



## LSE-Tsinghua University Sustainability Research Fund Application Guidance 2025/2026

The LSE- Tsinghua University Sustainability Research funding call aims to strengthen ties between the two institutions by supporting research projects rooted in a shared commitment to addressing key global sustainability challenges.

### Goals and activities:

- Advance research excellence at both LSE and Tsinghua University, promoting high-impact contributions in the broad field of sustainability, aligned with the strategic priorities of both institutions.
- Enable academic staff at LSE and Tsinghua to identify complementary strengths, explore synergies, and develop outstanding joint research projects.
- Foster long-term academic collaboration by engaging researchers from all schools and research centres at both universities. The fund supports both new collaborations and the development of existing partnerships.

### Thematic focus:

The scheme will support research broadly related to sustainability, with particular emphasis on the following six themes:

- Generating sustainable growth and energy transitions
- Creating sustainable finance and business
- Mobilising political, legal, and governance systems
- Protecting and enhancing nature and biodiversity
- Building sustainable societies
- Promoting sustainability in public health and well-being

### Examples of activities:

- Discrete pilot research project with at least one researcher from each institution.
- Collection of data, development of data resources, and/or data analysis.
- Evaluation of policies or proposed interventions for societal, economic, energy, and/or environmental impacts.
- Intensive research workshops or joint conferences intended to generate further collaborative research activities.
- Preparation of substantial joint external funding proposals.
- Expansion of existing LSE and Tsinghua University research activities to scale or otherwise increase their impact.

### Eligibility:

- To be eligible, a proposal must involve at least one researcher from each institution. Prior collaboration history is not essential.
- **For LSE:** All schemes are open to Faculty, Research and Policy Staff, and Fellows as listed in LSE HR Role Profiles, including practice roles. Members of staff outside the above categories should contact [global@lse.ac.uk](mailto:global@lse.ac.uk) about eligibility. We would not be able to provide funding for the PI past their current funding date as our funding cannot be used to affect HR staff contracts (so current contracts must cover the duration of the project). Changes to contracts must be communicated to LSE's Global Research Partnerships & Alliances Manager to ensure compliance with this rule.
- **For Tsinghua University:** All schemes are open to full-time faculty members at Tsinghua University. Priority will be given to young faculty members and faculty members without a Special Fund for Independent Scientific Research and International Cooperation.
- **Not Eligible as PIs:** Current students at LSE and Tsinghua, LSE and Tsinghua Graduate Teaching Assistants, Emeritus Faculty, Guest Teachers and Visiting Scholars are not eligible to apply; however, they may participate in the project.
- Applicants must confirm that they have the full support of their host academic unit as part of their application. An award letter co-signed by the hosting unit lead will be required at award stage.
- You may only apply once per round.

#### **Application Process:**

**Online sandpit event (optional)** – for those who would like to connect with other researchers at LSE and Tsinghua University to form teams for the LSE-Tsinghua University Sustainability Research Fund, we are holding an optional online research collaboration **sandpit** in **September 2025**.

This event aims to facilitate the introduction of colleagues across our two institutions, and provide an opportunity to identify and discuss potential project ideas that can hopefully be developed into collaborative applications to our Sustainability Research fund. If you would like to participate, please [\*\*submit an expression of interest by 15 August 2025\*\*](#).

Please note that the sandpit is optional – you do not need to attend to apply for our funding. Attending the sandpit does not guarantee that you will be part of a team or that you will receive funding.

As we will be breaking out into small group discussions, the capacity for this session is limited. If we receive more expressions of interest than we have available spaces, we will prioritise people whose research aligns with the fund objectives and aim to have an appropriate mix of sustainability themes represented. We will use the information given in your expression of interest to match people into groups for sandpit activities.

**Intent to apply (Required)** - the Lead PIs should contact the LSE Manager (Global Research Partnerships & Alliances) at [global@lse.ac.uk](mailto:global@lse.ac.uk) and the Tsinghua University [wenjuan\\_dong@tsinghua.edu.cn](mailto:wenjuan_dong@tsinghua.edu.cn) as soon as possible and **no later than 17 October 2025** to

indicate their intent to apply. Please include the names and titles of Lead PIs from LSE and Tsinghua University who will participate and a proposal title and sustainability theme. In addition, please indicate if any **staff costs** will be included in the budget (see below).

