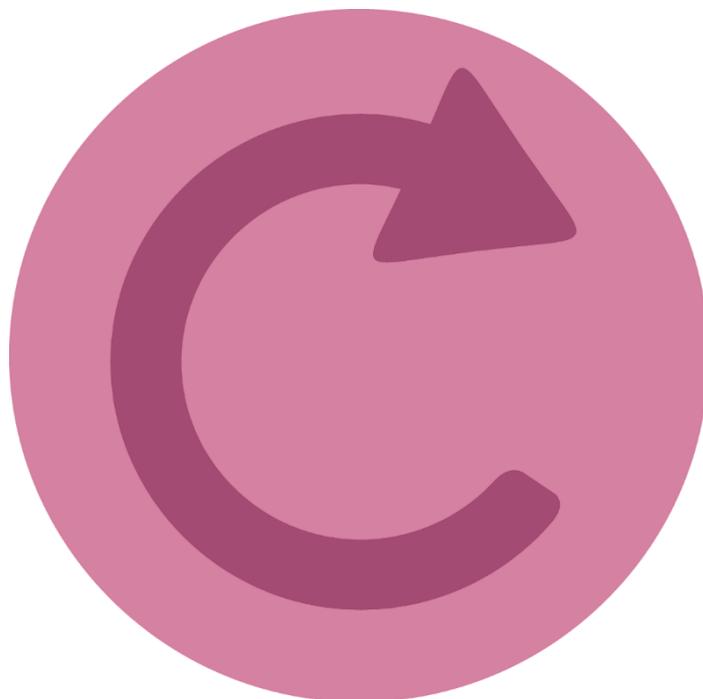




Be brave, ask, and keep trying!

A non-academic (and incomplete) guide to what to consider when looking for funding for third sector collaborative research



A Scottish Third Sector Research Forum resource

A supplementary TSRF resource to Collaborating with academics

2019

Third Sector Research Forum

For further information contact ESS info@evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk
Evaluation Support Scotland Scottish Charity SC036529

Third Sector Research Forum

In order to increase understanding about the third sector's contribution to public services and to improve the third sector's understanding and use of research, the **Scottish Third Sector Research Forum** (TSRF) brings together third sector and public sector partners to:

- Promote and share research about and from the third sector
- Identify research questions and meet evidence gaps
- Promote the use of research to improve policy and practice.

The TSRF meets four times a year and members take it in turns to host meetings at their venues in different parts of Scotland. Members include representatives from a variety of research-active third sector organisations, public sector organisations and academics from Scottish universities.

Previous TSRF publications:

- Why Involve the Third Sector in Health and Social Care Delivery (2011)
- Why Involve the Third Sector in Reducing Reoffending (2012)
- The Benefits of Inclusive Volunteering (2015)
- Third Sector Partnership Compass: What research tells us about engaging in positive partnerships (2016)
- Top tips to communicate research effectively (2016)
- Evidencing genuine co-production in the third sector (2017)
- Top tips to use research from other UK jurisdictions or countries (2017)
- To publish or not to publish? (2018)
- Inclusive Growth (2018)
- Making an impact with research: a Third Sector Research Forum case study (2019)

TSRF resources can be downloaded from [Evaluation Support Scotland's website](#)

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Introduction

This guide is for third sector organisations (TSO) that want to obtain funding for collaborative research with academia. However, it may also be useful to academics working in universities and colleges, and funders. It gives ideas to consider when looking for funding for collaborative research and includes some hints and tips from those who have been successful and unsuccessful in applying for funding. This is **NOT** a guide about how to apply for funding.

The guide originates from a small research project undertaken in 2017 by the Third Sector Research Forum (TSRF), to find out if, and in what circumstances, third sector organisations involved in research with academia were funded for their work. Previously at TSRF events, it was noted that lack of funding was a significant barrier for TSOs wanting to be involved in academic research. Funding was mentioned as an issue at the very first TSRF collaborative event (2014):

“It is difficult to get funding to do collaborative working. There are not enough sources for this.”

