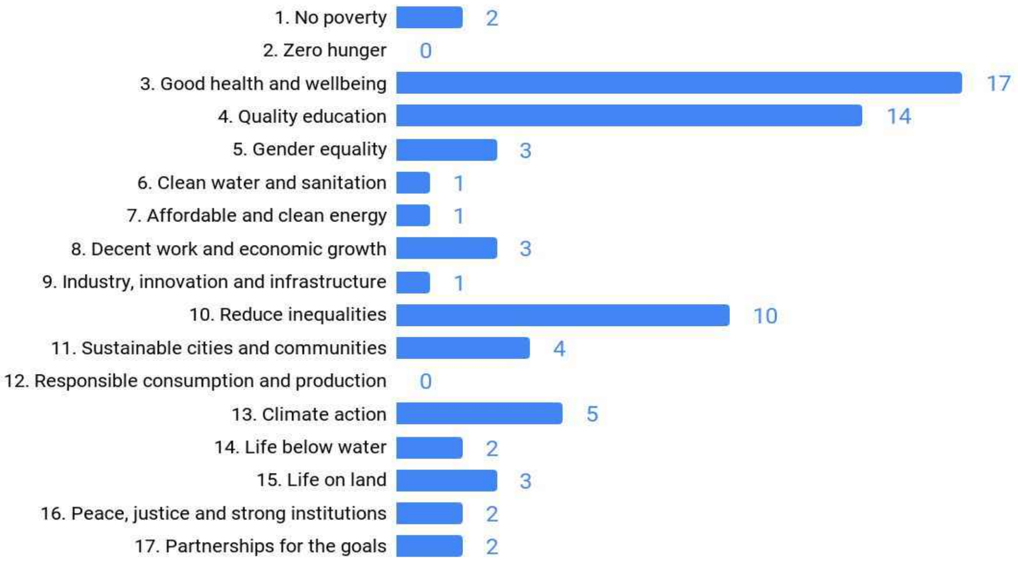


- The most frequently chosen key purpose was 'Inform & Inspire,' selected 132 times over the years, indicating a preference for raising awareness of research. This choice may reflect a traditional perspective, where academics view themselves as educators or communicators of research rather than actively involving the public as research partners or in shaping research agendas and projects.
- The number of applicants selecting either 'Collaborate' or 'Consult & Listen' has increased in the past two funding rounds. This change in 2022/23 may be attributed to the requirement for applicants to choose a single purpose.

1b. Did the proposals include engagement activities with a clear purpose, including, potentially, being linked to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and did the proposals outline the difference they aimed to make?

SDGs

Number of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) selected



- 28 out out of 38 applicants in 2022/23 stated that their project contributed to one or more SDGs.
- The number of SDGs selected by applicants varied:
  - 1 SDG (10 applicants)
  - 2 SDGs (9 applicants)
  - 3 SDGs (3 applicants)
  - 4 SDGs (3 applicants)
  - 5 SDGs (2 applicants)
  - 6 SDGs (1 applicant).
- This variation in SDG selection may reflect diversity in the breadth of impact that different projects aimed to achieve, or differing interpretations of what it means to *contribute* to an SDG.

Perceptions & indicators of fund operations & impact

2. What were the benefits and challenges of the fund?

The PCER Seed Fund is seen as a valuable asset within the University for the learning opportunities it provides for researchers, the potential impact it affords to members of the public, and as a means of supporting early-stage researchers to pursue public engagement – an aspect not typically part of the regular career pathway.

The evaluation workshop and support were consistently mentioned across all touchpoints (interviews and surveys) as a significant benefit and learning opportunity.

The types of challenges that were identified include the fund's purpose, priorities and decision-making process, and more practical issues such as the breadth of information covered in the guidance documents and the tight timeframes to work within.

Benefits

For researchers

- It encourages early career researchers with the opportunity and means to try public engagement with research and participatory research, sometimes for the first time.

For Divisions

- It supports Divisions' goals of enabling researchers to get better at public engagement and provides case studies that demonstrate the value of engagement work and participatory research.

For the university

- The fund raises the profile of PCER and allows researchers to respond to real world community challenges.

During interviews, Divisional PER Leads mentioned there would be a negative impact on both learning and research if this fund didn't exist. Additionally, a researcher highlighted that the seed fund enables academics to carry out projects that they might not have funding for otherwise.

Challenges

Decision making

- There are mixed views on striking the right balance between timely decisions and capturing a diverse range of perspectives to identify potential.

Expectation setting

- There are ambiguity and assumptions surrounding the fund's purpose, what it prioritises, and permissible ways to use the funds, such as salary contributions or researcher buyouts. The vision for the fund was further explored in the workshop with Divisional PER Leads.

Preparing the application

- The practical aspects of structuring and designing a project were the more challenging aspects of preparing an application, e.g. defining a budget and understanding how to go from an idea to an outcome.

See the summary of pain points in interim report for the complete list.

2a. Has changing the way we administer the PCER Seed Fund/ Culture Change Fund in 2022/23 resulted in any change e.g. to who applies; what they apply for; confusion between which fund fits?

Perception from surveys

Changes to who applies

- The rolling deadline was well received by researchers as it was seen to be helpful when applying. One researcher said that it made their group more likely to apply.
- One researcher was drawn to the opportunity by the mention of a focus on participatory research projects. Another expressed their appreciation for the inclusion of participatory research projects in this scheme.

Change in requirements

- A concern was raised about imposing too many top-down requirements as it makes it harder to design projects and may discourage ideas which don't fit the mould.
- One researcher mentioned that the focus on intended impact and outcomes was helpful, but would have appreciated more guidance on how to get from their idea to the outcome.

  We recommend providing outcomes frameworks such as 'theory of change' to assist researchers in structuring how they select and plan activities to achieve their desired outcomes.

Confusion between which fund fits

- Aside from confusion with filling out the combined application form, nothing was raised regarding confusion amongst applicants on whether they should apply to the PCER Seed Fund or Knowledge Exchange Seed Fund.

It was hard to determine from application data what changes, if any, to who applies and what they apply for, were caused by the change in the way that the funds were administered in 2022/23.

Perceptions from interviews

- Some people were concerned that having just a few people select which project to fund might perpetuate underlying biases or what is seen to be 'good' by a subset of people.
- As Divisional PER Leads weren't involved in the decision-making process for the latest round, they relied on interpreting review comments to discern why projects weren't awarded. In one instance, a Divisional PER Lead could see reasons not to fund an application, they believed it met all the basic criteria, and felt that the decision might have been based on other criteria that wasn't communicated upfront.
- In a separate instance, a researcher mentioned that for their 2022/23 application, they received feedback from someone who appeared unfamiliar with their proposal and wasn't involved in the decision-making process. The researcher expressed a preference for more specific feedback and insight into the decision-making rationale.
- It appears that relying on Divisional PER Leads to convey funding decisions based on review comments may not always provide researchers with the depth of rationale and feedback they require. With a reduced role in the process, Divisional PER Leads might have had less engagement with each project, potentially affecting their overall understanding and familiarity in some cases. Unfortunately, we did not receive relevant information during interviews to make a comparison with previous years.

