



COLLABORATORY
Research Hub

Guidance for Teams Submitting PhD Project Proposals

Collaboratory
Leicestershire & Rutland
ROUND 2

Research Project Co-Creation 2025-26



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1. KEY INFORMATION

All project proposal submissions must be received through our [online proposal submission form](#). There is one form for Research Placement projects and one for PhD projects.

We cannot accept any submissions by email or any other format. Any proposals sent by email will not be considered.

- While development of all Collaboratory project proposals should be a collaborative effort between academic and community partners, it is strongly recommended that an academic team member completes the proposal submission form. This is because we ask for some institutional specific information that community partners will not know.
- The online form allows you to save your progress and return at a later date.
- An offline copy of the proposal form questions is available to download from our website. This is for planning purposes only.
- Please be aware of minimum and maximum word counts.
- All word limits include citations.

Peer Reviews:

Each proposal [must be submitted with 2 complete peer reviews](#). Peer reviewers should have expertise in an area relevant to the proposed research project, and where possible, expertise in participatory action/community engaged research.

Peer reviewers can be academic colleagues from any higher education institution with relevant expertise. We strongly recommended that colleagues from either UoL, DMU, or LU are approached in the first instance as they will likely be more familiar with local community contexts and the requirements of Collaboratory's programme.

It is the responsibility of the academic members of the proposal team to contact their own peer reviewers and include their responses as part of a complete submission. Our peer reviewer form can be [downloaded from our website](#).

DEADLINE:

Proposals must be submitted by 11:59pm Wednesday 10 September 2025

Submission forms will automatically close after the deadline.

All project teams will be notified of outcomes by 26 September 2025.

2. OVERVIEW OF COLLABORATORY PHD STUDENTSHIPS

Collaboratory's PhD Research projects are an integral part of our work to create a comprehensive cycle of community engaged research. The Collaboratory programme has been developed based on the principles of responsible, community engaged research, and the latest evidence and best practice in inclusive research approaches.

As a place-based research programme, we are looking for proposals which embody the values of the project and seek to deliver meaningful change for Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland communities by addressing locally relevant challenges through rigorous, collaborative research

Collaboratory seeks to remove structural barriers, making research degrees more inclusive and accessible to strong, promising local candidates who otherwise may be excluded from traditional routes into PhD study. Furthermore, this approach also aims to support the growth of more equitable, meaningful partnerships between Leicestershire researchers and local community-focused organisations.

Our cohort-based PhD studentship scheme is a pioneering initiative developed through many hours of specialist insight and support. Each project and its candidate represents an investment of approximately £120,000 by Collaboratory.



3. FUNDING OVERVIEW

All PhD studentships are 3-year-long, fully funded, full-time programmes (plus a 4th, unfunded, thesis-pending year). We cannot offer part-time study due to funding limitations.

Conditions of Funding

- Proposals selected for funding will open to applications from prospective candidates in Autumn 2025, with successful candidates commencing on 30 March 2026 (April intake).
- Funding/candidate start dates cannot be deferred.
- All supervisory team members are expected to engage fully with Collaboratory's inclusive recruitment approach.
- All candidates will be required to engage fully with Collaboratory's unique training and development programme, as a condition of funding.
- All supervisory team members must attend a mandatory, 1-day induction with their candidate. This will take place on Thursday 16 April 2026.
- Collaboratory is more than just PhD funder. It is a specific programme that is developing a unique, inclusive, and community-engaged approach to PhD research. Supervisors will be required to encourage and support their candidates full engagement with the Collaboratory programme throughout their PhD.
- Continued disengagement with the Collaboratory programme or refusal to cooperate with mandatory Collaboratory processes may result in the withdrawal of our funding offer.

Collaboratory PhD Offering

All successful Collaboratory PhD projects receive the following funding:

- All PhD candidates receive the UKRI basic stipend paid monthly, in arrears.
- Full payment of tuition fees.
- Purchase of a laptop for the candidate up to the value of £1400.
- A Research Training and Support Grant of £500 per year (£1,500 total). This is to be used towards the candidate's specialist training and development, and research consumables such as participation incentives, etc.
- Support payments of £50 per half day for Community Supervisors to support their attendance at essential events such as shortlisting, interviews, induction, and regular project meetings.
- PhD candidates receive full access to both partner universities.
- Candidates benefit from extensive support and training developed and delivered by the Collaboratory team, and researcher development teams at UoL, DMU, and LU.
- Candidates will take part in our Championing Engaged Research training module, created in partnership with the [National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement](#), which aims to develop our researchers into future leaders of community-engaged research.

