

Public Engagement Development Funding Guidelines 2026/27 Call

1. Context

The [Public Engagement with Research](#) unit invites applications for funding to grow and develop high quality Public Engagement projects and activities during the 2026/27 academic year that aim to strengthen the role of public engagement with University of Southampton research, promote mutually beneficial outcomes and evidence to inform and progress both research and its impact. The Public Engagement Development Fund has previously supported engagement projects that have developed sustained change and impact, providing evidence to develop future funding bids, partnerships and contributions to the 2020 REF Impact Case Studies.

The call is framed by the [National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement](#) definition:

“Public engagement describes the myriad of ways in which the activity and benefits of higher education and research can be shared with the public. Engagement is by definition a two-way process, involving interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit.”

2. Call Themes and theme-specific criteria

The 2026/27 call comprises three themes aligned with the University of Southampton [Goals](#), [Values](#), our [Civic Agreement](#), the [Public & Community Engagement Hubs](#) and our wider commitments to Government Research and Development.

Proposals should relate to **one** of the three themes and demonstrate they meet the criteria within that theme as listed below:

Theme 1: Supporting engagement and participation

Projects that will be considered for funding must:

Empower people to engage productively in the economy through the development of skills to be able to meaningfully do this, including the generation of co-produced bids for larger grants, with the expectation that a large proportion of this funding will be to pay for partner time.

Theme 2: Supporting local growth and regeneration

Projects that will be considered for funding must:

Support the social, environmental and economic resilience of a co-defined local area by engaging with people to identify and deliver benefits that are most vital to them and their region with a prime focus on local growth or regeneration.

Theme 3: Supporting an open curiosity-driven research culture

Projects that will be considered for funding must:

Demonstrate how learning and growth will develop from the creation or experimentation of novel nation-wide and discipline/journey agnostic engagement approaches; breaking down silos, supporting emerging talent and empowering people to participate in innovative delivery, distribution and bids for larger grants or generation of private investment.

3. General Call Criteria for all themes based on Theory of Change

Section A: Purpose

Proposals should:

- seek two-way engagement for mutual benefit with Southampton’s Research and/or Teaching and Learning
- present clear engagement aims – include clear rationale on why you want to engage, who you want to engage with and why they might want to engage with you.

	present clear project objectives that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time bound.
Section B: People	Proposals should: - be led by a member of the University from any one of our six job families: Education, Research and Enterprise (ERE); Technical and Experimental (TAE); Management, Specialist and Administrative (MSA); Community and Operational (CAO); Clinical Academic; Research Nurse or Postgraduate Research (PGR) student (with supervisors' endorsement). Community individuals, groups or partners can co-lead the application but the form must be submitted and 'owned' by a member of the University for financial purposes - demonstrate cross-sector engagement approaches that enable inclusive, mutually beneficial collaboration among researchers, students and community partners. Show how these methods can identify skills gaps and support the co-creation of entrepreneurial knowledge and capabilities that lead to evidence-based solutions - be supportive of diverse career paths and contributions across wider research teams (for example technical and professional services staff) and partnerships.
Section C: Inputs	Proposals should: demonstrate consideration of roles, responsibilities, capacity and skills
Section D: Activities	Proposals should: - present a clear, detailed, justified budget that covers all project activities and that will be spent by 30 July 2027. This should include all considerations such as public contributor time buy-out, equipment purchase, administrative support to arrange venue/transport, evaluation costs etc. The small PERu team do not have capacity to support this, however training and information is available on the PERu website - ensure that the majority of funding is used for creative Public Engagement project methodology, activity and relationships. There will be no geographical restriction to the location of partners or activities, but the majority of funding cannot be used for travel or transport purposes - mobilise change that supports local needs and social justice, ensuring activities and management of these activities are inclusive and not likely to present barriers to participation or disadvantage any groups from participation, including the inclusion of one group to the detriment of another. - demonstrate understanding and commitment to the principles described in the University of Southampton Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan and describe how your project will value difference, embed inclusivity and combat inequalities/prejudice throughout your work with clear consideration of accessibility needs/measures, power balance and power-sharing as appropriate.
Section E: Outputs Outcomes Impact	Proposals should: - describe how mutually beneficial, sustainable outputs will be created as a result of your engagement practice and be committed to power-sharing throughout the project, exploring and reflecting on what this means for all elements/aspects and at each stage. - demonstrate plans for sustainability and legacy beyond the funded life-cycle of the project, with consideration of future investment that will retain/enhance regional

