

Policy Innovation Fund 2025: Guidance Notes and Assessment Criteria

Call opens: 9 May 2025

Call closes: 30 June 2025

Award amount: up to £10,000 per application.

Project duration: up to 9 months

Background

The University's Research Office is working with the [Centre for Science and Policy](#) to distribute project funding for researchers to work in partnership with policy professionals to address a public policy need with an innovative concept and develop potential policy impact. The funding comes from Research England's Policy Support Fund. In total, £60,000 is available through this call.

Who can apply?

Funding is open to researchers employed by the collegiate University. All applicants must have Principal Investigator (PI) status in a University of Cambridge department for the duration of the proposed project. All applications will require a Head of Department signature. Applications from early career researchers (ECR) are welcome.

*PhD students may be involved in a Policy Innovation Fund project, but the project needs to have a PI status researcher (as defined above) as its lead, and any costs for PhD students' time will need to be costed on a day rate through the Temporary Employment Service.

(*An ECR for the purpose of this award is considered as someone who is within eight years of the award of the PhD.)

What activities can be funded?

The Policy Innovation Fund (PIF) will enable Cambridge researchers to initiate or deepen collaboration with policy partners so that they can take the crucial next step in developing, testing, demonstrating, or disseminating an innovative concept for policy impact.

Policy engagement activities that could be supported include:

- Establishing robust reciprocal relationships with policy partners, and knowledge exchange intermediaries to establish the network needed to progress a policy innovation.
- Organising participatory research or data collection to test the potential for a new policy impact or achieve that impact.
- Taking part in policy engagement activities to give the research team the skills and knowledge they need to take forward their policy innovation e.g. training, consultations, conferences
- Organising workshops and seminars focused on specific policy innovations to facilitate knowledge exchange, networking, and skill-building, convening academia, policy and external stakeholders.

- Conducting impact assessments of existing policies or policy proposals, helping policymakers make informed decisions based on evidence.
- Innovating in terms of the method or format of policy engagement or pilot demonstration for a policy idea

Proposed policy activity may build on a continuing project or mark the start of a completely new initiative. In the case of the former, the application should distinctly showcase the enhanced benefits of continued funding and the prospect of achieving timely results.

Project holders must ensure that their project is compliant with the University's [Policy on the Ethics of Research Involving Human Participants and Personal Data](#) and that any ethical issues are identified and brought to the attention of the relevant approval or regulatory body. Where ethical approval is required this must have been granted before work begins. See the [University's Research Ethics pages](#) for further details.

Eligible costs

The PIF may be used to fund directly incurred costs such as:

- **Directly incurred** staff costs, in line with this call guidance
- Pooled labour, where applicable
- Travel/subsistence, in line with University policy [Sustainable business travel: expenses policy | Finance Division \(cam.ac.uk\)](#)
- Workshops
- Engagement, knowledge exchange and training activities
- Materials and consumables
- Equipment/facilities access
- Procurement of an external consultant, e.g. for design

The PIF is not available to support the continuation of research, either solely or with external partners. New collaborative research which is in response to policy needs and embeds knowledge exchange activity is eligible.

Ineligible costs include:

- Indirect or estates costs
- Any costs relating to Intellectual Property protection including but not limited to registering, maintaining, or supporting patents or property rights.
- Salary of Policy Partners

All applications must be fully costed, and all costs should be shown to be necessary for the project. Please liaise with your departmental finance team to prepare an itemised budget to go into this application. Any changes to an approved project budget will need to be cleared by the PIF management team from the Centre for Science and Policy and the University's Impact and Knowledge Exchange team.

The assessment panel may decide to part-fund any application at their discretion.

Working with Policy Partners

All proposals for PIF must include at least one Policy Partner. A Policy Partner could be a non-academic individual or organisation, including but not limited to, policymaking staff from central government

departments, parliament staff, staff from city councils or any local authority, non-profit or charity organisation working with policy, officials from intergovernmental or multilateral institutions.