A key finding from the research was that having a good relationship with an academic partner is essential to collaborative research. We address building relationships and good partnerships in our guides: [‘Collaborating with academics’](#) and [‘Third sector partnership compass: what research tells us about engaging in positive partnerships’](#).

The guide is divided into three sections:

- Barriers to funding collaborative research
- How to overcome barriers
- Sources of funding

The guide includes lots of tips and examples so look out for the following symbols.



Tips



Examples

If you can add to this document from your experience, please email info@evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk

Barriers to funding collaborative research

Funding is important and failure to secure funding can make collaborative projects impossible. It takes time, energy and effort to learn how to obtain funding for academic research and it can take several attempts before success.

TSOs don't know where to get funding

TSOs often lack the knowledge about what funding is available for academic research and how to apply for it. Academia is not a world that TSOs are used to operating in and it can feel overwhelming. Gaining knowledge about grants, universities, colleges and academics is essential when coping with unfamiliar environments and complicated processes.

University structure

Universities are large, complex institutions which makes them hard to navigate, particularly for non-academics. They are organised by academic subject into Faculties or Colleges, each of which is divided into several Schools.

Administration and management of UK universities vary significantly between institutions but commonly include some university-wide departments such as a Research Office. Each faculty/college will usually have their own research office too.

Each School or Faculty will have an ethics committee. Before a research project can get underway the ethics committee has to approve the research approach to ensure that research participants and researchers are safe during the research and are not harmed. These committees also make sure that the proposed research will be compliant with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Universities are subject to the [Research Excellence Framework](#). The REF is the UK's system for assessing the quality of research in UK higher education institutions.

Academics

Academics work in universities, teaching/lecturing, or researching, or both. They may be Early Career Researchers (in posts such as Research Assistants, Research Fellows,) or lecturers, senior lecturers, readers and professors. Early Career Researchers are often on short term contracts and may combine work with study. They may move around in the sector depending on funding. It is a very competitive environment to work in and they often have to 'chase' funding. They may have fewer decision-making powers in respect of funding than 'tenured' (permanently contracted), more experienced university staff. Some academics have more choice about how funding is used than others.



Take time to learn about the tensions/pressures your partner has as well as the culture they work in.

Do not make assumptions about researcher's age and experience – some academics enter the university world at a later age. Relatively young academics could also have progressed quickly in their careers. This depends on the academic field as well as the individual institution.

Academics are restricted by funding or university regulations

Academics are required by many universities to add 40% to their fee to cover their overhead costs which means that the full academic costs per day could be about £1000.

Some universities stipulate that academics can't work on projects less than £50,000 but can make a special case to do so, for example to do work with smaller TSOs. The case they can make includes that the work can lead to:

- ✓ obtaining a bigger grant
- ✓ evidencing impact.

Research Councils are one of the main funders of research in the UK (see page 13). Funding from Research Councils may have specific demands about the impact of a research project. Impact may mean different things to TSOs, academics and funders.



Talk to your (potential) partner about how many **days** the work will take and the academic's daily rate to give you an idea of the funding you may need to cover the costs of an academic's input.

Check out what impact means to your academic partner and ask what the expectations of potential funders will be.

Lack of funding for TSO work

TSOs are expected to contribute to research for free – and indeed, so are service users. There might be times when a TSO agrees to do so for broader charitable purpose reasons, as in the example of [Glasgow Homelessness Network](#).

TSOs often work on small budgets and their funding may not support speculative or unpaid work.

Practicalities

- Timing of payments - research councils' funding is paid in arrears – this may make it very difficult for TSOs.

Differing expectations and motivations

Common drivers for TSOs and academics to engage in collaborative research are:

- Legitimacy to access funding
- Exploring emerging problems
- Wanting evidence for new projects
- Wanting to influence policy change.

