



Whole Systems Networking Fund

Frequently Asked Questions

December 2025



Overview

The Whole Systems Networking Fund (WSNF), managed by the UK Energy Research Centre (UKERC), is designed to improve Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), collaboration and networking across UK energy research. Projects must align with UKERC's current research areas and foster interdisciplinary, cross-institutional collaboration.

Eligibility

Who can apply? Early Career Researchers (ECRs) who are UK residents and are employed at the submitting organisation. We particularly encourage applications from under-represented groups and researchers from the devolved nations.

How does UKERC define an ECR? An ECR is someone employed on an open-ended, fixed-term, or project-funded (precarious) contract who has not previously led a project exceeding £100k.

What employment/contract conditions apply? Applicants must hold a fixed-term (or other) contract that extends beyond the proposed project's end date and be employed at the submitting organisation.

Can third-sector organisations apply? Yes. Third-sector organisations are eligible provided they can meet the 80% Full Economic Cost (FEC) rule (i.e., cover 20% of total project costs).

Can I collaborate with senior academics and industry partners? Yes. The project must be led by an ECR, but senior academics and industry partners can be included as collaborators.

Can I be involved in more than one proposal? No. Applicants may only be involved with one proposal in this call.

Are international collaborators allowed? Yes, international collaborators may be included. The lead applicant must be a UK resident and employed by the submitting UK organisation.

Funding, Scope and Eligible Costs

What is the maximum award? Applicants can apply for up to £88,500 (at 100% costs). Awards are made at 80% FEC. For example, a £75,000 project



would receive £60,000 from UKERC, with the host organisation covering the remaining 20%.

What activities can be funded? The WSNF primarily is allocated according to UKRI terms and conditions, please see UKRI guidance on eligible costs here. If you have any questions regarding this we suggest you contact your pre-award team at your host institution. funds networking focused activities that enable collaboration and impact, such as workshops and events; travel and subsistence; engagement activities and materials; cross-institutional collaboration costs; and research assistant time where justified.

Can I include my own (PI) salary? PI-Yes as above, staff costs can be included salary is generally not funded under WSNF. All costs must be justified under UKRI fund headings and clearly aligned to networking, collaboration, and impact objectives.

What budgeting rules apply? Budgets must follow UKRI fund headings and demonstrate value for money. Applications should include travel and accommodation to attend at least two UKERC meetings per year.

Time Allocation and Team

How much of my time should be dedicated? Applicants are expected to commit sufficient time to lead and deliver the project. PI time is typically supported by the host institution and is not normally an eligible cost under WSNF.

Is Research Assistant (RA) support eligible? Yes, where clearly justified under UKRI fund headings and directly contributing to networking and collaboration outcomes.

Can senior staff be included on the application? Yes senior staff and industry partners can be included. All that we require is that the project is led by an ECR.

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Do you allow/encourage cross-institution collaboration? Yes we do allow cross institution collaboration. The only thing to note is that this needs to be fully costed in the application.

Is there a minimum duration for projects? There is no minimum duration for the project, however the research must be completed by March 2028.

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How to Apply

- Download the [WSNF application form](#) and complete all sections (contact information; personal statement; research questions and methods; EDI; budget and justification; and equality monitoring form).
- Align your proposal with one or more UKERC research areas and include travel/accommodation for at least two UKERC meetings per year.
- Save the application as a Word document named “WSNF-name of project”.
- Email the completed application to UKERC@imperial.ac.uk by 17:00 on 30 January 2026.
- Complete the anonymous EDI monitoring form (used for monitoring only; not part of assessment).

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Assessment Process

How will my application be assessed? Assessment is a two-stage process: Stage One is blind screening ~~of where all identifying information is removed,~~ with applications reviewed only on the quality of the ideas; Stage Two is non-blind, assessing the PI personal statement and overall fit. Applications are scored against published criteria covering idea quality, methods, impact, EDI, and budget.

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Will feedback be provided? If we receive a large number of submissions, we may be unable to provide feedback to unsuccessful applicants.

Is there a tie-break rule? Where two applications are judged of equal merit, women may will be prioritised due to under-representation in the consortium.

Dispersal of Funds and UKERC Membership

How are funds disbursed? Successful projects will be reimbursed via quarterly invoicing, coordinated by UKERC's Operations Manager.

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Do awardees become UKERC members? Yes. Awardees are integrated into the UKERC research area their project aligns with, participate in UKERC activities (including the annual assembly and relevant theme meetings), and will be asked to submit a final project report.

Key Dates

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- Opening date: 10 November 2025
- WSNF grant proposal training session: Tuesday 9 December 2025
- Closing date: 17:00, 30 January 2026
- Blind and non-blind assessment: February 2026
- Successful proposals notified: March 2026
- Funded research commences: April 2026
- Project completion deadline: 31 March 2028

Contact Details

General enquiries: Engagement Manager Oluwatobi Balogun –
oluwatobi.balogun@ukerc.ac.uk

Eligibility and contracting: Operations Manager Jessica Bays –
j.bays@ukerc.ac.uk

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