2c. Do people read the guidance and does it help? i.e. do they fill in the form correctly

Survey results for 'How would you rate the helpfulness of the guidance provided in assisting you with your decision to apply and/or complete the application?'

Rating	#Researchers
Unhelpful. The guidance provided was not useful or did not contribute to informing the decision to apply or completing the application.	**0**
Relatively unhelpful. The guidance provided was relatively unhelpful in assisting with the decision to apply or completing the application.	**0**
Average. The guidance provided had some helpful information, but there were gaps or areas that could have been more informative or concise.	**1**
Relatively helpful. The guidance offered valuable assistance in aiding the decision to apply and completing the application.	**5**
Helpful. The guidance provided was informative, comprehensive, and greatly assisted in informing the decision to apply or completing the application.	**5**

- All but one survey respondent recalled reviewing the guidance provided.
- The majority of respondents found the guidance valuable in aiding their decision to apply and preparing their application.

Errors in applications, all years

Description	#Errors
Post held - not answered	**5**
New activity or improving an existing activity - selected both options	**5**
Purpose of the activity - not answered/unclear	**3**
Audience and community - not answered	**1**
Does this project contribute to SDGs - not answered	**1**
Level of experience with PCER - not answered	**1**
Would they do this project again - selected both Yes and No	**1**

- We identified 17 clear errors in the extracted data fields.
- It's unclear whether these errors stemmed from applicants not thoroughly reading or misinterpreting the guidance or application form.

Source and type of support sought out

Survey results for 'Which of the following support/resources did you turn to when preparing your application? Select all that apply.'

Source of support	#Researchers
Departmental staff	7
Project collaborators	5
Fellow researchers/colleagues	4
PCER Team	4`
Divisional staff	3
Previous awardees	2
Other Research services staff	1
Previous awardee case studies	1
Research papers	1
N/A - No additional support or resources sought out	1

Survey results for 'What type of support did you seek? Select all that apply.'

Type of support sought out	#Researchers
Proposal reviews	8
Support with project planning	7
Support with budget development	6
Guidance on eligibilit`y	4
Proofreading and editing	4
Best practice guidance	2
Networking	1
Training and upskilling	1
Inspiration	1
Other: Evaluation planning guidance	1

- The fact that applicants turn to departmental staff for support indicates strong connection between applicants and their respective departments, where these staff members play a crucial role in the application process, as noted in interviews. This reliance may also suggest a need for additional guidance to submit competitive applications, highlighting the importance of providing comprehensive resources and assistance to applicants.

Materials available

The types of support that staff currently offer as noted in interviews include:

- **Inspiration**: how to think creatively about ways to engage their target audience
- **Encouragement**: support to help them realise what's possible, especially when it's less obvious how to engage the public
- **Critical thinking partner**: challenge assumptions made, ask thoughtful questions to help shape the project and inform decisions
- **Practical support**: this can include how to build relationships and how to budget and pay participants amongst other things
- **Logistical support**: support to access the target audience or finding locations to carry out research
- **Evaluation support**: this is widely considered to be a very helpful and valuable component of the seed fund

While extensive, this requires a researcher to actively seek support, which could be a drop-off point for some applicants. We recommend making the requested additional materials/support, listed below, readily available on the PCER webpage for easy access by researchers.

- Evaluation planning (prior to application)
- Budgeting
- Sharing resources that worked well for past applicants
- Implementation advice
- Advice for how to source and book venues for events
- What the priorities of the fund are
- How to design 'less-structured' projects
- If you're not awarded
  - How to improve your application
  - Similar projects that were more competitive
  - Signalling other available opportunities
- Post-award support (reflections, celebration)

2e. What other ways could we minimise barriers to the fund?

See the following recommendations under **What recommendations can be made for future iterations of the Seed Fund?**

Recommendation 1. Clarify the fund's purpose and priorities
Recommendation 2. Strategise with existing funds
Recommendation 3. Adjust the timeframes
Recommendation 6. Tailor guidance to different disciplines
Recommendation 7. Provide preparation support

3. What typology can be developed for understanding the similarities/differences between objectives across all applications and the outcomes of funded projects?

We used the NCCPE's 'purpose' framework to categorise projects' objectives. Types of objectives across all applications and funded projects were distributed similarly, with most proposing objectives related to 'sharing'. However, successful applications also proposed objectives related to 'responding', 'creating' and 'applying', in addition to 'sharing', more frequently than unsuccessful applications.

Understanding project objectives

The NCCPE (via Duncan and Manners) classifies public engagement initiatives according to purpose, i.e. what an engagement activity will achieve.

We suggest using this existing typology to compare and contrast all prospective and completed projects based on their objectives, and to assess the outcomes of funded projects.

Sharing what we do (inspiring, informing)

Responding (to societal needs/requests)

Creating knowledge together /
doing research together (collaborating, innovating)

Applying knowledge together (collaborating, innovating)

Learning from others (consulting)

Changing attitudes/behaviours

To what extent did funded projects fulfill the objectives in their applications?

From the way that the data is collected in the evaluation forms, it is difficult to ascertain whether researchers did what they said they would, and whether they achieved their intended outcomes. This is attributed the following reasons:

- Researchers articulated their engagement activities with **varying levels of detail**. Some provided specific descriptions of their planned activities, while others offered more general outlines. This variation in detail makes it challenging to gauge the extent to which the proposed activities were carried out as planned.

- There was a difference in the **degree of commitment** to implementing engagement activities. While some researchers detailed clear plans and methods for engagement, others provided more flexible or open-ended descriptions. The range in commitment levels adds complexity as it is difficult to determine whether some activities were intended, adapted, or unforeseen.

- Researchers may have **adjusted their engagement plans as they learned more** during the project, responding to changing circumstances, stakeholder feedback, or emerging insights. This adaptive approach can be a common and sometimes necessary. However, it can complicate the evaluation of whether researchers did what they said they were going to do as outlined in their application.

- The **absence of a standardised format** for representing achievements further complicates the assessment process. The lack of uniformity in presentation and specificity makes it difficult in some instances to compare exactly what researchers intended to do and achieve with what was actually carried out and achieved.

To what extent did funded projects fulfill the objectives in their applications?

