

Centre for Public Engagement (CPE)
Small Grants Funding Round
Application Guidance and Conditions

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Overview

The CPE Small Grants programme is funded from Queen Mary's Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) allocation, which has been awarded by Research England to support the development and delivery of knowledge-exchange interactions between higher education and the wider world. For more information on Queen Mary's HEIF priorities please see the [Queen Mary University of London HEIF accountability statement](#).

The scheme has three categories of award available, based on differing criteria:

- Public Engagement
- Patient and Public Involvement (PPI)
- Community Engagement

Each scheme has up to £1,000 available allocated from three funding rounds during the academic year. All applications will be subject to a panel review (see [Funding Process subsection](#)) and will be judged against the application criteria outlined in this document (see [Application Criteria subsection](#)).

We recommend that individuals who are considering applying to the scheme familiarise themselves with this Guidance Documentation and seek appropriate support from the CPE (see [Support for Applicants subsection](#)) before submitting their project proposal.

Application Criteria

There are different sets of core application criteria according to which category of the Small Grant you decide to apply for. If you are unsure as to which category your project would be best suited for, or whether your project meets the below criteria, you can contact the CPE to discuss (publicengagement@qmul.ac.uk) or book a slot at one of the [upcoming advice surgeries](#).

Public Engagement Criteria

All applications to the Public Engagement category **must** meet the following criteria:

- A non-academic audience is the main focus of the activity: this means students or academic colleagues should not be the primary beneficiary of the activity
- There is a clear link to research, teaching or the core business of Queen Mary University of London
- The activity clearly demonstrates two-way engagement which means:
 - The activity has opportunities for conversation and dialogue between the organisers and the participants
- The activity demonstrates mutual benefit for both parties. This means that both organisers and participants are impacted by the activity in some way and take these benefits away with them. Benefits might include knowledge, skills, insights/ideas, and perspectives.

Further to the above criteria, the scheme prioritises activity which:

- Offers an innovative or creative approach to engagement
- Enables applicants to try out or pilot a new idea or approach, or to kick-start a longer-term engagement project
- Does not feature 'about us, without us' type content – where a topic is explored without representation from communities and individuals affected by it.
- Evaluates public engagement activity and/or demonstrates a novel approach to evaluation of the project

Patient and Public Involvement Criteria

All applications to the PPI category **must** meet the following criteria:

- A non-academic audience is the main focus of the activity: either patients, service-users, or members of the public
- There is a clear link to health-related research, teaching or the core business of Queen Mary University of London
- The activity clearly demonstrates two-way public engagement that provides mutual benefit and/or is an example of engagement-led research: knowledge and benefits of the activity flow between organisers and participants and have impacts on both parties

Further to the above criteria, the scheme prioritises activity which:

- Remunerates PPI participants for their time and expertise by experience. See [NIHR guidelines](#) for more information.
- Takes equality, diversity and inclusion into consideration.

Community Engagement Criteria

All applications to the Community Engagement category **must** meet the following criteria:

- There is a clear commitment to collaborate with community organisations to shape and deliver the activities
- The projects are based on a need (or needs) identified by the local community
- There is an opportunity to engage and involve the local community with research, teaching or the core business of Queen Mary University of London
- The activity clearly demonstrates two-way engagement which means:
 - The activity has opportunities for conversation and dialogue between the organisers and the participants
- The activity demonstrates mutual benefit for both parties. This means that both organisers and participants are impacted by the activity in some way and take these benefits away with them. Benefits might include knowledge, skills, insights/ideas, and perspectives.

Applicant Eligibility

Applicants must be current staff or students at Queen Mary, with an end date no sooner than twelve months from the date of application. We welcome applications from staff and students at all career stages—and this is not used as a criteria in the selection process.

Lead applicants must be the individuals who will be responsible for delivering the project and subsequent reporting. External applicants can apply to the programme (i.e. community groups) as co-applicants alongside Queen Mary staff or students on projects.

To ensure all applications engage external groups with Queen Mary research, teaching, or services, all submissions **must have at least one** applicant from within the University who will be held responsible for assisting the delivery of the projects and reporting on outcomes.

Activity Timings

All activities must be able to spend the funds and complete their activity before the end of the current financial year: 31st July 2026.

Due to the processes involved with the programme, **it may take up to four weeks** for applications to receive outcome information. We strongly recommend applying with at least three months' notice ahead of any proposed activity commencing.

Additionally, the round will not fund activity which would happen without funding from the CPE. If the project, or aspect of the project that funding is requested for, has already been advertised or has already taken place, we are unable to fund the project as it will be judged to be going ahead without CPE funding.

All financial administration (e.g. raising requisitions, expense claims) will need to be completed by end of June 2026, to allow for payments to be processed by the end of July.

