

JUST Centre Commissioning Fund

Goal of the fund

The Centre for Joined Up Sustainability Transformations ([JUST Centre](#)) Commissioning Fund will support projects which are in line with the mission of the JUST Centre. The JUST Centre is focused on the pursuit of sustainability transformations that are people-centred, joined-up and socially just. Our research seeks to investigate:

- **What works, when, where and for whom** - and what could work - to facilitate the development and implementation of joined-up interventions for a just transition to low-carbon living?
- **How, where and with whose participation** can sustainability transformations be accelerated – in ways that combine sustainability with justice – for citizens in places that benefit least from dominant economic and political systems?
- **What lessons** for just sustainability transformations can governments, businesses, and communities learn from place-based, co-produced action research?

In line with these overall goals, the objective of the JUST Centre commissioning fund is to fund projects that are designed to produce new knowledge regarding how the joining up of climate action with the pursuit of social justice enables the acceleration of sustainability transformations in the UK.

Funded projects will carry out research in the UK that is focused on initiatives that seek to support low-carbon living, and which generates novel insights about ‘what works, or might work, where, when and for whom’ in those initiatives. They will:

- involve working with partners in communities, local government, and/or businesses, to co-produce research outcomes and impacts;
- be guided by the JUST Centre’s EDI policy both regarding the research team and relations with participants;
- be expected to engage with one or more of the JUST Centre’s Thematic Working and Innovation Groups ([TWIGS](#))¹, and if appropriate the [Practice Builders’ Network](#), to connect their project more widely to JUST Centre research and impact activity;
- develop research capacity, including research leadership capacity, among project team members and partners;
- be required to report to JUST every six months on their research activities in line with JUST’s obligations to UKRI.

¹ These are: Democratic Innovations; Methodological Innovations; Policy, Governance, and Change; Principles of Justice; Social and Built Infrastructures; and Social and Solidarity Economies.

We particularly encourage projects on the following themes, within the overall context of the JUST Centre research agenda:

- Rural economies
- Biodiversity and nature
- Jobs and skills
- Race, ethnicity and justice
- Storytelling and journalism

We intend to fund a mix of projects both within and outside the core JUST Centre study regions.² The research funded by projects must be focused on the UK, although ones that draw on research from outside the UK and develop international collaborations are welcome. We also encourage Early Career Researchers (ECRs) in particular to apply.

Project teams would be expected to acknowledge the JUST Centre (and by extension ESRC/UKRI) funding in outputs, and to provide a project summary for the JUST website.

What we will fund

The overall budget for the commissioning fund is £500k. We are looking to fund projects of between £10k and £50k. Following standard ESRC policy, projects will be located in the social sciences (at least 50% of the research focus and effort), and funding will be provided at 80% FEC, except where funding Project Co-Leads at 100% complies with ESRC funding policies.³ Applicants should budget to pay community participants in line with [JUST Centre policy](#). We will fund projects that last between six months and two years.

Funding will be provided principally for primary data collection and analysis, in line with the objective of the fund in generating novel evidence. This will include salary costs for Project Leads, Co-Leads, and research assistants/associates as appropriate for the scale of the overall budget, and costs for fieldwork (travel, subsistence, participant payments). Funding can also be requested for impact and communications work in line with the logic of the proposed project, although applications should also recognise that they will be encouraged to engage with the JUST Centre's impact and communications capacity. We will not fund systematic literature reviews or research synthesis.

Who can apply

Project Leads must be from institutions [eligible for ESRC funding](#) and on contracts able to manage ESRC-funded projects. Project Co-Leads may be from non-academic

² These are: Greater Manchester, Merseyside, the North East (Combined Authority area), West Yorkshire, and West Cumbria.

³ See <https://www.ukri.org/publications/ukri-project-co-lead-international/ukri-project-co-lead-international-policy/>, and <https://www.ukri.org/publications/including-project-co-leads-from-business-third-sector-or-government-bodies/>.

institutions although the percentage of an overall budget that can be allocated to such institutions is limited to 30% of the overall cost of the grant in line with ESRC policy.⁴ Projects will need to include partners from communities, local government, and/or business, in the design of the project and in the plan for impact.

We will favour projects led by ECRs, defined as within 7 years of PhD completion, allowing for appropriate career breaks (e.g. parental or other caring leave, work outside academia), as part of the objective of building research capacity.