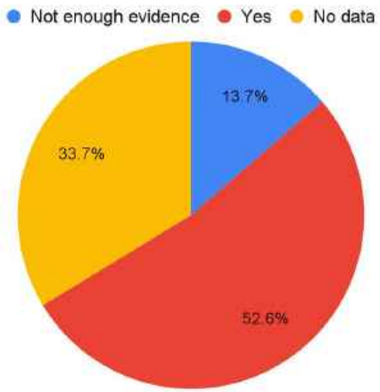
One method we tried was to use summary data for final reports between 2015/16 - 2020/21. We mapped applicants' objectives onto the six NCCPE purposes based on the information in the applications. This required a degree of inference. In some instances projects were ascribed more than one NCCPE category. We then compared the inferred objectives to the fulfilment of these inferred objectives according to the summary data for final reports between 2015/16 - 2020/21.

In 34% of the summaries, no/insufficient data was available for analysis. In 14% of the summaries, the reported evidence was insufficient for us to determine whether the objective had been fulfilled.

A comprehensive evaluation of each project, considering deeper levels of assessment, would be necessary to answer this question fully. Such an evaluation falls beyond the scope of this exercise.

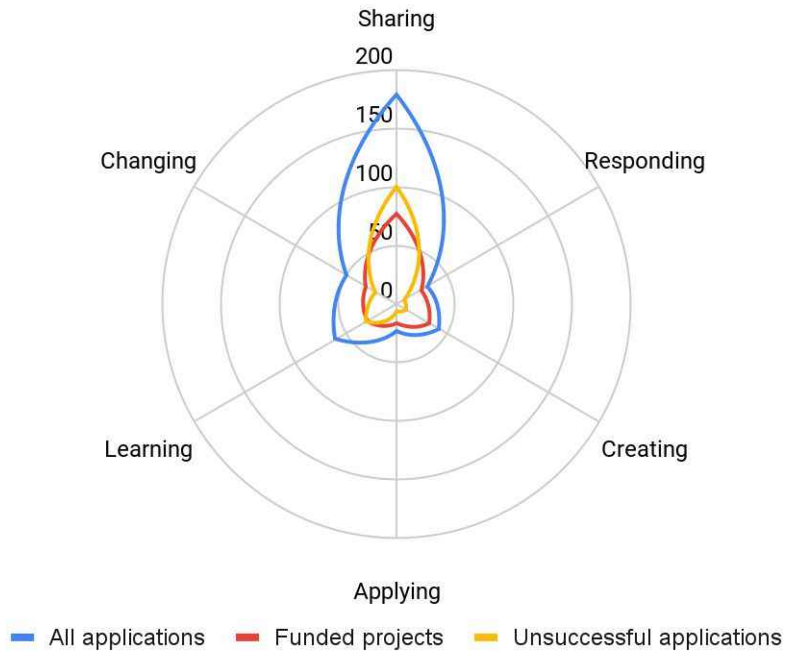
To enhance data collection for future evaluations, the evaluation form could prompt awardees to report on specific outcomes so that better data can be gathered, such as:

- Evaluating whether they executed the activities as stated in their application, with space for reflection for any changes in activities or lessons learnt.
- Using likert scales or multi-select options to indicate intended project outcomes compared with achieved project outcomes.



3b. Is there any consistency around what was funded/not successful?

Objectives of funded applications vs. unsuccessful applications vs. all applications



Note: One or more objective was ascribed to each project during this evaluation.

- ‘Sharing’ was the most commonly identified objective across all application groups. However, 41% of applications and 55% of funded projects with this objective had additional objectives.
- Distribution across the six objectives was relatively consistent across the groups.
- A possible explanation for the comparatively low numbers of projects in categories other than ‘Sharing’ is that applicants lack grounding in public engagement frameworks like this one, so they do not explain their projects in these terms.
- **In future, consider asking applicants to self-declare which objectives their application responds to. This could ease future data collection and also help applicants more accurately describe what is interesting about their projects from a public engagement perspective.**

Perceptions from interviews

Projects that tend to get funded

- Emphasise deeper, two-way engagements.
- Have targeted a specific community and challenge, tailoring their engagement efforts accordingly.
- Have had more interdisciplinary discussions between researchers and people with other skills.
- The applicant has already sought guidance and input from a public engagement professional, either in the central team or department.
- Go beyond dissemination of findings.
- Lead to tangible and measurable results.

Projects that don't tend to get funded

- Are aimed at getting the general public to love something without clear research objectives.
- Don't have a clear method or link to research.
- Treat the public as passive recipients or it's a one-way communication.
- Examples include attending a festival or creating a website without clear engagement strategies.

- **If this aligns with the types of projects you encourage, we recommend sharing this, or a similar example with potential applicants to guide their understanding of what reviewers are looking to see.**
- When comparing this to application data, we observed that applications that addressed 'sharing' as one of the NCCPE purposes, along with another purposes had a significantly higher success rate of 59%, whereas applications that solely focused on 'sharing' had a success rate of 33% which may represent those aimed at dissemination or one-way communication.

4. Was the decision-making a robust and fair process? Do we have the right skills and expertise to review and make funding decisions?

We found a range of opinions and perspectives about the decision making process and who needs to be involved. These are collated on the following two slides and further suggestions are made following.

Key learnings

- Divisional PER Leads benefitted and learnt from reviewing applications and discussing them in person, including applications from other divisions. It fostered cross-divisional learning and inspiration. While this opportunity doesn't currently exist elsewhere, it may not be the most ideal setting for such activities if it hinders the speed of decision-making.

- Diverse opinions when making decisions (whether internal or external to the University) is favoured to counter any bias that decision-makers may have.

- Upon reviewing the latest round of reviewers' comments, we didn't spot an any issues with the availability or summarisation of information provided for each application. **However, in cases where Divisional PER Leads are not actively involved in the decision-making process, we recommend providing an opportunity for them to seek clarifications and insights. This proactive approach can enhance their understanding of decision rationale, facilitate effective communication, and better equip them to support future applicants.** One suggested approach is to organise a 90-minute playback session, allowing Divisional PER Leads to review decisions in advance. During this session, decision-makers can provide explanations and address any questions raised by the Divisional PER Leads. To streamline the process and ensure efficiency, we propose quickly reviewing applicants who did not meet the criteria, and allowing more in-depth discussions for other cases.

Who is involved?