There's a perception amongst academics that TSOs want help to ensure they are delivering an evidence-based service and an assumption for TSOs that having an evaluation of services carried out by an academic will help obtain funding in the future. Academics find that TSOs approach them to do evaluations which may not always be attractive to researchers.



“One of the recurrent reasons for third-sector organisations to approach universities was because they needed an evaluation of their work, usually to support a further funding application. Unfortunately such evaluation activity tends to have a low priority for academics...” [Interaction](#) How can academics and the third sector work together to influence policy and practice? Professor Mark Shucksmith OBE, Carnegie Fellow



Don't write off doing small projects which may involve students (and their supervisors). Building relationships with academics through doing small pieces of work can be beneficial and may lead to a larger research project in the longer term.

What do academics get out of partnering with TSOs?

- TSOs can give access to people researchers want to reach
- It gives them:
 - opportunities to disseminate their findings (particular to a field or issue). This may help meet REF requirements
 - a place to test new ideas
 - a way to translate knowledge into action/practice
 - access to third sector networks and forums where academics' work can be disseminated and may be used to influence policy.



Ask questions about funding; ensuring you cover the practical tasks – when and how payment will occur. Do you need a contract or written agreement?

Establish the ground rules at the start.



It might be useful to discuss the following with your academic partner

- TSOs have a responsibility to their service users to ensure that they are comfortable to be involved in your research. Some groups of people can become 'over' researched! And some organisations may be inundated with requests from researchers to find 'subjects' e.g. for focus groups.
- TSOs funding may not cover the cost of organising access to research participants.



More guidance about working on collaborative research can be found in the Knowledge Translation Network's free to download resource '**Collaborating with Academics**'.

Breaking down the barriers and maximising your chances

Before you start looking for the resources to undertake the research there are several things to consider. You'll need to work out what you want to know from the research, and why you want to do the research collaboratively. Then, how to make this happen – who will do the work, what time and resources you can commit, and when this work needs to be completed.

Why do you want to do research with an academic?

It might seem strange to ask yourself this question, but the answer may have a bearing on your next steps. The driver for your research may affect where you might access funding. Start by asking:

- Why do you want to do a piece of collaborative research, and what do you want to get out of it? What is the **purpose** of the research?
- What is your **expectation** of the time and effort involved, and the outcome of the research?
- Are there other ways of reaching the same outcome? Can you think of other ways to get academic input? For example, having a student or intern placement.
- Is a research project the best way to answer your questions?
 - Is primary research (gathering data directly from people) really what you need? Can you draw on evidence from elsewhere and use other people's research instead of doing primary research
 - Can you meet your needs in other ways than involving academia?



Remember academics can be expensive. As a TSO you may have to moderate your expectations about how much can be done for the amount of funding.

Ask how much time your academic partner expects of you and timescales.

Encourage dialogue - tell academics what would make it easier for TSOs to use research i.e. "We'd be able to use research if...."

Have a clear idea of why you are engaging with academia and what is on offer, in order to prioritise and not overcommit.

Know your “ask”

Before approaching academics, academic schemes, funding bodies or trust funds it is helpful to have a written document (funding brief) and the following questions might help with identifying what else you need to know:

- **What type of research do we want to do?** Qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, not sure? Working with community members or crunching stats? Some academics only support specific types of research, and topics so it’s helpful to have a rough idea before you start looking around.
- **What level and amount of research do we need?** Would a student (undergraduate or postgraduate) placement work well or do we need to collaborate with a more experienced academic, perhaps for a longer period of time?
- **When do we need it?** Can we be flexible on time scales?
- **What kind of research relationship do we expect?** Who sets the research brief and who leads or project manages the research?
- **What resources do we have i.e. staff, funding?** Do we need funding, and for what (resources, time)? Is there a staff member who wants to do a piece of academic study as professional development? i.e. Masters or Fellowship. Can the organisation support this person by allowing paid time for study?
- **Who will be involved in writing a research proposal? What will this look like?** This does not have to be as formal as a traditional research proposal. It’s a way of putting your ideas on paper so that it can be emailed to a researcher you’ve identified or taken to a conference where you may meet an interested person through networking.

