

Funding opportunity

Pre-announcement: Design Generators

Opportunity status:	Upcoming
Funders:	Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)
Funding type:	Grant
Total fund:	£1,000,000
Award range:	£150,000 - £200,000
Publication date:	17 October 2025
Opening date:	3 November 2025 9:00am UK time
Closing date:	29 January 2026 4:00pm UK time

Apply for funding to combine design-led interventions with arts and humanities methodologies to make positive contributions to the green transition.

You must be based at a UK research organisation eligible for Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funding.

Design Generators connect directly with the wider Future Observatory: Design the Green Transition Programme.

The full economic cost (FEC) of your project can be up to £200,000. AHRC will fund 80% of the FEC.

These awards can be between 9 to 12 months in duration.

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- This is a pre-announcement and the information may change.
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- The funding opportunity will open on 3 November 2025. More information will be available on this page then.

Who can apply

This opportunity is open to organisations with standard eligibility. [Check if your organisation is eligible](#).

Who is eligible to apply

Applications are welcomed from researchers across all career stages, from early career to established researchers.

Project leads must be actively engaged in postdoctoral research and be of postdoctoral standing. This means you must have a doctorate or can demonstrate in your application that you have equivalent research experience or training. You must have a level of skills, knowledge and experience that is appropriate to your proposed project.

You must either be:

- employed by the research organisation submitting the application
- have an existing written formal arrangement with the research organisation confirming that you will be able to carry out the research as if you were an employee
- scheduled to move to the research organisation before the proposed start date of the application

Project co-leads are supported by this funding opportunity, see [AHRC research funding guide](#) for further information.

We expect the project lead and any project co-leads time commitment to be proportionate and relative to the project that they are proposing. There is no minimum or maximum requirement.

Every project must have a non-academic partner. These partners can include, but are not limited to, businesses, public sector organisations, third sector, civil society or community organisations. The non-academic partner should be a relevant stakeholder that is equipped to support the proposed activities and has the capacity to commit to delivering impact. Non-academic partners must be listed as co-investigators provided that they meet the criteria set out in our guidance, which can be found in the Supporting Documents section.

There are no restrictions on the types of organisations, and any non-academic partner may be involved in more than one application as capacity and strategic alignment allow. However, non-academic partners must declare if they are involved in another UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) grant so that AHRC can determine whether it would be appropriate to also apply for this opportunity.

The lead research organisation may make a total of two applications for this programme, but each application must be substantively different in both partnership team and project objectives. The project team may participate in only one application for this programme.

The overall portfolio of proposed activities must be at least 50% within [AHRC disciplinary remit](#).

Who is not eligible to apply

We cannot support job shares within this funding opportunity.

We do not support project studentships (funding PhD study) within this funding opportunity. Subcontractors and research and innovation associates are also not eligible within this funding opportunity.

Individuals who are based at a non-UK based organisation or do not have an organisational affiliation (freelancers and independent consultants) are not eligible within this funding opportunity.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

[We are committed to achieving equality of opportunity](#) for all funding applicants. We encourage applications from a diverse range of researchers.

We support people to work in a way that suits their personal circumstances. This includes:

- career breaks
- support for people with caring responsibilities
- flexible working
- alternative working patterns

[UKRI can offer disability and accessibility support](#) for UKRI applicants and grant holders during the application and assessment process.

What we're looking for

Aim

Design is a discipline that applies user, customer, citizen or community-centred approaches to creativity and invention to ensure more successful outcomes. These may include the built environment, physical products, digital, or other services and systems that underpin how we live. Success in this context may mean economic, social, environmental, or a combination of all three.

