

WUN Research Development Fund 2025

Introduction

The WUN Research Development Fund (RDF) provides grants of up to £10,000¹, for one year to foster research collaborations among academic staff (faculty) at WUN member universities. Grants from the RDF are intended to help stimulate larger collaborative projects that will strengthen WUN and have impact, for example through giving rise to influential publications or making the collaborating partners competitive for major grants.

The RDF supports research projects directed at problems that lie within the network's principal research theme of *sustainable development*, and on which a diverse team of collaborating partners confers distinct advantage. These will often be problems where comparative analysis is important.

WUN RDF 2025 focus

In line with the WUN Strategic Plan 2023-2026, we encourage proposals that address problems in one or more of the following areas within the context of *sustainable development*:

1. Social justice and human rights; inequality
2. Sustainable world: cities and urbanization; energy transitions; water, and food security
3. Mental health; child and maternal health; ageing
4. Responsible and ethical applications of Artificial Intelligence

Eligibility

The RDF is open to academic staff (faculty members) at [WUN member universities](#).

Project teams. A project must engage at least three WUN member universities across at least two regions². Projects may include non-WUN universities and external partners but must have an active core of WUN member universities. Projects led by early career researchers are especially encouraged.³

Matching funds: In the past, awards made from the RDF required matching support from the applicants' home universities. Matching cash contributions are encouraged but not required and will not factor in the review.

How applications are assessed

Applications are reviewed and ranked by a committee of at least six members of the WUN Academic Advisory Group (AAG).

Applications will be assessed against the following criteria:

- **ACADEMIC QUALITY**
Is the project academically rigorous, and does it address a new research problem or take an existing WUN research program in a *significantly* new direction?
- **RELEVANCE TO CALL**
Within the context of sustainable development, does the project address a problem of consequence in one or more of the focus areas?

¹ Currency converter (set on 9 April, 2025): GBP£1 = AUD2.13; BRL7.48; CAD1.86; CHF1.14; CNY9.61; EUR1.16; GHS19.59; HKD10.01; JPY188.32; MXN26.35; NZD 2.26; THB44.17; TWD42.95; UGX4742; USD1.27; ZAR23.78

² WUN regions are defined as North America, Latin America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and Oceania.

³ The WUN Research Development Fund definition of Early Career Researcher is as follows: A researcher who is in the final year of their terminal degree program (e.g., PhD) or has completed fewer than seven years* of their first appointment as a member of faculty/academic staff.

* The age of the researcher has no bearing on this timeframe, and career breaks within this period do not count against the total.

- **WUN ADVANTAGE**

Is the project one that WUN can pursue with advantage?

WUN is likely to have special advantage when the research problem:

- Requires distinctive constellations of talent that are best assembled (or can only be assembled) by drawing on multiple partners.
- Presents opportunities for comparative analysis, stemming from member universities' locations in different geographical and cultural contexts.
- Requires access to unique environments/resources possessed by one or more partners.

- **RESEARCH TEAM**

Does the project involve a well-qualified team of researchers drawn from relevant disciplines and regions?

- **OUTCOME AND IMPACT**

Does the application clearly specify what will have been achieved by the end of the funding period of one year, and is there a realistic plan to secure impact? Impact might be achieved through one or more of the following: authoritative research publication(s) or policy paper(s); the project having laid the groundwork for major research funding.

Reminder: Matching cash contributions are encouraged but not required and will not factor in the review.

Eligible expenditures

Eligible expenditures are detailed in the Permitted Uses of WUN Funds annex.

How to apply

Applications must be approved for submission to WUN through an internal review at the principal investigator's university. **Your local WUN Coordinator** will provide guidance on securing this approval. Each member university may submit up to two applications on which its academic staff (faculty) are principal investigators. There is no limit on the number of applications on which a member university or individual can be a co-investigator.

Applications, submitted online through the WUN online application portal, are due by Friday, 17 October 2025 at 21.00 UK time. Internal deadlines at many member universities will be earlier. Access to the online [application portal](#) will open on 13 June 2025.

Prospective applicants considering a submission should contact their local WUN Coordinator well before the application deadline. The WUN Coordinator will be able to provide advice about eligibility, preparing the application, internal deadlines, and the university's internal review.

Applications must be accompanied by:

- Program budget outlining key areas of expenditure (a common template will be provided).
- CV of the principal investigator (1 page maximum) with URL links to partner investigator CVs.

Applications that are incomplete or received after the closing time will not be considered.

The outcome of the review will be announced on 15 December 2025. For successful applicants, award funds in GBP will be deposited in February 2026 via bank transfer to the principal investigator's nominated university account after receipt of an invoice from the university, and the establishment of the project page on the WUN website.

Financial, Reporting and Acknowledgement Obligations

Award funds should be expended within 12 months. Funds unspent at the conclusion of the 12-month award period may be recalled by WUN.

Principal investigators are required to:

- Establish, with the help of your local WUN Coordinator, a simple project page on the WUN website.
- Acknowledge support from WUN on any publications and presentations that result from the RDF-funded project.
- Submit a brief report after the initial year of the project and annually for the life of the project.⁴

Annex: Permitted Uses of RDF Funds

Please note that, should you identify categories of expenditure that would benefit the success of your project and are not listed here, the WUN Secretariat would be happy to respond to your queries.

- A maximum of one in-person event that requires air travel (for example planning workshops, international project team meetings or conferences). Costs associated with virtual meetings are not subject to this restriction.
- Exploratory research initiatives
- Formation of collaborative networks
- Engagement of students through remote guest lectures and master classes
- Assistance from individuals where critical to the project (see "what expenditures are not funded by the RDF for further detail)
- Access to necessary software
- External project website or other multimedia production and development
- Data collection
- Development and implementation of survey instruments
- Access to online databases
- Access to general samples from panel survey companies
- Contribution to open access fees of up to £1500
- Primary data collection costs
- Activities related to other data collection (Costs of /acquiring/copying policy documents and literature where these are not available via institutional libraries/databases)
- Transcription costs
- Consumable equipment costs for the sole use of the project such as primers, probes, reagents, pipettes etc.
- Prototype production
- The development and production of dissemination reports

⁴ Annual reporting, mandated by the WUN Partnership Board (member university Vice-Chancellors/Presidents/Rectors), is essential to tracking outcomes and the return on investment for WUN. WUN will send a reminder to the online survey annually via your local Coordinator. Investigators who fail to submit satisfactory reports will be ineligible for future WUN funding.

What expenditures are not funded by the RDF?

RDF funds may not be used to support an applicant's salary, or to supplant the salary or scholarship of any assistant or student who is already funded from another source. Funds may be used only to pay for assistance from other individuals when essential to the project. The RDF may not be used to cover the costs of equipment depreciation.

Where funds are to be used for air travel, only economy class fares are permissible. In the interest of the environment, while also recognising the value of face-to-face interaction, RDF funds may support no more than one in-person event that requires air travel (for example an international project team meeting or conference). WUN encourages the use of deploying virtual alternatives to assemble the project team whenever possible.

Funds may not be used to cover general management/overhead fees.