NOTE: Any project costs in excess of the funding outlined above must be sourced by the project team. Details of any additional funding requirements must be detailed in the proposal submission form.

4. SUPERVISORY TEAM REQUIREMENTS

All PhD project supervisory teams require the following named partners, as a minimum:

A lead Academic Supervisor

An Academic Co-supervisor

Community Supervisor

At least 1 member of a Leicestershire or Rutland based organisation which works with one or more, defined, Leicestershire or Rutland communities.

As a minimum, each supervisory team must have an academic lead and co-supervisor from any two different Leics universities.

- Community Supervisory partners must hold an active, formal position with a Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland based organisation. This can be paid employment or a voluntary position. Management and supervision experience is not a necessary prerequisite for involvement.
- Community-focused organisations based/operating outside of Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland may only be named as additional partners but cannot be named as a primary Community Supervisor.
- The role of a Community Supervisor is to provide insight and guidance to the candidate based on their real-world, professional expertise and experience working with relevant communities. They can also provide access to defined communities, data, resources, etc., where relevant.
- Up to 1 additional Community Supervisor may be named on the proposal, if relevant to the needs of the project.
- Up to 1 additional Academic Co-Supervisor from each institution may be named on the proposal, if relevant to the needs of the project.
- Named academic supervisors MUST meet their local institutional and departmental supervision regulations. This is non-negotiable.
 - This must be confirmed prior to proposal submission.
 - The eligibility of named academics to take on a new PGR supervision will be checked against local records. If any named academic supervisor on a proposal is not eligible to take on a supervision, the proposal will not be considered.
- Named academic supervisors must receive approval from their line manager in order to be awarded Collaboratory funding for a PhD or Research Placement.

5. WHAT ARE WE LOOKING FOR IN A PHD RESEARCH PROJECT PROPOSAL?

Project Focus

- Proposals can be based in any academic discipline. The core requirement is that every project must seek to address one or more defined local challenges relevant to one or more defined Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland communities.
- Each proposal must be of appropriate scope for a full, PhD-level research project.
- Projects must have a legitimate academic and community basis.

We strongly recommend that teams interested in submitting a project proposal explore the profiles of our previous and current PhD research projects to understand the nature and scope of the work we will fund. Each project profile also includes a link to our candidate profiles which allow you to learn more about the kind of people we recruit.

[Explore Our PhD Project Profiles](#)

How will proposals be assessed?

All proposals will be assessed by a panel comprising members of the Collaboratory team, academic researchers from UoL, DMU, and LY, as well as members of local community-focused organisations. All proposed will be assessed against the following criteria:

Community Basis | Academic Basis | Potential for Impact | Supervisory Team

Community Basis

- Proposals must have a clear and well-informed grounding in the needs and challenges of one or more defined Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland communities. We are looking to fund research centred around the nuances of local people and challenges, rather than research that could be carried out anyway and just happens to be set in Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland.
- The local challenge(s) which the project seeks to address should be informed by the experience of local communities and/or the practice and experience of the community partner.
- Proposals must address one or more 2025-26 Community Priorities for Research ([see Section 6. Local Priorities for Research](#)).
- The community context underpinning the proposal should be made explicit. In the interest of fairness, proposals where the connections to community need are assumed or implicit will not be considered.

Academic Basis

- Proposals must demonstrate a strong academic basis for the proposed research project, making it clear how the work intends to make a novel contribution to one or more academic fields.
- Projects must provide an academically robust justification for the proposed methods, and approaches.
- Sufficient detail about the proposed methods and any community-engaged approaches must be provided for their suitability to be judged in relation to the project's rationale, aims, and make-up of the supervisory team.

