

UCL Grand Challenges

2021-22 Special Initiatives



SDGs: Pathways to Achievement

Joint call from Grand Challenges, UCL SDGs Initiative, and Global Engagement

Deadline for applications: 23:59, 9th January 2022

In the summer of 2023, the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will reach the halfway point of a 15-year programme focused on the achievement of 17 globally important goals ([the SDGs](#)) and 169 associated targets. The SDGs were conceived as a set of interlinked and interdependent ambitions, with targets that aim to promote prosperity while protecting the environment. The goals recognise that climate change, inequality, health, poverty, hunger, rapid urbanisation, biodiversity loss and degradation of the natural environment are not discrete and separable concerns.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has brought into stark relief the interdependencies that make achievement of the SDGs essential over the remaining nine years of the UN's 2030 Agenda – now one year further on from the [UN leaders' reality check statement in September 2020](#). Participants at the 2021 UN Climate Change Conference, the COP26 meeting in Glasgow, committed to enhanced ambition to mitigate climate change (defined by targets in SDG 13, Climate Action). While it does not go far enough to achieve the COP26 long-stated goal of limiting global warming to 1.5C, the Glasgow Climate Pact is the first ever climate deal to explicitly plan to reduce coal, the worst fossil fuel for greenhouse gases, and a commitment to greater inclusion of indigenous communities in the UN climate convention process. Ultimately, the achievement of all the SDGs, including SDG 13, depends on implementation of international agreements, but progress in discussions towards such agreements is absolutely dependent on findings from high-quality, peer-reviewed research.

The [Beyond Boundaries: Realising the UN Sustainable Development Goals virtual conference](#), held in October 2020 by UCL [Grand Challenges](#) (GC) in partnership with UCL [Global Engagement](#) (GE), showed how UCL is tackling the UN's global challenges through research strengthened by cross-disciplinary interaction and global collaboration.

After Beyond Boundaries, GC and GE announced a special SDGs initiative. [Awards made following the first SDGs: Pathways to Achievement call \(for work in academic year 2020-21\)](#) explored diverse opportunities to facilitate progress towards the goals, including policy toolkits, connecting communities, shared agendas between goals, wellbeing and infrastructure development, public health policies and healthcare, removing language barriers, the global impact of food choices. Without doubt, accelerated progress towards SDG targets needs the insights gained from academic research, including from activities co-created and co-produced in partnership with civil society and other non-academic collaborators.

Now, in partnership with the [UCL SDGs Initiative](#) (SDGI, established in 2020–21 in the lead-up to Beyond Boundaries) UCL Grand Challenges and UCL Global Engagement are offering a second opportunity for UCL-based researchers to secure support for research-related activities designed to hasten progress towards the achievement of the SDGs.

OUR PROVOCATION

The 17 SDGs and their 169 targets interact and blur beyond sectoral, disciplinary or geographical boundaries with multiple interdependencies. In their 2015 book, *Thinking Beyond Sectors for Sustainable Development*, Jeff Waage et al proposed a framework for classifying and clustering goals and their interactions, as a means to identify different problems and potential solutions. Applicants to this call are encouraged to submit proposals that address the positive and negative interactions between goals at [Waage's](#) three levels, grouped by intended outcomes: **Wellbeing** (SDGs 1, 3, 4, 5, 10, 16); **Infrastructure** (SDGs 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12) and **Natural Environment** (SDGs 13, 14, 15). [NB Goal 17, 'Partnerships for the Goals', cutting across all three levels and geographical locations, was highlighted in the Beyond Boundaries conference as a key factor in interventions designed to produce target success in the goals.] The initiative also encourages attention to target attainment at one of three exemplar geographical scales: **Local/London**, **National/UK**, or **Global**.

Outputs and further outcomes of projects supported by last year's SDGs: *Pathways to Achievement* awards, and resulting from projects funded through this year's call, might be appropriate to showcase at UCL's next SDGs conference, '*Beyond Boundaries 2*'. BB2 is planned to coincide with the half-way point of the UN Agenda 2030, in 2023 (Spring or Summer term, TBC); the organising committee will contact awardees after the format of the event has been finalised.

FUNDING

Applications for projects **costing up to £10,000 will be considered**. The total allocation of funds for this scheme is £30,000, but will be increased if GC and GE budgets permit.

Grants can support cross-disciplinary and cross-boundary projects and activities that generate societal impacts leading to published reports, including, but not limited to:

- Research or policy workshops, symposia or conferences
- Articles or comment pieces in peer publications or media channels
- Preparatory or exploratory research towards larger grant applications
- Public and community engagement activities
- Videos and reports focused on policy or teaching curriculum development
- Research-led performance/public art-based outputs, including documentary films

The UCL fiscal year-end is 31 July. All expenses must be invoiced by that date, with costed activities completed by 22 July 2022. Use of awarded funds cannot be deferred to a later date.

Allowable costs include payment for part-time Research Assistants. Please note, however, that the following items are not fundable under Grand Challenges schemes:

- Activities that will incur costs after 31 July 2022
- Equipment costs
- Studies in basic science or research that is exclusively lab-based
- Article processing costs (publication fees)
- Staff 'buy-out', maintenance fees or bench fees

ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS

First Applicants must be UCL-based researchers holding academic positions or postdoctoral appointments in academic Faculties. [NB Doctoral students are not eligible to stand as lead applicants but can be paid project research assistants].

Second Applicants can be either UCL staff (researchers in an academic Faculty different from the First Applicant or from a Professional Services department) or external partners – either academic (i.e., at another university in the UK or overseas) or non-academic (e.g. at a Local Authority, NGO, community or business organization).

ADDITIONAL COLLABORATORS

These can be from within, or external to UCL. We strongly welcome and encourage external partners, including third sector organisations, policy, think tanks, industry, and charities whose expertise and missions focus on societal impact. If not standing as ‘Second Applicants’ they can be shown as ‘Additional Collaborators’.

ASSESSMENT OF APPLICATIONS AND NOTIFICATION OF DECISIONS

Applications will be assessed by panels comprising members of Grand Challenges Working Groups from UCL Academic and Professional Services departments, and members of the Grand Challenges and Global Engagement teams. The scoring criteria will include:

- Quality of the application and originality of topic and/or approach
- Cross-disciplinary and cross-boundary (academia to civil society) strengths of the collaborating Applicants and any external partners
- Societal relevance and potential to deliver significant positive impact
- Extent to which the proposed activities can be delivered within the timeframe and budget

Funding decisions will be announced between late January and mid-February 2022, to enable access to awarded funds between 1 March and 31 July 2022.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

By submitting this form, applicants indicate their agreement if successful to:

- Provide a short report to GC, GE and SDGI by 30 November 2022 describing activities, outputs, and impact to-date
- Permit GC, GE and SDGI to publicise the immediate, medium, and long-term outcomes attributable to funded projects.
- Acknowledge UCL Grand Challenges and Global Engagement support in publications or external communications, using GC’s visual identity guidance, and with advice from the GE Communications Officer, Jinnie Chua (j.chua@ucl.ac.uk)

To submit your application, please fill the application form and submit it via the [online platform](#).

Please direct questions or queries to Sophie Mepham (sophie.mepham@ucl.ac.uk) or Dr James Paskins (j.paskins@ucl.ac.uk).