



# Data Empowered Societies Small Grants Call 2024–2025

Deadline for applications: 17.30 GMT on 14 March 2025



## The Grand Challenge of Data Empowered Societies

Data is transforming our daily life; medicine and healthcare is being transformed, climate modelling is advancing, the way humans live, work and learn are all being transformed through new forms of data measurement, sharing, analysis and decision making. However, rapid advances can leave parts of society behind due to issues like machine bias and exclusion.

The new Grand Challenge of Data Empowered Societies (GCDES) at UCL has a vision of a 'data empowered society' in which these advances enrich our society and enable us to make informed, inclusive decisions about technological advances.

DES aims to harness the power of data to address pressing societal issues, promote ethical data practices, and foster interdisciplinary collaboration. UCL emphasises the importance of diversity and community involvement in data-driven decision-making, aiming to create innovative solutions and educational approaches that can transform society.

The [Pro-Vice-Provosts for Data Empowered Societies](#), Professors Alison Littlejohn and James Hetherington, discuss their vision for creating a data empowered society in [Building a Data-Empowered Society: UCL's Vision for Inclusive Innovation and Transformation](#).

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## About the Small Grants Call

This call is offering small grants of up to £10,000 for research-informed, societally relevant, interdisciplinary projects that explore opportunities of a data empowered society and the challenges to achieving it. These grants aim to foster grass-roots cooperation between different parts of UCL, leveraging the university's diversity to gain novel insights and impacts within the research community and wider society.

This call aims to support the UCL community to make new links, test out new ideas and try out novel approaches. We are looking for collaborations that combine the viewpoints and approaches from different experts at UCL to come up with new ways of approaching the challenges and opportunities in a data empowered society.

The DES PVPs have outlined four sub-themes for the programme:

1. Knowing and Deciding in a Data Empowered Society
2. Embodied Data
3. Data and the Lived Experience
4. Data Empowered University

You can read more about the themes in the [Building a Data-Empowered Society blog](#).

The sub-themes are included as a guide to the thinking behind this Grand Challenge theme. This is an open call and you can address any aspect of data empowered societies.

For this call there is no restriction on the number and type of output your project can produce, including grant applications, published papers, new teaching material and courses, public events and exhibitions and new or enhanced collaborations.

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## Interdisciplinary Approach

Grand Challenges supports collaborations that cross disciplinary boundaries. The aim is to leverage UCL's diversity to gain novel insights, and impacts, for the research community and wider society. We are looking for proposals that include at least two people from different parts of the university: different faculties and/or different professional services offices.

Where it is possible and assists in delivering the project, you are encouraged to expand the collaboration beyond the first and second applicants, bringing in additional UCL expertise, other universities, businesses, charities, policy makers and community groups and others as appropriate

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## Funding

Applications for projects/activities costing up to £10,000 will be considered under this call. In total, up to 15 projects will be awarded.

Awards will be transferred to an account in the first applicant's department or centre. Funding must be spent by **31st July 2025** – any unspent funds will be returned to UCL Finance at the end of the grant, it does not return to the Grand Challenges.

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## Eligibility Criteria and Award Conditions

- 1) Proposals must have a strong relevance to [Data Empowered Societies](#).
- 2) Eligible collaborations must include a **First** and **Second** applicant.  
*First and Second Applicants are regarded as equal, co-leaders, of the project. The only difference from the Grand Challenges point of view is that if an application is successful, **First Applicants** will receive the funding from the Grand Challenges and must create a new PTA account in their department to receive it.*

- 3) The **First Applicant** must be a **UCL member of staff** (academic or professional services).
- 4) The **First Applicant's** status and period of employment at UCL must enable him or her to receive funding from the Grand Challenges that can be administered by their department.
- 5) We warmly welcome proposals initiated, written and led in spirit by **doctoral students** and **postdoctoral researchers**. In these cases, their supervisor (or another academic) must be the **First Applicant** procedurally, to guarantee the project and receive the funding. The student or postdoc should identify themselves as the **Second Applicant**. This will provide the opportunity to develop project proposal and leadership skills on an interdisciplinary project.
- 6) This is a call for interdisciplinary proposals so the **Second Applicant** must represent expertise from a different area of UCL—For the purposes of this call, the Second Applicant **must** come from a **different** [academic faculty](#) or [professional services office](#) than the First Applicant.  
***N.B.** Applications where the first and second applicant come from the same UCL faculty or PS office will not be funded.*
- 7) You are encouraged to include relevant **additional collaborators**. There is no limit to the number of additional collaborators.
  - a) UCL staff (Academic or Professional Services)
  - b) Students (undergraduate or postgraduate)
  - c) Academic staff at another university in the UK or overseas
  - d) External partners drawn from third sector organisations (e.g. community-based organisations), policy think tanks, industry, or business
  - e) Staff of a non-academic organisation in the UK or overseas
- 8) Research assistant employment costs are admissible
- 9) Costs for specific permanent UCL staff members providing technical support or professional services are admissible, making it possible to buy services from UCL units, like Advanced Research Computing, that operate on a cost recovery basis. This should include strong justification for the service provided.
- 10) Teaching buy-out for contracted UCL staff members is not included
- 11) All the costs associated with the proposal must be paid by **31 July 2025**.
- 12) We do not offer detailed individual feedback on unsuccessful applications.
- 13) Successful applicants will be expected to submit a brief report of all expenditures alongside an [Impact Report](#) in **November 2025**.
- 14) Successful applicants will be expected to acknowledge the support that they have received from Grand Challenges in promotional materials related to the supported activities, and in attributable publications.
- 15) If you have a [UCL profile](#), you should ensure that it is fully completed and up to date

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## How to Apply

1. Read the full guidance and eligibility criteria (shown above) for the call
2. Please download and complete [the application form](#) with your project partners
3. Upload the completed application using [this online form](#)

This guidance, the application form and a link to the online can be found on [the Grand Challenges funding page](#).