Potential for Impact

- Projects must explicitly demonstrate a strong potential for the proposed research to deliver genuine, relevant, and meaningful impact to one or more defined Leicestershire and/or Rutland communities.
- The potential impact of a project should be realistic and achievable given the scope of the work and funding available. The panel will be looking for evidence of the named Community Supervisor's input in exploring potential impacts.
- Sufficient detail should be provided to rationalise how such impact would be achieved through the proposed project, highlighting aims for potential outcomes, where relevant.

Supervisory Team

- Each project supervisory team must have an appropriate combination of relevant knowledge, skills, and expertise to guide a PhD Candidate in the defined research activities, and to ensure the project is successful.
- The balance of expertise from academic and community supervisors should be appropriate for the area of focus of the proposed research.
- Each project supervisory team must demonstrate how each member (including any additional named members) has the experience and expertise necessary for the project's success.
- Named academic supervisors **MUST** meet their local intuitional and departmental supervision regulations. This is non-negotiable and must be checked **BEFORE** submission.
- If any named academic supervisor does not meet the necessary supervision regulations the proposal will not be considered.

Additional Considerations

In addition to the criteria mentioned above, the selection panel will also take into account the following when making funding decisions.

- Each institution will be running internal sifting of applications led by their academics.
- The balance of topics being addressed by projects within each cohort portfolio.
- The institution of the lead academic supervisors. We will fund 3 PhD projects per institution, per cohort. The lead institution is determined by the lead academic supervisor named on the project.

6. LOCAL PRIORITIES FOR RESEARCH

An integral part of our engaged research process involves working with local community stakeholders to set our research agenda.

For the Leicestershire chapter of Collaboratory, we have developed the Leicester's Voice in Research initiative. Through this, we run a series of workshops each year with local community professionals and residents. Using their lived-experience and local knowledge, these attendees collectively identify specific priorities that our next research projects should look to address.



For our 2025-26 call, all proposals must demonstrate how the project addresses one or more of the research priorities identified by our Leicester's Voice in Research workshops. A full breakdown of the 2025-26 Community Priorities for Research will be made available, through our website, from Monday 30th June 2025.

To explore the community priorities identified through our Leicester's Voice in Research initiative, [please see our web page.](#)

7. RECRUITMENT OF PHD CANDIDATES

A core area of work that Collaboratory is funded to undertake is to pilot new, evidence-based, inclusive recruitment mechanisms, with the aim of creating more accessible pathways into doctoral research for promising local candidates who might otherwise be excluded from more traditional academic opportunities.

All project teams who are successful in securing Collaboratory funding are expected to engage fully with our approach to PhD candidate recruitment. **This is as an essential, mandatory condition of Collaboratory funding.**

Applicant Eligibility

- As a place-based programme, only those who qualify for UK Home Student fees are eligible. Our funding will not cover overseas student fees and visa sponsorship.
- Those currently in formal employment by UoL, DMU, or LU are not eligible to apply. This does not apply to those in casual employment by any partner university.
- Those who already hold a doctoral degree (including any medical degree awarding the title of Doctor) are not eligible to apply.
- We cannot consider applications from those who wish to conduct a PhD at distance/remotely. Due to the mandatory training requirements and significant community engagement focus of our projects, in-person engagement with the programme is essential.
- No applicant can be given preferential treatment. All candidates must apply through our open, competitive process.
- Applicants who do not meet standard Higher Education minimum qualification criteria of holding a 2.1 undergraduate degree (or 2.2 with a Masters) can still apply.

Recruitment Process

- Candidate recruitment is run centrally by the Collaboratory team.
- Promotions will target local candidates via non-academic channels; primarily social media.
- Support from Community Supervisors is essential to successfully attract strong candidates with relevant skills. Community Supervisors of successful projects will be asked to support in disseminating details of the studentship opportunity through their professional networks.
- All Collaboratory projects are advertised in a job advert-style format which provides a break down of core Collaboratory competencies, as well as project-specific essential and desired competencies.

Project Summaries and Competencies

To help you write an effective project summary and to define appropriate essential and desirable competencies, please see the examples at the links below.

[Example 1](#)

[Example 2](#)

[Example 3](#)

Final project specific competencies may be edited by Collaboratory before advertising. Suggested competencies which can reasonably learnt or attained throughout the course of the PhD programme will not be included in the final advert.