- In addition to the PCER Team, Divisional PER Leads, and academic representatives, two additional stakeholders were identified as worthy of considering for inclusion in the decision making process – external public engagement professionals and community representatives.
- Engaging an external public engagement professional could mitigate potential biases and ensure decision-makers are held accountable for their funding choices. This approach is believed to foster more thoughtful and conscientious decision-making. However, the benefit gained given the amount of money on offer may not be worth the cost.
- Involving community representatives, or those outside of academia, in the decision making process was seen to provide valuable insights into assessing whether research projects request an appropriate level of involvement from the community. However in order to do this, relationships would need to be built with a variety of community stakeholders, and it would be essential to establish measures to mitigate any potential biases that could arise within a community member's perspective.

The mechanics of the decision-making process

- To understand what levers could be adjusted to change how the decision-making process works, we explored what we called the 'mechanics' of the decision-making process.

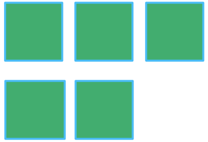
- These mechanics encompass key factors that govern how the funds are allocated such as how the funding allocation is structured, the order in which applications are reviewed, and the individuals responsible for making the funding decisions.

We recommend further examining combinations of these mechanics to explore possible decision-making processes for future funds.

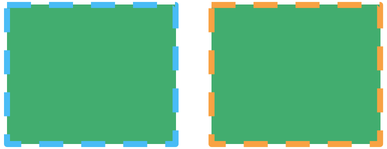
How the money could be allocated

- The allocation of funds available for each project shapes the scope and impact of engagements supported.
- Each method of allocating funds can prioritise different strategic aims for the Seed Fund.

Unified pot
The total amount of funding for the academic year is considered as a collective sum.



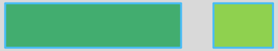
Segmented pots
The total amount of funding for the academic year is divided between divisions.



Portfolio building
Specify different funding priorities over the years to build up the portfolio where it’s lacking.

‘Soft’ ringfence
Reserve a proportion for projects with specific profiles, activities, or innovation.

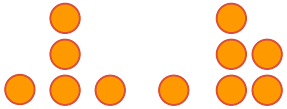
Extended budgets
Not strictly capping the budget per project and allowing applicants to apply for the £6k + additional funds.



Follow on budgets
Ask applicants or awardees what funds they need to continue their research past the current timelines.

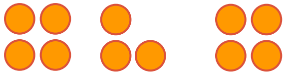
Order to review applications

- The sequence and timelines to review applications can influence the attention and resources given to each application.
- There is practical consideration to the method selected that is influenced by both capacity of reviewers and which method is selected for ‘Who decides, and how’.



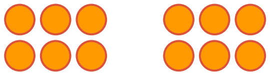
As received

Review each application as it’s received within an agreed timeframe.



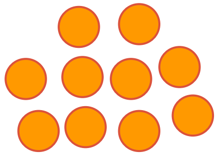
Rolling batches

Review applications that are received by predetermined dates or earlier if a specified threshold of applications apply.



Phased batches

Review applications in batches at predetermined dates.

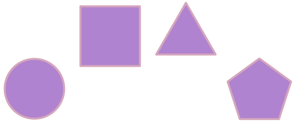


Wait for all

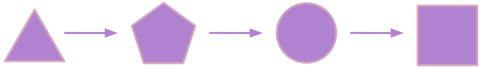
Wait until a predetermined date for all applications before reviewing.

Who decides and how

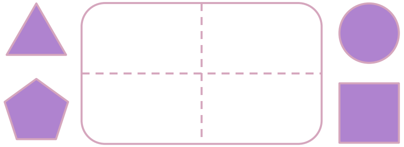
- Who decides and how considers who holds the responsibility for selecting successful applications and to what extent.



Representative panel
A committee representing each key perspective makes all assessment and selection decisions at all stages.

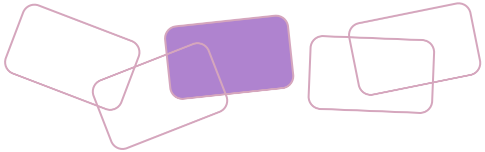


Phased input
Different perspectives contribute to assessment and selection at different times, e.g. EOI, review, score, rank, decide.



Divide responsibilities
Different perspectives are responsible for reviewing and scoring different sections of each proposal.

Pair scoring / double blind
Assessors from different perspectives, whether departments or professions (e.g. academic staff vs. public engagement professionals), assess the same applications as a pair or via double blind.



Constrained randomisation
Applications that are judged to meet pre-set criteria are entered into a candidate pool and winning grantees are randomly selected.

Mechanics: Suggestions from the workshop with Divisional PER Leads

- The current setup puts DPhils against experienced PIs. It was suggested to allocate smaller amounts for early-career researchers and smaller-scale projects, while reserving larger amounts for more extensive/ambitious projects led by experienced researchers, thus nurturing researchers at both stages. **If you do decide to offer larger budgets for different projects, we advise against varying the maximum budget based on career stage, as this could discourage early-career researcher from pursuing ambitious projects.**
- As we didn't have information on career stage, we were unable to determine the ratio of early-career researchers to experienced PIs among the awardees.
- There was interest in 'Constrained randomisation' and its potential impact on awardee selection. The main concern raised was how this is communicated to researchers as it may affect their motivation. However, it could work well for applications that are comparable and would benefit from a quick decision.
- There were mixed views on setting a strategic direction (even one that might change year on year). It's really valuable to have unrestricted funding that is more open as some researchers might be turned off by too strong of a strategic direction. However a focus on topic/method/audience might provide a focus that researchers can innovate around.

Vision of the fund

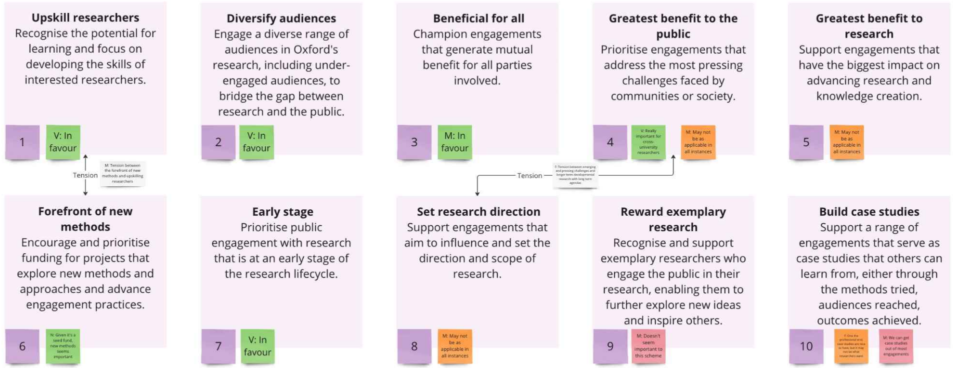
To inform the decision making process, we wanted to understand how Divisional PER Leads interpret the fund's purpose.