Selection process

The application process will consist of a single application stage. They will be evaluated and selected through the following process:

- Applications will first be screened by JUST for their eligibility under the fund and ESRC funding policy.
- They will then be each evaluated by two members of the JUST Centre team, who will score according to our criteria (see below) and agree a score as well as provide *brief* feedback for applicants. One of the people scoring will be from the TWIG that the applicant has indicated they see their project connecting to. Evaluations will not be blind: scorers will know the names of applicants.
- The fund management board ('the board') will be responsible for deciding which applications to approve for funding. Based on the scores, each application will be read and introduced to the board discussion by two members by the board. The board will be composed of:
 - one member of the JUST leadership team,
 - three members of the JUST Centre International Academic Critical Friends Group,
 - one team member from the Young Foundation, and
 - two other JUST Centre members.

The JUST Centre team will liaise with successful applicants to ensure the project plan is integrated effectively into JUST Centre objectives. Awards will be conditional on engaging with the Centre in this process to enable this effective integration.

Criteria for project evaluation

Applications will be scored according to:

- The strength of the fit with the JUST research agenda

⁴ 'Combined costs for project co-leads (international) not on the OECD DAC list (plus any organisations in India and China), and project co-leads from UK business, third sector or government organisations, on an application cannot be more than 30% of the total full economic cost'.

<https://www.ukri.org/publications/including-project-co-leads-from-business-third-sector-or-government-bodies/>, p4.

- the focus on *either*:
 - a theme identified in the call as of particular interest (Rural economies; Biodiversity and nature; Jobs and skills; Race, ethnicity and justice; or Storytelling and journalism), *and/or*
 - a geographical area of the UK outside the five study areas of the JUST Centre: (Greater Manchester, Merseyside, The North East, West Cumbria, or West Yorkshire)
- originality, ambition, methodological rigour, capacity and career development (the last of these including for non-academic partners)
- intended outputs, impacts and outcomes
- how well the project has been co-developed with project partners
- adherence to JUST [sustainability](#) and [JEDI policies](#)
- engagement with one or more of the [JUST thematic areas](#) and/or the [Centre's practice builders network](#).
- resources and cost justification
- measures for evaluating success

The fund management board will then use a portfolio approach to make awards. The scoring process will be used to generate a shortlist of the strongest applications. The board will select the applications to fund from this shortlist, taking into account:

- the need to fund projects that reflect a breadth of thematic and geographic areas
- JUST EDI principles
- the desire to favour applications by ECRs.

How to apply

Applications should be submitted via the [Flexigrant portal](#). A copy of the form to help plan is [here](#).

The application will include:

- Project Lead (PL) details.
- List of Project Co-Leads (PCL), their email addresses, and their organisations.
- List of project partners – individuals, their email addresses, and their organisations.
- Description of the project, including its goals, methods, expected research outcomes, measures to evaluate success, and data management/availability. Please make clear how your project will build on and extend existing literature and key debates, and how it articulates with the goals of the JUST Centre.
- Summary of your experience in your past research on justice in sustainability transformations.
- Please describe the types of impact your proposed research is expected to achieve and how you intend to realise them. This could include contributions to policy,

practice, or citizen engagement. Outline key mechanisms, partnerships, or engagement strategies you will use to maximise the impact.

- Please outline what you will bring to JUST’s research community if your project is approved, including which Thematic Working and Innovation Group(s) and/or Place team(s) you would envisage working with.
- Please outline how you have employed principles of equality, diversity, inclusion and intersectionality in the proposed research/team setup and any specific objectives planned with respect to EDI.
- Timeline of proposed project (maximum two years). Include consideration of research ethics and contracts.
- Budget details. Include travel and accommodation costs to attend a minimum of two JUST Centre meetings per year (assume in Manchester). Note, we will not fund PL salary costs, or PCL costs except for those in community partner organisations.

Ethics

Project leads will be responsible for securing ethical approval for their research within their own home institution, as well as ensuring it complies with broader ethical guidance from the JUST Centre.

EDI

All projects will be expected to abide by general EDI principles but also specifically be guided by the JUST Centre’s principles which can be found here, and which follow the guidance developed by ACCESS - <https://accessnetwork.uk/guiding-principles/>.

Timeline for applications

Call for applications	3 rd July
Application deadline	15 th September
Application decision	30 th October
Contract arrangements/liasing to integrate with JUST Centre	15 th December
Start of projects	April 2027

Enquiries about the fund should be addressed to: Just-fund@manchester.ac.uk. Please see also the FAQ page on the JUST Centre website.