

GET YOUR GCRF PROPOSAL FUNDED

Mark Reed, Professor at Newcastle University and Research Manager for an international charity, provides advice on how to submit a great Global Challenges Research Fund proposal

This year, a raft of new development projects will start, led by UK Universities and Research Institutes rather than development agencies. The projects are part of the Government's £1.5 billion Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF). Each project aims to deliver important benefits for people in lower and middle-income countries (LMICs). However, led by researchers, these projects will also focus on discovering new ways of tackling development challenges.

GCRF is a new and very different way of funding research, which puts impact centre-stage. However, if you think you're going to get funding for work that generates impact without advancing knowledge, then you are misguided. GCRF funding has been devolved largely to the Research Councils, who are committed to "supporting cutting-edge research that addresses the challenges faced by developing countries". This means that research excellence remains paramount.

A big challenge for the research community is to get our heads around the sorts of impacts that GCRF panels are looking for. The first step is to look at the call specification and ODA guidance. Beyond this however, there is a lot of uncertainty across the research community. Here is what I learned from being a GCRF panel member and from conversations with fellow panel members and staff from BBSRC, NERC, MRC and ESRC on how to write a fundable GCRF proposal:

- **Choose an eligible country.** It must be from the OECD Development Assistance Committee's (DAC) list of LMICs, which changes every three years. It is worth knowing if you are targeting an Upper Middle Income Country that might be reclassified and drop off this list.

- **Benefit disadvantaged, impoverished populations and major development issues that will impact on the economic development and welfare of the target country(ies).** Don't assume that delivering benefits for an elite group, business or sector will necessarily "trickle down" to surrounding populations. If that is your strategy, then make sure there is a robust pathway to impacts for these groups that can be pursued as part of the project.
- **Explain how many people are affected by the issues the project will address.** Also, identify and characterise the groups who will benefit, and explain exactly how they will benefit and why this is important. If only a small number of people will directly benefit from the project, explain how those benefits may be scaled up or transferred to other populations as part of your pathway to impact.
- **Don't overplay your hand.** Making wild claims about the economic or health benefits of your project based on shaky assumptions is likely to earn you ire from reviewers and panel members alike.
- **Build capacity for research and/or development with in-country partners.** For example including collaborative working, training, and skills development.
- **Build on existing work in the country/region and add value to global research efforts by international agencies and consortia.** Reviewers and panel members will know about previous work and key partners in the country or region working on the issues, and will question proposals that appear to be unaware of this.

- **If you have them, demonstrate that you have strong existing in-country partnerships**
- **Do preparatory work.** Show you have been working in the country already, understand the issues and potential constraints, and demonstrate that the proposed work is practical and feasible
- **Support the country you are working with to co-create solutions rather than imposing what you think is a solution.** Don't be patronising. They may not have access to certain expertise, technology, or resources, which the UK can provide. However, people living and working in these countries will know what will and will not work.

PROFILE



MARK REED is a recognised international expert in impact research with more than 100 publications and 9,000 citations. He has won awards for the impact of his work, and he regularly collaborates and publishes with scholars working in sectors ranging from the arts and humanities to physical sciences. He regularly sits on funding panels and reviews for the Research Councils, and he has helped run workshops to assist researchers prepare for GCRF funding across the UK.