- Conversations highlighted the importance of smaller grants in facilitating engagement that might not occur otherwise.

- There was recognition of the 'seed' element in the fund's name, signifying its role in initiating projects, and supporting early-career researchers who may face limited opportunities.

- It was acknowledged that there is a tension between seeking out high-quality projects or those at the forefront of new methods and using the fund to provide learning opportunities for newcomers to this way of engaging.

- Among the proposed visions, Visions 1, 2, 3, 6, and 7 received the most support. Visions 4, 5, and 8 were considered not applicable in all instances and Visions 9 and 10 were viewed as less important for the Seed Fund.



"[Base line] quality but would like diversity over time."

4a. Are our definitions shifting, e.g. participatory research; what is considered as engagement?

- More generally, the nature of engaging the public in research has evolved over the past 5-10 years. Traditional methods of dissemination are being replaced by more collaborative, interactive and two-way engagements. The rise of digital platforms, social media and multimedia technologies has also provided means for broader and more immediate public participation, fostering dialogue and collaborations between researchers and the public.

- In the 2022/23 application cycle, 16 out of 25 applicants who selected the 'participatory research' option were deemed not to meet the criteria for participatory research by reviewers. This suggests a potential gap in the understanding of the definition. However, it could also be attributed to half of the funds being ring fenced for participatory research, potentially incentivising the selection of this option to enhance chances of funding.

- Two interviewees raised that participatory research means different things to different disciplines. Researchers, accustomed to the terminology of other funders, may face challenges when applying to funders with different definitions.

- Participatory research and PPI are similar concepts, however we heard that researchers and PPI Leads aren't always recognising that they could use this fund to support their research. It was suggested that the framing could include "if you're engaging anyone outside of academia, check our criteria".

Recommendations

5. What recommendations can be made for future iterations of the Seed Fund?

Based on a review of the current process, data analysis of applications and funded projects, and the pain points identified in the interviews and survey results we conducted, we can make 14 key recommendations for improving future iterations of the seed fund.

Current process

To determine the stage at which each recommendation applies, we mapped out the process based on the involved stakeholders. Each recommendation is categorised according to the specific key stages it would impact.

Key stages	Set up	Apply	Review	Award	Implement	Evaluate and reflect
	The next round of funding is confirmed. The PCER team prepare materials and work with the PER Divisional Leads to publicise the opportunity.	Applicants assess the opportunity and develop their project plan. The PCER team host drop-in sessions and field queries. Divisional PER Leads and departmental staff act as a 'critical friend' supporting with scoping, project planning and preparing the application.	A combination of the PCER Team, Divisional PER Leads, and in past years, academic reps, review and score the applications, and decide who to award. Applicants are notified, some are invited to reapply. Feedback sessions are available on request.	Each project that is awarded needs approval from their Departmental Project Officer. It is then sent to the Finance team to create a task code and award the funds.	Applicants prepare and run their engagement activities. The PCER Team host check-in sessions and are on-hand to support.	The PCER Team run evaluation workshops for awardees. Awardees complete pre and post project evaluation reports. On completion, projects are publicised.

Summary of pain points

We proceeded to outline the primary pain points within each of the key stages. Additionally, each recommendation is categorised according to the specific pain points it aims to resolve.

Key stages	Set up	Apply	Review	Implement	Evaluate and reflect
Summary of key pain points	**Expectation setting** There is ambiguity, mixed opinions, and implicit assumptions on the fund's purpose, what it prioritises, and how the money could be used.	**Partnership development** Developing relationships for this type of research takes time, affecting the preparation timeline for submissions. Those new to engagement may be unsure where to begin or what level of relationship maturity is ideal for maximising the fund's benefits.	**Diversity of decision-makers** The diversity of decision-makers has changed over the years. Last year it was reduced to mainly the PCER Team which raised concerns including that it might perpetuate what is seen to be 'good' by a small subset of people.	**Tight timescales** The time that researchers have to use the funds and complete their activities is very tight and impacts the quantity and ambition of projects.	**Congratulate** There are no moments or opportunities to celebrate the achievements of the researchers (both funded and unfunded).
	Promotion It takes time for information to percolate through divisions and the fund's announcement isn't coordinated with other comms' timelines or events.	**Support** There are no readily accessible materials to support scoping and structuring a project. Researchers have to actively seek support. Best practice and learnings over the years aren't available for others to benefit from.	**Additional learning value** As well as a means to select awardees, Divisional PER Leads and academic reps across divisions benefit from the opportunity to discuss, learn from, and build upon each others' expertise. This takes time and can be seen as a trade-off with the speed of making decisions so that researchers can get started.	**Treated as an 'add-on'** Researchers (and often collaborators) aren't compensated or rewarded for their work. They have to be personally interested. It's not seen to be something that will help them get a job and isn't reflected in hiring decisions.	**Post-award transition** Once the money runs out the engagement typically ends. It's not clear how to continue, handover, or wind down relationships.
	Seeing yourself in the opportunity There is confusion on the distinctions between participatory research and PPI, public engagement and outreach, and participatory research and research that is 'very engaged'. Those in quantitative or abstract subjects struggle to see the relevance to their work.	**Application form** There are mixed views on whether the ask is commensurate with the amount on offer, the length of the form is comparable to internal funds offering up to £20k. The combined form with the Culture Change Fund confused some researchers.	**Scoring criteria** There are mixed views on whether it's easy to spot good practice or if the learning potential should be sought out instead *(relates to expectation setting)*. Comparing an application that could save a life with one that's more immeasurable is difficult.	**Supplement from other sources** Due to the limited funding and tight timeline, researchers sometimes depend on their personal connections or additional sources of funding to ensure the success of the project.	**Follow-up** There are no efforts to follow up with applicants who weren't awarded to understand if they were able to proceed with their project. Similarly there's no follow ups with previous awardees to understand the longer term impacts of their project and what they did next.

* No specific pain points were raised for Award, aside from time taken.

Overview of recommendations

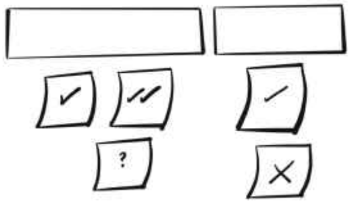
Recommendations	Key stages | *Pain points*
1. Clarify the fund's purpose and priorities	Set up | *Expectation setting*
2. Strategise with existing funds	Set up & Evaluate and reflect | *Post-award transition*
3. Examine combinations of the mechanics of the fund	Set up & Review
4. Adjust the timeframes	Set up
5. Build the support network	Across all
6. Provide oversight of applications	Apply & Award
7. Tailor guidance to different disciplines	Apply | *See yourself in the opportunity*
8. Provide preparation support	Apply | *Support*
9. Share templates & guides	Apply | *Support* & Implement
10. Change the application form	Apply | *Application form*
11. Mirror the scoring rubric & application form	Award | *Scoring criteria*
12. Playback decisions made	Review
13. Introduce moments for recognition & reward	Evaluate and reflect | *Congratulate*
14. Improve data collection for future evaluations	Evaluate and reflect

More details follow for each recommendation.