The Design Generators aim to fund innovative, design-led research projects that contribute to the green transition. They seek to generate new arts and humanities-based approaches and methodologies that harness design to address environmental sustainability, decarbonisation, circular economies, policy design and regenerative practices. Funding will be provided to:

- co-develop interventions with a non-academic partner to assist sustained impact beyond the life of the grant
- engage collaboratively with communities or stakeholders, ensuring relevance and responsiveness to lived experience
- promote green transition-supportive behaviour change, either through deliberative policymaking and (de)regulation or through ‘nudging’
- highlight the value of academic design research in addressing real-world, locally relevant challenges arising along the journey to net zero and a green economy

This round will focus on creating interventions within existing systems. These systems may include, but are not limited to, healthcare, food networks, governance structures, financial infrastructures, and other societal frameworks. We are particularly interested in projects that approach these systems from a community perspective and use design thinking and creative methodologies to identify leverage points for positive change.

Applicants should propose research that is collaborative, community-engaged, and scalable. Projects must be grounded in arts and humanities disciplines, drawing on methodologies including, but not limited to, design research, ethnography, and visual arts. We encourage researchers to work closely with communities, stakeholders and system actors to co-develop interventions that are contextually sensitive and have the potential to be scaled up. These interventions could be scaled up to benefit larger populations, influence policy, or be applied to parallel systems. The aim is to generate new knowledge and prototypes that not only respond to systemic challenges but also reimagine how systems could function more equitably, sustainably, and creatively.

Scope

Projects can be single discipline, interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary. The majority of the disciplinary focus of the project must fall within AHRC’s subject remit, see section 7 of the [AHRC research funding guide](#) for our remit coverage. Practice-based and practice-led research is supported by this scheme.

Partnerships and collaboration are supported. Applications should articulate how collaborative activity will be conducted, considering good practice in equitable partnerships. Further guidance is available in the [UK Research and Innovation \(UKRI\) good research resource hub](#).

For more information on the background of this funding opportunity, go to the Additional information section.

Duration

The duration of these awards can be between nine to twelve months.

Projects must start by 1 June 2026.

Funding available

The FEC of your project can be between £150,000 and £200,000.

AHRC will fund 80% of the FEC.

What we will fund

Design Generators may support activities that include but are not limited to:

- design research and innovation that prototypes and explores products, services, and systems with users
- creation of multidisciplinary design research capabilities that respond to net zero challenges
- exploration of circular, cyclical, or regenerative business models
- strengthening resilience in third sector and community organisations
- supporting skills transition across sectors and disciplines
- developing policymaking strategies for a green and regenerative economy
- providing training and development opportunities
- facilitating public participation in the research process
- conducting outreach to involve individuals or organisations outside academia in shaping ideas and research

Please note that applications should be specific about the details of the proposed activities, be these coordinated programme activities or a standalone activity.

Projects should demonstrate clear pathways to measurable outcomes of benefit to stakeholders both within the project lifetime and beyond.

An eligible cost would be paying participants for their time to help remove barriers to engagement. Any related costs will be subject to assessment on value for money and appropriateness by assessors. These costs should be listed under Other – Directly Incurred.

Please note that each research organisation, either standard academic research organisations or independent ones, can only submit two applications to this round of funding. AHRC will not enter discussions with any research organisations regarding demand management and how to prioritise their submissions to this round of funding.

What we will not fund

Applications that are not primarily rooted within the design discipline. Applications must comprise, and evidence at least 50% design discipline coverage.

Projects that do not engage directly with the theme or seek to develop a generic approach to a wider green transition challenge will be considered outside the scope of this funding opportunity.

Any costs that do not have a clear rationale or link to the proposed activities, such as vague consultancy fees and unrelated overheads.

Trusted Research and Innovation (TR&I)

UKRI is committed in ensuring that effective international collaboration in research and innovation takes place with integrity and within strong ethical frameworks. Trusted Research and Innovation (TR&I) is a UKRI work programme designed to help protect all those working in our thriving and collaborative international sector by enabling partnerships to be as open as possible, and as secure as necessary. Our [TR&I Principles](#) set out UKRI's expectations of organisations funded by UKRI in relation to due diligence for international collaboration.