INVOLVE publishes guidelines about public engagement including information about good practice in payment and recognition for public involvement. More information can be found on [their website](#)



Be brave and ask for funding!

Remember this may be a competitive process so whatever form the proposal takes, make sure that it is clear, succinct and realistic. Include what you can bring to the research – why it would be good to work with you/your organisation, and how the research will benefit the wider society or add to the research community.



Ensure that your research proposal is attractive to academic partners.

- Is the subject of your research interesting to academics? Presenting in terms of 'Impact' may make it more appealing and perhaps easier to get funding
- Is your research interesting to others besides your organisation?
- Is there anyone else who may be interested in your research who would like to be a partner? i.e. another TSO or make a consortium of TSOs



Is your research a manageable size? i.e. could you do an initial pilot on a smaller scale as a stepping stone to a bigger project?

Increasing your odds - how to increase the likelihood of securing funding

There are many different places to go for funding and different types of funding to consider. There are some things that will feel impossible but keep in mind that it can happen and have good outcomes. There are ways of increasing your success!



TSOs are more likely to be successful in being funded when they:

- ✓ Work with their academic partner on the funding bid - Your academic partner(s) are more likely to know where, and how to get funding (and may be more experienced than you are). Some funding sources are only available to academic institutions
- ✓ Obtain funding from different sources (don't just rely on one funder).



Learn about research funding and funders

- ✓ Do your research – identify academics/researchers who are specialising in your area/interest
- ✓ Find out about funders who fund collaborative research
- ✓ Be proactive – network to develop and maintain relationships with academics (some funding information is only circulated within academic institutions)
- ✓ Keep informed - sign up to newsletters and alerts from government, academic institutions and third sector organisations in your field
- ✓ Attend networking opportunities and conferences
- ✓ Look out for calls for proposals.



Be prepared

- ✓ Have your “ask” ready in a clear pitch
- ✓ Watch out for opportunities and be ready to act when necessary!
- ✓ Be flexible – for example, you may need to pilot an innovation to provide evidence of concept and partnership initially
- ✓ Be enthusiastic and energetic to drive a project and be persistent.



Communicate

- ✓ Don't be scared to start the conversation - be prepared to say what you want
- ✓ Keep in touch with previous research partners (even when there seems little to say)
- ✓ Speak to your non-research funder/s – they may know someone else who may be able to fund your research even if they can't
- ✓ Use social media such as Twitter to reach and follow researchers and funding bodies interested in your field/issues
- ✓ Spread the word. Tell people what you are looking for!



Develop and maintain good relationships with academics and funders

- Know how to be good collaborative partners and how to build a good relationship based on shared values and a mutual commitment to the work.
- Enlist academics onto your Boards, on Project Steering Groups or Advisory Groups, or in other voluntary roles.
- Consider whether to offer volunteering opportunities to students
- Consider the merits of secondment (outward or inward) with academic partners.

More guidance about working on collaborative research can be found in the Knowledge Translation Network's free to download resource '**Collaborating with Academics**'



“I knew partners already through previous work for different reasons. Having existing links made it easier and critical. Academics aren't always good at that. Attending conferences and workshops can be helpful! [...] Get out and meet people, network! New connections and ideas could lead to future collaborations!” Alasdair Rutherford, Stirling University (Let's collaborate 2014)

Sources of funding and support

Support for collaborative research can come in the form of funding or in-kind support.

Monetary sources

- **Research Councils**

One of the main ways of funding research in the UK is through the seven research councils.