1. Clarify the fund’s purpose and priorities

Ways to achieve this

1.1 Be transparent about the implicit and unstated preferences for projects of a certain nature.



1.2 Explain in a more nuanced way, why the fund exists, what it funds, and why researchers should be working in this way.

1.3 Indicate the types of projects or researchers that tend to benefit the most from this seed fund, e.g. maturity of engagement, potential for learning, or types of activities.

1.4 Condense the amount of information shared on the webpage and reconsider the headings under which they are contained. (Example: UKRI, UoE). E.g., it may not be immediately apparent that ‘What we won’t fund’ sits under ‘Your proposal’

Problem it addresses: **Set up** | ***Expectation setting***

Why it’s important

- There are mixed opinions, ambiguity and implicit assumptions on what the fund prioritises and who should apply.
- Researchers are time-limited and should be able to swiftly determine suitability and eligibility, and find key information.
- Key information about the fund is spread over multiple pages on the fund webpage and can be lost.

Potential impact

- Clearly defining the purpose of the fund helps stakeholders stay aligned and allows you to focus on what creates the intended impact.

1. Clarify the fund's purpose and priorities (continued)

1.5 If the points listed below align with the types of projects you encourage, we recommend sharing a similar example with potential applicants to guide their understanding of what reviewers are looking to see.

Projects that tend to get funded

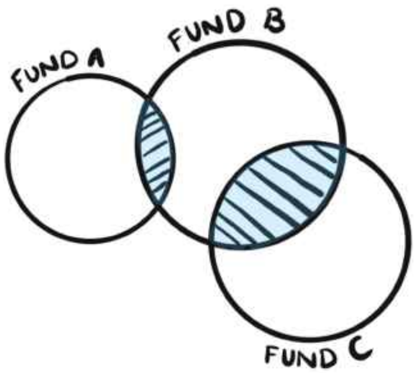
- Emphasise deeper, two-way engagements.
- Have targeted a specific community and challenge, tailoring their engagement efforts accordingly.
- Have had more interdisciplinary discussions between researchers and people with other skills.
- The applicant has already sought guidance and input from a public engagement professional, either in the central team or department.
- Go beyond dissemination of findings.
- Lead to tangible and measurable results.

Projects that don't tend to get funded

- Are aimed at getting the general public to love something without clear research objectives.
- Don't have a clear method or link to research.
- Treat the public as passive recipients or it's a one-way communication.
- Examples include attending a festival or creating a website without clear engagement strategies.

2. Strategise with existing funds

Ways to achieve this



2.1 Collaborate with other internal funds to understand overlaps and limitations of the funds and identify opportunities close the gaps e.g. redirecting researchers to the Research England participatory fund for longer-term funding or follow-on funding.

Problem it addresses: **Set up** & **Evaluate and reflect** | ***Post-award transition***

Why it's important

- The time limitations on the seed fund can limit the scope of work and what is achieved. Indicating other resources could enable them to extend their work.
- Funding opportunities may have similarities, researchers should be able to quickly discern how opportunities differ and what is right for their research.

Potential impact

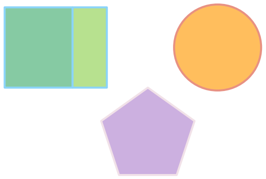
- Leading to better sustained and funded relationships with public and community partners.

3. Examine combinations of the mechanics of the fund

Ways to achieve this

3.1 Off the back of the strategy redesign, articulate the vision and purpose for the fund, and explore which mechanics of the decision-making process (pages 44–46) best support you in achieving this. It may be preferable to experiment with different options and measure the impact had on applications.

If you do decide to offer larger budgets for different projects, we advise against varying the maximum budget based on career stage, as this could discourage early-career researcher from pursuing ambitious projects.



Problem it addresses: **Set up** & **Review**

Why it's important

- Flexibility in the mechanics of the Seed Fund can allow for experimentation and continuous learning.

Potential impact

- Certain changes could impact who applies, the types of projects researchers apply with and who is successful.

4. Adjust the timeframes

Ways to achieve this

4.1 Extend the beginning and end of the current time scale to make the most of the time to use the funds. As an example:

May: Advertise and open up the expression of interest.

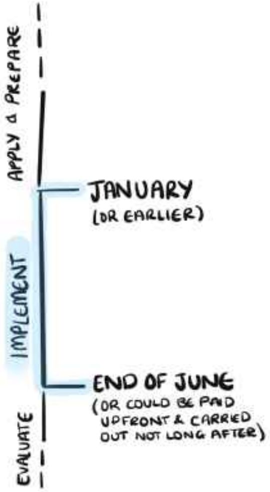
July: Open the applications and confirm total amount on offer.

September/October: Notify applicants in the first round.

November/December: Notify applicants in the second round.

End of June: Deadline to use funds.

Offer flexibility, e.g. end of September: Final report due.



Problem it addresses: **Set up** & **Implement**

Why it's important

- Short timeframes limit what can be achieved and the types of projects that people apply with.

Potential impact

- More applicants may be able to apply, especially those who want to carry out engagements in summer months.
- Extending the deadline for the evaluation report allows researchers to pay upfront and carry out activities at a later date.
- Having longer to prepare and organise activities improve time management and how resources are allocated.
- Awardees have longer to focus on the engagement and research.

5. Build the support network

Ways to achieve this

5.1 Create opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and collaboration between researchers (especially previous awardees), through documented learnings, in-person events, or new roles such as buddies, mentors, and advocates.

5.2 Explore how to leverage the facilitators' network to support a high quality and high quantity projects, especially in divisions with fewer dedicated staff.

5.3 Continue working closely with the Divisional PER Leads, as well as Science Together and TORCH, to understand where efforts might be duplicative, and how best to share learnings, opportunities, and resources.

5.4 Work with influential researchers in the university to actively promote the seed fund among colleagues to generate greater awareness and engagement.