CSaP can offer consultations for candidates interested in applying for PIF to help develop their policy engagement idea and/or finding a suitable policy partner, if required.

Letter of Support: A letter (or email) of support is required from the Policy Partner which should reflect an understanding of the proposed policy activities and outcomes. If obtaining such a statement is particularly difficult at the proposal stage, the panel may consider applications without one, and subsequently offer a conditional award, pending provision of letter of support.

Contracts and Agreements: If your project includes exchange/transfer of materials and/or data between the University and an external party/ies this should be flagged in the application and any contracts and/or agreements should be in place before work on the project begins.

Brief details of the types of materials/data involved and which partners will be providers/recipients should be provided. Special attention should be taken to highlighting any international partners and/or new partners who have not been through [due diligence checks](#).

If you need agreements for pre-application submission discussions with policy partners with respect to the general contract expectations/considerations for these awards please contact impact@admin.cam.ac.uk who will be able to provide you with links to contract support.

Similarly, if you intend to discuss non-public domain information with an external partner to prepare the application, you will need a confidentiality agreement in place with the proposed external partner before these discussions take place. You can also find a template for these here [Impact Acceleration Accounts | Research Strategy Office \(cam.ac.uk\)](#). The Research Operations Office Contracts team will support you to put this in place.

Advice for this call

The background research and planned activities should be explained in terms which can be understood by a panel that has no specialist knowledge in your technical field.

It is important to be realistic about what will be achieved in the project and how the project will be monitored to ensure that it remains focused on the impact objectives.

Applications must give clear demonstration as to why the project is most suited to the Policy Innovation Fund.

Applicants are encouraged to browse through Government and Parliamentary Areas of Research (ARIs) and identify relevant ARIs related to the proposed engagement activity in their applications. You can search for ARIs by using keywords in the [ARI database](#). Read more about ARIs and how they can be useful to your research [here](#).

Applicants are strongly encouraged to get in touch with CSaP while drafting the proposal for guidance. To schedule a meeting, please email: k.neeba@jbs.cam.ac.uk

Assessment process

The applications will be assessed by the panel by the end of July 2025 and decisions communicated soon after.

Projects will be assessed on the following criteria:

Criteria	Guidance
Clarity of Policy Innovation plan	Clarity and coherence of the plan to achieve impact objectives, including management, innovativeness, and key milestones. Clarity on the suitability, level of engagement and degree of support offered by the Policy Partner, and how the project can potentially advance the Policy Partner's understanding and enable them to use research evidence.
Articulation of need	Clarity of description of the need or policy issue being addressed. Clear links between the identified challenge, proposed activity and outcomes
Clarity and Effectiveness of Impact Objectives	Clarity of the policy engagement and impact objectives, including how the outcomes from activities will be monitored and evaluated. Potential for other researchers and policymakers to learn from the proposed project
Value for money	The extent to which the proposal makes the best use of resources. Clear justification of all costs and identification of risks and limitations
Sustainability planning	Clarity on potential next stages (including further sources of funding) Explains how the project fits within a larger programme of policy work or is connected to previous/existing research

Timeline

Project start dates are subject to any necessary agreements with external partners being in place.
All requests for extensions must be made through the PIF management team.

All project activity must be completed, and funding spent by 30 May 2026.

Action	Tentative Date
Application Window opens	9 May 2025
Application Deadline	30 June 2025
Release of funding decisions	By 1 Aug 2025
Earliest Project Start Date	02 September 2025
Latest Project End Date	30 May 2026

Monitoring, evaluation and reporting

All successful applicants will be required to complete an evaluation report detailing the key learnings from their policy project and the impact, opportunities and challenges encountered during the project. The case study or report may also include an exit interview or testimonials from the Policy Partner.

If PIF was used for an ongoing project, CSaP may follow up in 6 months from the end of the project date to understand the long-term impact.

Project holders will be asked to work with departmental grants/finance officers to ensure that all expenditure is posted against projects within 2 weeks of the end of the project. Further financial reporting will be requested at project close.