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) is the overarching funding body for all seven research councils:

[Arts and Humanities Research Council \(AHRC\)](#)

[Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council \(BBSRC\)](#)

[Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council \(EPSRC\)](#)

[Economic and Social Research Council \(ESRC\)](#)

[Medical Research Council \(MRC\)](#)

[Natural Environment Research Council \(NERC\)](#)

[Science and Technology Facilities Council \(STFC\)](#)

Although research councils can grant funding to TSOs the reality is that this is limited, highly competitive and difficult to obtain. Applying to research councils is a lengthy process requiring specific research skills which many TSOs do not have in-house. In addition, to apply alone TSOs need to qualify as an Independent Research Organisation. This means most TSOs need to work in partnership with universities or other research organisations to obtain funding from research councils.

It is hard to find out the extent of research council funding awarded to third sector when collaborating with academics as this information is not publicly available. Furthermore, the conditions of research council grants limit the amount of funding that can be given to a TSO partner (maximum 30% of grant) although academics can make a special case to increase this.

Specific funds

Research councils manage specific funds. Specific funds may be more interesting to TSOs in particular fields. For example, **Global Challenges Research Fund** addresses the challenges faced by developing countries.

Knowledge exchange activities are funded through **'Impact Acceleration Accounts' (IAA)** which are held by 24 universities listed on ESRC website¹, two are in Scotland: [University of Edinburgh](#) , [University of Glasgow](#). IAA funding is

¹ <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/funding-opportunities/impact-acceleration-accounts/>

for projects conducted with research user partners, aiming at generating benefits to society and the economy from research.



Examples of third sector organisations working with the University of Edinburgh funded through IAA are: ASH, Young Enterprise Scotland, SSPCA, Girl Guiding, Chest, Heart and Stroke, Children in Scotland.

Understanding Society-UK Household study

Another example, third sector organisations can apply to [Understanding Society – the UK longitudinal household study](#) to share knowledge and skills.

Understanding Society invites innovative research ideas from third sector organisations that help further their mission and drive social change through the development of a research base to inform policy, support social innovation or improve services. This research is funded by ESRC.

- **Independent charity funders**

Fund research

For example, [Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#) (JRF) and [The Rowntree Charitable Trust](#).



An example of collaborative research funded by JRF is [The Homelessness Monitor 2015: Scotland](#) which is jointly funded by Crisis and JRF.

Fund services and research

Some independent grant makers who mainly fund projects and service delivery sometimes fund research, such as, National Lottery Community Fund and The Robertson Trust.



For example, in 2013 the National Lottery Community Fund (previously called Big Lottery Fund) funded a partnership between the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships (CRFR), Capability Scotland and Parenting across Scotland called About Families <http://www.crfr.ac.uk/projects/current-projects/about-families/>

- **UK or Scottish Government funding**
For example, public bodies that administer funding on behalf of Scottish Government, such as Creative Scotland, Scottish Enterprise R&D innovation scheme, local authorities.
- **Universities**
Some researchers will have access to apply to their university for small amounts of funding i.e. specific internal grants.
- **Other bodies** such as [Scottish Universities Insight Institute](#) (SUII) supports programmes of knowledge exchange.

Non-financial schemes which support research in kind

- University Studentships (research placements)
- University Internships e.g. Q-step
- University Knowledge Translation partnerships
- Government schemes e.g. Scottish Government's Analytical Exchange

University studentships and internships

These are schemes which support university students to work with others. Undergraduate and Postgraduate students (studying for First degrees, Masters or PhD degrees) are required to write a dissertation towards the end of their period of study. This can be a good and mutually beneficial way to get a research question answered or a project piloted to collect evidence of efficacy for further funding.

[The Scottish Graduate School for Arts and Humanities](#) and the [Scottish Social Sciences Graduate School](#) fund studentships and internships.

See next page for tips about how to learn more about studentships and internships.



Studentships and internships are restricted to certain times so beware of the student's timetable.