Problem it addresses: **Across all**

Why it's important

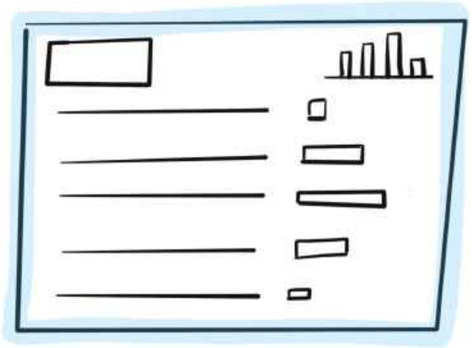
- Some researchers might be out of their comfort zone. Additional points of contact allows them to seek support where they feel most comfortable.
- Finance is only one type of support that researchers need. Building up the network allows for other forms of support to reach them.
- The devolved nature of the university means that some departments are further along in their PCER journey than others.

Potential impact

- Cross-pollination of ideas and exposure to different methodologies and approaches.
- Broadening the knowledge base and expands skill-sets of researchers.

6. Provide oversight of applications

Ways to achieve this



6.1 A live dashboard can provide Divisional PER Leads with oversight to the researchers in their division that are in or interested in the process e.g. those who submit an Expression of Interest. This could be viewed at any time alongside an email summarising at an agreed frequency might be well suited.

Problem it addresses: **Apply** & **Award**

Why it's important

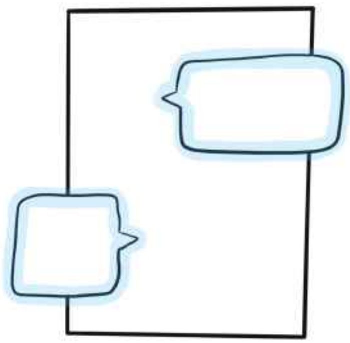
- Divisional PER Leads can only help those they know about.
- Having a heads up on the number of applications that will need to be reviewed can help with planning and time management.

Potential impact

- Promotes better coordination and reduces communication gaps.
- Monitor the progress of applications and redirect researchers to available support.

7. Tailor guidance to different disciplines

Ways to achieve this



7.1 Provide additional context on what successful engagements might encompass for different disciplines, especially those in quantitative or more abstract subjects.

7.2 Expand the information for previously funded projects to include methods used and recommendations for projects of a similar nature. The use of tags for activities, subjects and target audience could also support navigation.

7.3 Explain the similarities and differences between: PPI and participatory research, outreach and public engagement, participatory research and engagement.

7.4 Introduce an eligibility checker or 'find the right fund for you' for researchers to identify the most suitable opportunities.

Problem it addresses: **Apply** | ***See yourself in the opportunity***

Why it's important

- The approaches and terminology used by different departments can differ depending on the nature of the subject. Some researchers still remain confused about the differences.
- Tailoring guidance helps researchers to 'see themselves' in the opportunity.
- Researchers looked to past projects to see if their work might be in scope for this fund.

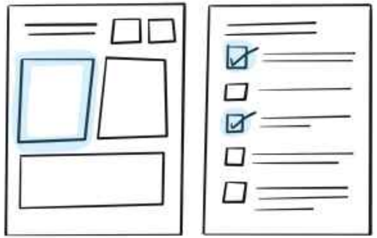
Potential impact

- Encouraging researchers to apply by emphasizing the relevance of the opportunity to their work.

8. Provide preparation support

Ways to achieve this

8.1 Provide the following to support researchers in their preparations: crib sheets, checklists, drop-in sessions, webinars, workshops. This should include 1-to-1 opportunities as well as group sessions.
Example: University of Leeds



8.2 To compliment the support provided in-person by staff, provide a readily-available comprehensive set of resources to assist applications. Materials requested on the following topics:

- Evaluation planning (prior to application)
- Budgeting
- Lessons learnt and resources that worked well on past projects
- Implementation advice
- How to source and book venues for events
- What the priorities of the fund are
- How to design 'less-structured' projects
- If you're not awarded
  - How to improve your application
  - Similar projects that were more competitive
  - Signalling other available opportunities

Problem it addresses: **Apply** | ***Support***

Why it's important

- The availability of preparation materials empowers applicants to understand what they can and should do upfront to be well-prepared.
- It can help researchers to keep the whole picture in mind while fine-tuning the specifics of their project.

Potential impact

- Streamlining the preparation process and teaching early-career researchers how to approach project planning.
- Demystifying the process for those who are less experienced or unfamiliar with the application process or PCER.

8. Provide preparation support (continued)

Ways to achieve this

8.3 Frameworks, such as theory of change, could be provided to support researchers in thinking about how to start with the outcome they wish to achieve and working backwards to plan their activities.

8.4 Provide guidance on the permissible uses and restrictions of funds e.g., whether funds can be used to buy out internal researchers' time. This should include encouragement for best practices such as compensating participants for their involvement.

Problem it addresses: **Apply** | ***Support***

Why it's important

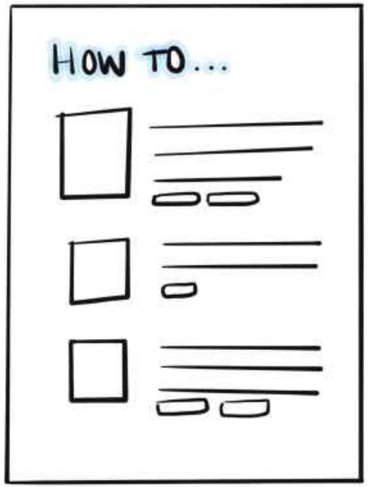
- Researchers may be less familiar with how to plan a project with a desired outcome or state in mind.
- It's not clear which types of costs the Seed Fund covers.

Potential impact

- Starting with a desired outcome and working backwards can aid researchers in understanding the necessary goals that they need to achieve, and from that, any actions required. It can draw out any assumptions early. It is also best done with the target audience and can be a means to receiving early input and feedback.
- There may be a difference in the way that researchers allocate funds.

9. Share templates & guides

Ways to achieve this



9.1 Provide materials to support research including: how-to guides, best practices, outreach and recruitment resources, descriptions of methodologies, reflections from previous awardees.

Topics that were raised included: payments, holding meetings, facilitate conversations and listening skills, building relationships, budgeting and project management, what worked well and lessons learnt, list of venues to host events.

Problem it addresses: **Apply** | ***Support*** & **Implement**

Why it's important

- Equal access levels the playing-field as some researchers benefit from and rely on the expertise of others to successfully apply or conduct their research.
- The templates can be used a foundation so that efforts can be focussed on specific and essential details.

Potential impact

- Lowering the barrier to entry.
- Saving time reinventing the wheel and providing more time and space to be ambitious.
- Making best practices the norm and improving the likelihood of a consistent quality of projects.

10. Change the application form

Ways to achieve this

10.1 Keep the PCER Seed Fund and Culture Change Fund application forms separate, and keep the format consistent with other internal funds, where possible.

10.2 Remove additional formatting where possible including text boxes and tick boxes to keep the form user-friendly and accessible.