Additional Considerations for Applications

(a) Staffing Costs and Paying People

Academic staff costs cannot be included in applications to the Small Grant programme.

Internal staff costs for special services related to the event such as out of hours charges or AV support necessary to deliver the project may be included.

Student costs can be included into applications to the Small Grant programme. We strongly encourage that student time is reimbursed appropriately. This includes both undergraduate and postgraduate student time.

If you intend to include student costs, **we strongly encourage you to contact your School Finance contact** to find out the correct hourly rate and discuss on-costs. On-costs tend to be an additional 30 per cent on the rate of pay and should be listed in your breakdown of costing with the hourly rate. On-costs include pensions, employer's NI, holiday pay and the apprenticeship levy. Additionally, you should not employ students for hours in excess of their weekly limits (i.e. 20 hours per week for students on Tier 4 Visas and PhD students). Please follow guidance from HR to determine the appropriate hours.

If you are working with external partner(s), we encourage that their time and participation is reimbursed appropriately. These costs can be included into applications.

If you are involving patient or public representatives in PPI activities, we **strongly encourage you to recompense them for their time**. The NIHR recommended rate is £27.50 per hour and you can find more information in their [payment guidance](#).

(b) External Speakers and Facilitators

Small Grants are intended to engage non-academic groups with Queen Mary outputs. If the activity is inviting an external speaker or facilitator, it must be clearly justified why they have been selected instead of a Queen Mary representative, and how publics will still be engaged with the work of Queen Mary.

Examples of where funding may be granted includes where relevant external representatives from outside higher education feature alongside Queen Mary staff and/or students, or artistic facilitators are selected to run creative explorations of Queen Mary work.

The Small Grants will not fund honoraria for speakers from higher education.

(c) Catering

Catering costs can be included in applications to this funding programme when it is integral to supporting engagement. If catering is not seen as integral to facilitating engagement, it will not be funded. Applications requesting any funds for catering must demonstrate clearly how this will improve the quality of engagement, and why it is necessary and appropriate for the activity and the target audience.

Applications that design catering into activity in a way that encourages and deepens engagement as part of the project will have a stronger chance. Examples of this include having facilitated coffee breaks to encourage discussion or food-tasting to bring a subject area to life.

(d) Conferences

It is an important part of the remit of the Small Grant programme that a non-academic audience is the main focus of the activity to be funded. Therefore, projects and activities associated with academic conferences (or similar activities) should clearly explain why this is an appropriate platform for the intended audience and show how this activity will do one or more of the following:

- Attract a significant portion of its audience from non-academic backgrounds
- Encourage two-way dialogue between academics and non-academic participants through the design of activities
- Offer significant demonstrable value to the non-academic proportion of the audience in this format

If the activity is associated with a fee-paying conference, the applicant should show clearly why the conference fees cannot cover this portion of activity.

(e) Outreach activities

As the Small Grants are intended to support public engagement activities, we are unfortunately unable to fund projects which focus on delivering outreach activities within schools or colleges.

Outreach activities are activities where the primary aim is to raise awareness of Higher Education or a specific subject area and/or to inspire and encourage students to apply to University or to study a particular subject. Projects within this remit are advised to contact the Student Recruitment and Widening Participation team to see what support is on offer for their work.

The Small Grants can fund public engagement projects where schools/colleges are the primary target audience where there is a clear, two-way interaction and exchange which is mutually beneficial for all involved.

(f) Accessibility

Consider whether your activity is accessible to the people you are engaging with and to people engaging with any legacy items. Accessibility can have associated costs, and the Small Grants can be used to cover these costs, including but not limited to:

- hiring a suitable venue (easy to get to, accessible to disabled people - with seating, with gender neutral and accessible toilets etc.)
- hiring British Sign Language interpreters
- covering transcription and translation costs
- covering travel expenses for participants
- data top-up cards allowing access to the internet for participants in online activities

Other measures to improve accessibility are free:

- schedule breaks and stick to them
- provide directions and instructions in advance
- use inclusive language

(g) Sustainability

Small Grants can be used to purchase consumables and equipment for activities (i.e. printing costs, craft materials, etc.). Consider whether you might be able to source existing materials from your team, your department or the CPE. Also consider whether you will be able to re-use materials and equipment purchased for other projects in the future and think about the environmental impact of

your project. Consider limiting the use of plastics and single-use items if you can or choosing vegetarian options if catering.

Support for Applicants

(a) Advice Surgeries

The CPE run fortnightly public engagement surgeries where you can book a 20-minute slot with the team for some 1-2-1 support on Small Grant projects. The team will be able to help refine, shape, and strengthen proposals, as well as discuss practical considerations for project delivery.