	social, environmental and economic resilience, benefits, productivity and innovation. • support learning and development within the project team, impact on research and/or teaching and learning with examples of how this will be captured and shared with others • apply the University's sustainability principles and practice throughout the project behaviours and actions for positive impact on research, education, engagement, reach, significance and responsible practice.
Section F: Assumptions Risk	Proposals should: • include appropriate methods of engagement for targeted groups and consideration of assumptions to understand if the project aims are realistic and achievable. • include realistic consideration of potential challenges, barriers and/or risk to the success of your project and how you will mitigate these.
Section G: Evaluation	Proposals should: • ensure that your project aims are measurable using a considered, realistic and appropriate evaluation plan for measuring the project's effectiveness and how this will demonstrate positive change for all the people involved • establish a strong evaluation framework that clearly outlines how evidence will be gathered to demonstrate the project's contribution to long term growth, legacy and impact.

4. Additional Guidance

- Proposals may focus on 'pilot' activity to test a methodology/approach that will identify and provide evidence to support future outcomes and impact; alternatively, they may seek to build on and develop existing work where the funding received would lead to a substantive change, impact or benefit to individuals, groups or communities identified in the application.
- The potential for activities/outputs to feature within centrally led initiatives including [Human Worlds \(Arts/Humanities\) Festival](#), [ESRC Festival of Social Sciences](#), [Science/Engineering Festival](#) or [Research Roadshow](#) should be considered where this would support the purpose/aims of the project. Guidance and support to participate in this can be found on the links included or by contacting festival@soton.ac.uk
- Proposals aligning with one of our [Public Engagement Hubs](#) or [Schools Partnership](#) work are encouraged. Please make contact with these groups to confirm and build in any costs relating to these collaborations before submitting your application.
- Proposals should focus or link to research and/or teaching & learning and may contain elements of each.
- Additional in-kind resource or matched funding is welcome, but this is not essential.
- Previous projects can be reviewed [here](#) (Internal UoS SharePoint) [case studies \(external website\)](#).

5. Funding, scope and duration

- **Projects should begin in November 2026 and be substantially complete by 30 July 2027.**
- **It is essential that all projects spend is complete by 30 July 2027 (all Agresso processes must be completed), this funding does not permit any extension of spend beyond 30 July 2027.**
- We anticipate funding approximately 10 projects to a maximum of £5,000 each
- Funding use is flexible, with justification. Examples include: partnership time-buy-out, equipment purchase, buy-in of expertise, venue hire, refreshments, accessibility considerations, travel costs (as long as the majority of the funding is not spent on travel)

- International engagement is within scope and the International Office may be able to advise/support. Contact peru@soton.ac.uk in first instance to discuss this
- **Activities that fall outside of funding scope and will not be funded include:**
- Applications that focus on marketing and dissemination or recruitment and widening participation activities (although these may be secondary benefits of the project)
- Applications planning the majority of the budget being used for travel (including moving assets)
- Work that could be considered to be within the remit of an existing funded project.

6. Reporting requirements

The written reporting process will consist of:

- Short light touch interim progress report by Friday 26 March 2027
- Expenditure summary in July 2027
- Final report by Friday 1 October 2027
- Record your Public Engagement activities on the University Current Research Information System “Pure”, citing PERu Funding (See the [Pure SharePoint Site](#) for further information) and confirm completion of this
- Write a blog (max 1000) words for the Public Engagement website during 2027/28 describing your public engagement project aims, learning, experience, impact and links to tangible outcomes (for example learning resources such as videos, toolkits, evaluation methodologies, links to events, talks, documents) to share your successes widely and inspire others participating in public engagement activity

The verbal reporting process will consist of:

- Attend and potentially provide a 10 minute talk about your project at the annual Public Engagement Partnerships and Impact Event in June 2028
- Attend and potentially provide a 10 minute talk at an Engaged University Steering Group or Public Engagement Network event during 2028.

7. Open Information Session

Project teams are invited to attend an information session at **11:00-12:00, Wednesday 8 July 2026** on Teams by clicking on the link below:

Microsoft Teams meeting

Join: <https://teams.microsoft.com/meet/353109283542657?p=d4aAR5oyQPbAsZi8P2>

Meeting ID: 353 109 283 542 657

Passcode: gx248S3o

If you are external to the University please email peru@soton.ac.uk to be added to the meeting.

8. Application form

[Public Engagement Development Fund Application Form](#)

Application deadline: Friday 4 September 2026

Award outcomes: Announced from Monday 26 October 2026 – Friday 30 October 2026