The TSO may be required to accommodate the student so be prepared to offer desk space and in-house support which may take a substantial amount of time.

Some things to be aware of:

- Sometimes a PhD can start with one focus and end up with another.
- Sometimes a TSO provides an additional supervisor for the PhD student, which is a big time commitment.
- The findings of the research are what they are and the TSO can't expect to edit/manage the outcomes even if they don't welcome the findings. (This, of course, applies to all research).

Calls for proposals

At times funders and researchers put out calls for research proposals or papers for conferences.



An example is [Scottish Civil Society Data Partnership](#), an ESRC-funded collaboration between Scottish Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) and Universities of Stirling and St Andrews. They advertised studentships to work on this project.

University support

Research and innovation services within individual universities are points of contact for research brokerage.

Research Offices

Getting to know who to contact in a university can be challenging but each university has a central research office with research officers who can be a useful source of knowledge and can signpost you to academic researchers and their areas of research expertise. In addition, some universities have a Research Office webpage for each Faculty or School.

Most universities are keen to find hosts for work placements for their students. You might be able to use a work placement as an opportunity for a student to help you with some research. Contact your local university/ies to find out more.

Spin-off companies

Some universities have enterprise companies within faculties/colleges and schools. For example, the University of Edinburgh has a commercialisation service called [Edinburgh Innovations](#).

“Edinburgh Innovations proactively engages with companies and organisations to ensure they can access the right expertise at the University quickly and efficiently throughout an innovation project.”

“Collaborative research projects are an ideal way for a company to access expertise at the University of Edinburgh and create partnerships.” (University of Edinburgh website 13.5.19)

Universities also have teams that deal with research consultancy if you are seeking to commission research.

University Knowledge Translation partnerships

University schemes, such as, [The Knowledge Exchange Fellowship](#) at University of Edinburgh, connect people in public, private and third sector organisations, and self-employed freelancers, with academics to work on projects of mutual interest.

The Knowledge Exchange Fellowship scheme

Knowledge Exchange Fellows undertake a variety of projects such as: research, organising an event to link research to policy or practice, building a network or developing a training course. The scheme offers you the opportunity to work with an academic mentor and access to University resources.

Other sources of support

Scottish Government - The Analytical Exchange programme

The [Analytical Exchange programme](#) provides development opportunities for analysts working in Scottish Government, as well as providing some needed support to organisations. Third sector organisations can apply for short term support from a government researcher.

Brokers

There are organisations that have a broker role supporting academic and TSOs collaborative research, such as, [Interface](#) and [Social Value Lab](#).

Interface has a special Innovation Voucher Scheme. This is a £5k grant to facilitate the first interaction between university and a partner to take forward an innovation idea. This is usually taken up by private sector, but third sector can apply. Funding comes from the [Scottish Funding Council](#) and is managed by Interface.



- Think about others who might be able to help
- Organisations such as Interface and Social Value Lab may be able to introduce you to partners who have funding or can help you get funding.

A list of funders and government schemes is on the [‘Finding an academic for your third sector research’](#) page in Third Sector Research Forum section on ESS website.

References and useful publications

Third Sector Research Forum (2017) Who funds third sector to undertake collaborative research with academics?

Knowledge Translation Network (2017) Evidence from Elsewhere: Gathering, analysing and using other people's evidence

Interaction (2016) How can academics and the third sector work together to influence policy and practice? Professor Mark Shucksmith OBE, Carnegie Fellow, https://d1ssu070pg2v9i.cloudfront.net/pex/carnegie_uk_trust/2016/04/LOW-RES-2578-Carnegie-Interaction.pdf

Reports from TSRF Let's collaborate events
www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk

NIHR Involve – National standards for public involvement

ESRC <http://www.esrc.ac.uk>

Call for case studies – We would like to add some case study examples to this publication. Please contact ESS to tell us about your experiences in getting funding for collaborative research.

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