If you'd like to attend an Advice Surgery, check the [forthcoming dates and book online](#).

(b) Evaluation Toolkit

Evaluation is a process of reflection and collecting evidence that will help you understand the effect of your work and help inform future projects or approaches. It is a valuable tool in assessing whether you have met your objectives, what changed because of your activity, how it could have been more effective and if there were any unintended outcomes (both positive and negative). It is important to understand not only what happened but also why something worked or didn't work.

Evaluation can be multi-faceted: from counting the number of people you engaged with, to recording their perspectives on the activity and your own. For more information about evaluation and methods of collecting evaluation data, see our [Evaluation Toolkit](#).

The Funding Process

Applicants to each strand can apply for a maximum of £1,000 of funding for their project. This is allocated competitively from a monthly funding round.

The Small Grants programme will have three rounds in the 2025-26 academic year, with round deadlines as follows:

- 5pm, Friday 31st October 2025
- 5pm, Friday 9th January 2026
- 5pm, Wednesday 4th March 2026

Any applications received after the deadlines will automatically be considered for the next round, with the exception of the final round deadline in March.

Applicants will be notified of the outcome of their application within four weeks of the application deadline.

If successful, funds will be transferred by the end of the following month after the deadline (i.e. for the first round, funds will be transferred by the end of November)

Panel Review

Each application received will have a panel review to determine the outcome. The panel is drawn from a number of individuals with public engagement experience, with representatives from each Faculty and a mixture of academic and professional service staff. Each application will be reviewed by at least three members of the panel who will judge applications either as successful, unsuccessful, or will permit a project to reapply with changes.

All applications will receive feedback from the panel within four weeks of the application deadline.

(a) Successful Projects

Successful projects will receive confirmation of the award of funding once panel reviews are completed. If a project is successful, funds will be transferred to the nominated budget code by the next month end via an internal transfer.

All projects receiving funding will be subject to the funding conditions outlined below ([see Funding Conditions section](#)).

(b) Unsuccessful Projects

All unsuccessful projects will receive feedback from the panel about why their project was not funded.

(c) Reapplications

In some cases, applicants may be invited to reapply to the programme by the panel. This is often because the panel believes there is merit to the proposed project, but it requires further development. In these instances, you will be required to visit a public engagement surgery and/or discuss this project further with the CPE before resubmitting to the programme.

Reapplications for previously unfunded projects are only possible for those that have been told explicitly so after discussing the project with the CPE.

Multiple Applications

The Small Grants round is intended to initiate projects that have the potential to become self-sustaining or used as a pilot to then apply for further funds, rather than to continually sustain individual projects. This means that an applicant that has previously received small award funding may only reapply with a substantially different project to that previously applied for.

The only exception to this is in the event of unexpected project results from the original funded activity that would reach to different audiences, substantially increase project outcomes, or create different project outcomes from similar activity. In these incidences, it may be possible to reapply for further funding, but this must be discussed with one of the CPE team prior to submission.

Conditions of Funding

All successful applications must adhere to the Small Grants Round conditions of funding and reporting requirements below:

- The **funds provided must only be used to fund the project as described** in the initial application.
- Any **deviation in spend from that set out in the initial allocation must be submitted in writing to the Centre for Public Engagement for approval**. Permission will not be unreasonably withheld unless the changes in spend would significantly alter the outcomes or process of the project.
- **Spend must follow the correct procurement procedure for the University** and be within the guidelines laid out in the hospitality and travel expenses policy (i.e. the correct procedures for your institute/department must be followed when buying goods or services).

If you have not procured goods or services through University processes before we recommend contacting your Finance contact to discuss and secure the necessary training.

- **Spend must be complete by the 31st July 2026**, as this is a requirement of HEIF spending. All associated financial administration will need to be completed by 30th June 2026 to allow enough time for payments to be processed.
- The **Queen Mary logo must be used in any publicity material or resources** produced relating to the project.
- **All Evaluation Forms must be submitted as requested by the CPE**. All reporting must be submitted to the CPE within two months of the end date of the project, and by 14th August 2026 at the latest. Failure to do so may result in future exclusion from CPE funding schemes.
- **Projects may be invited to write a reflective blog post, case study or testimonial** to share good practice and learning from their work with others (this is not mandatory).

(a) Reporting Requirements

The reporting process is intended to be light-touch, consisting of a few questions in an Evaluation form. **All reporting must be received by the CPE by 14th August 2026, or you may become ineligible to submit for future funds from the CPE.**

Upon conclusion of your project, you may be invited to a 1-2-1 discussion with a member of the CPE to further explore some of the reflections submitted in your Evaluation Form to help the development of future public engagement support at Queen Mary. If you are interested, you can also put your name forward to be a member of the Small Grants review panel in future years.