10.3 Explain why you ask whether researchers have received funding from other sources. This put off some researchers.

10.4 Use the application form as another touchpoint to recommend applicants engage with their departmental or divisional reps.

10.5 Indicate where applicants can showcase their professional experience.

10.6 Where possible, provide guidance and examples of what a good response speaks to and what they should include at a minimum.

Problem it addresses: **Apply** | ***Application form***

Why it's important

- The application form was seen to be of comparable length to funds that offer up to £20k.
- The effort required by researchers to understand what they need to do can be minimised if kept generally consistent.

Potential impact

- Make it easier for applicants to understand the requirements and provide the necessary information.
- Improve the readability and accessibility of the form.

10. Change the application form (continued)

Ways to achieve this

10.7 Test the application form once changed to understand how useful and valuable it is to applicants – i.e. will they be able to read and use it given their practical constraints, and will the guidance provide value if they do read it. This can be approached in the following ways:

- Test driving forms and guidance before they launch with prospective applicants, and getting them to provide voiceover of the information they'd anticipate providing based on guidance.
- Checking in with Divisional/Departmental staff in the know re: what questions they are getting requests for help about.
- Tracking which application form sections receive questions during webinars or via email.

Problem it addresses: **Apply** | ***Application form***

Why it's important

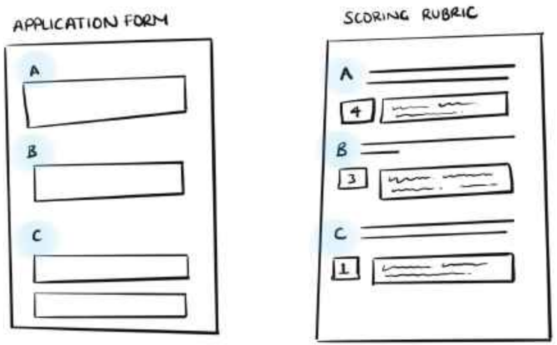
- The application form was seen to be of comparable length to funds that offer up to £20k.
- The effort required by researchers to understand what they need to do can be minimised if kept generally consistent.

Potential impact

- Make it easier for applicants to understand the requirements and provide the necessary information.
- Improve the readability and accessibility of the form.

11. Mirror the scoring rubric & application form

Ways to achieve this



11.1 Structuring or grouping the applications questions, where possible, to contain the information needed for each scoring criteria. This should only be done if the order of questions are still logical on the application form.

Problem it addresses: **Review** | ***Scoring criteria***

Why it's important

- The format of the scoring rubric and application not matching can increase the time taken by reviewers to locate and access relevant information for each criteria as answers might lie across several questions.

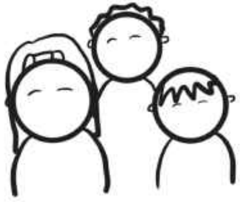
Potential impact

- It supports a more objective assessment of applications and helps prevent relevant points not being spotted by a reviewer.

12. Playback decisions made

Ways to achieve this

12.1 In cases where Divisional PER Leads are not actively involved in the decision-making process, we recommend providing an opportunity for them to seek clarifications and insights.
One suggested approach is to organise a 90-minute playback session, allowing Divisional PER Leads to review decisions in advance. During this session, decision-makers can provide explanations and address any questions raised by the Divisional PER Leads. To streamline the process and ensure efficiency, we propose quickly reviewing applicants who did not meet the criteria, and allowing more in-depth discussions for other cases.



Problem it addresses: **Review**

Why it's important

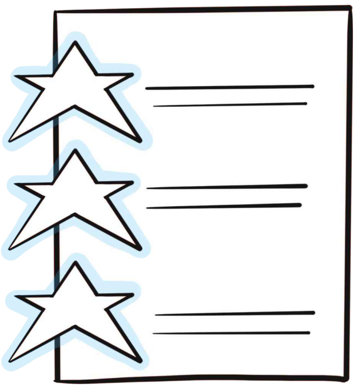
- Relying on interpreting reviewers' comments in a word document to discern why projects weren't awarded didn't always provide the depth of feedback and rationale required.

Potential impact

- This proactive approach can enhance Divisional PER Lead's understanding of decision rationale, facilitate effective communication, and better equip them to support future applicants.

13. Introduce moments for recognition & reward

Ways to achieve this



13.1 Publish the list of applicants (if consenting) to recognise efforts and help identify funding or collaboration opportunities. Where possible refer researchers to other sources of funding.

13.2 Host a mixer to congratulate efforts for those who applied and encourage idea sharing.

13.3 Host a celebration event after each round for awardees, their Divisional PER Leads, project and community partners, and others who may be relevant, to share back what they achieved and how they achieved it.

13.4 Build in feedback loops. After a certain period of time, follow up with researchers who applied (both awardees and otherwise) and see how they got on.

Problem it addresses: **Evaluate and reflect** | ***Congratulate***

Why it's important

- Recognising both those who were awarded and those who applied demonstrates a respect for researchers contributions, efforts and motivations.

Potential impact

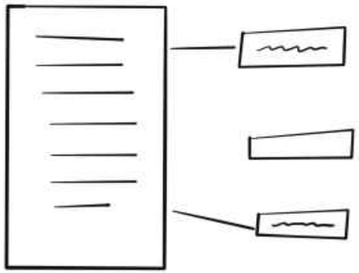
- Fostering a sense of value and appreciation for those interested in participatory methods.
- Encouraging and motivating continued development and improvement.

14. Improve data collection for future evaluations

Ways to achieve this

14.1 The evaluation form could prompt awardees to report on specific outcomes so that better data can be gathered, such as:

- Evaluating whether they executed the activities as stated in their application, with space for reflection for any changes in activities or lessons learnt.
- Using likert scales or multi-select options to indicate intended project outcomes compared with achieved project outcomes.



14.2 Ask applicants to self-declare which of the NCCPE objectives their application responds to. This could ease future data collection and also help applicants more accurately describe what is interesting about their projects from a public engagement perspective.

Problem it addresses: **Evaluate and reflect**

Why it's important

- Adding in additional points for data collection and asking more specific questions to facilitate the use of that data at a later stage can help to ensure accurate assessments of the Seed Fund.

Potential impact

- Support with future evaluations, identifying trends and ensuring continued relevance and effectiveness.

What advice would we give to applicants?

- Clearly define your target audience and initiate engagement during the preparation of your application or ideally before.
- To make an application that stands out, beyond dissemination with two-way engagement opportunities.
- Begin with your desired outcome and use frameworks such as the theory of change to tailor activities to your target audience and objectives.
- Use available resources including online guidance and staff support to get feedback early and refine your plans.

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