As such, applicants for UKRI funding may be asked to demonstrate how their proposed projects will comply with our approach and expectation towards TR&I, identifying potential risks and the relevant controls you will put in place to help proportionately reduce these risks.

[See further guidance and information about TR&I](#), including where applicants can find additional support.

How to apply

We are running this funding opportunity on the new UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Funding Service so please ensure that your organisation is registered. You cannot apply on the Joint Electronic Submissions (Je-S) system. We will publish full details on how to apply when the funding opportunity opens.

How we will assess your application

Assessment process

This funding opportunity will have an assessment process consisting of a full proposal stage.

Further details of the assessment process and assessment criteria will be published when the funding opportunity opens.

Contact details

Get help with your application

If you have a question and the answers aren't provided on this page.

The helpdesk is committed to helping users of the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Funding Service as effectively and as quickly as possible. In order to manage cases at peak volume times, the helpdesk will triage and prioritise those queries with an imminent opportunity deadline or a technical issue. Enquiries raised where information is available on the Funding finder opportunity page and should be understood early in the application process (for example, regarding eligibility, content or remit of a funding opportunity) will not constitute a priority case and will be addressed as soon as possible

Contact details

For help and advice on costings and writing your application please contact your research office in the first instance, allowing sufficient time for your organisation's submission process.

For questions related to this specific funding opportunity please contact ahrcdesignandinnovation@ahrc.ukri.org

Any queries regarding the system or the submission of applications through the Funding Service should be directed to the helpdesk.

Email: support@funding-service.ukri.org

Phone: 01793 547490

Our phone lines are open:

- Monday to Thursday 8:30am to 5:00pm
- Friday 8:30am to 4:30pm

To help us process queries more efficiently, we request that users highlight the council and opportunity name in the subject title of their email query, include the application reference number, and refrain from contacting more than one mailbox at a time.

For further information on submitting an application read [How applicants use the Funding Service](#).

Additional info

Background

Future Observatory is the Design Museum's national research programme for the green transition. Future Observatory curates exhibitions, programmes events and funds. And publishes new research, all with the aim of championing new design thinking on environmental issues. Based at and coordinated by the Design Museum, Future Observatory is delivered in partnership with AHRC.

Future Observatory will act as the engagement hub for the Design Generators and the wider Design the Green Transition programme, providing opportunities for showcasing research, running events for award holders as well as networking opportunities and the chance to help shape the conversation around the UK's green transition.

All funded applications will be expected to engage with Future Observatory throughout the lifetime of the project.

Research and innovation impact

Impact can be defined as the long-term intended or unintended effect research and innovation has on society, economy and the environment; to individuals, organisations, and the wider global population.

Supporting documents

[Inclusion of non-academic co-lead guidance \(PDF, 71KB\)](#)

Webinar for potential applicants

We will hold a webinar on 18 November 2025. This will provide more information about the funding opportunity and a chance to ask questions.

[Register for the webinar](#)

Research disruption due to COVID-19

We recognise that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused major interruptions and disruptions across our communities. We are committed to ensuring that individual applicants and their wider team, including partners and networks, are not penalised for any disruption to their career, such as:

- breaks and delays
- disruptive working patterns and conditions
- the loss of ongoing work

- role changes that may have been caused by the pandemic

Reviewers and panel members will be advised to consider the unequal impacts that COVID-19 related disruption might have had on the capability to deliver and career development of those individuals included in the application. They will be asked to consider the capability of the applicant and their wider team to deliver the research they are proposing.

Where disruptions have occurred, you can highlight this within your application if you wish, but there is no requirement to detail the specific circumstances that caused the disruption.

Timeline

○ **3 November 2025 9:00am**

Opening date

○ **18 November 2025 11:00am**

Webinar

○ **29 January 2026 4:00pm**

Closing date

Guidance on good research

[Good research resource hub](#)

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<https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/design-generators>