**Application submission** - applicants must apply using the LSE- Tsinghua University Sustainability Research Seed Fund Application Form 2025/2026 by the deadline of **Friday 14 November 2026 (4pm BST, 11pm CST)**. The Form will collect information on the Applicants and Team Members; Project Overview; Proposal Details; Descriptions of Originality, Significance, Implementation, and Potential; Project Budget, including separate budgets for Tsinghua University and LSE; and Budget Justification.

The following documents must also be submitted as part of the application:

1. CV of LSE Principal Investigator (max 2 page each)
2. CV of Tsinghua University Principal Investigator (max 2 page each)

#### **Funding:**

Each awarded project will receive up to £20,000 (approx. RMB 180,000) in total for a one-year duration, with up to £10,000 contributed by each institution. For projects lasting two years, the total funding will be up to £40,000 (approx. RMB 360,000), with each institution contributing up to £20,000.

Principal Investigators (PIs) at LSE and Tsinghua University are advised to aim for an equal partitioning of the budget when preparing their proposals. This will ensure that the grant can be divided and managed independently by both institutions.

Project timelines should not exceed 24 months from the project start date. It is expected that projects will start no later than 31 January 2026.

#### **Cost eligibility:**

The following costs **are eligible** for this scheme:

- Directly incurred non-staff costs such as travel, fieldwork, consumables, goods, equipment, services, and consultants (including associated fees and taxes).
- Hourly Paid Staff costs for occasional research assistance and clerical support.
- Research staff/Directly Incurred Salaried research and policy staff costs.

Specialist costs to make project activities more accessible that are not already covered by benefits or elsewhere institutionally **are also eligible**, such as:

- Costs for care of dependents where it is unavoidable.
- Costs to make adjustments within travel and accommodation bookings for staff who need them.
- Cost to make sure outputs are accessible (both for researchers and stakeholders, such as braille printed books or pamphlets).

- Costs of specialist contractors that are working on EDI supporting activities, such as audio transcription for events, etc.
- Costs to make events more accessible including specialist venues and supporting staff.

The following costs are **not eligible** under this scheme:

- Faculty salary/Directly allocated salaried staff costs.
- Collaborator and partner staff costs, and subawards.
- Indirect (overheads) and estates (space) charges of LSE and TSINGHUA UNIVERSITY or any other Partner and Collaborator.
- Open Access fees and article processing charges covered by the Open Access Fund
- DI teaching contract or hourly paid teaching costs are not eligible. No funding can be requested for visiting scholars, as those are unpaid affiliations.

### **Examples of permissible costs**

- Research assistance, both hourly paid and salaried, which is linked to roles in the project.
- Staff time, for Directly Incurred staff, to undertake research, write up outputs and engage with partners and collaborators.
- Data collection/fieldwork in the UK, China and overseas including associated travel, expenses and service provision if this is being outsourced.
- Purchasing datasets for use in the research.
- Reasonable travel, subsistence and accommodation costs that conform with the cognizant institutions policies.
- Participant payments and/or incentives as part of formal surveys or for community groups and beneficiaries involved in the research.
- Consultancy services in the UK, China and overseas which must include applicable taxes and fees.
- Goods and services required from suppliers including surveys or transcription and translation services which must include applicable taxes and fees.
- Attendance at conferences, symposia and other networking and dissemination events, if integral to the proposed project.
- Costs of hosting events and other dissemination activities.
- Costs of software or licences required for development, research and collaboration.
- Small items of consumables.
- Other project specific costs, such as equipment (where it is directly linked to delivering project objectives).
- Costs of proof-reading and copy-editing manuscripts or grant proposals.
- Costs for publishing monographs or experimental publishing outputs.

### **Non-permissible costs include:**

- Faculty salaries or faculty salary supplementation of any kind
- Indirect and overhead costs
- Course fees, stipends or scholarships for students

- Infrastructure and equipment purchases, such as computers, including laptops and basic computing facilities such as printers, word processing and other standard software
- Conference registrations unrelated to the dissemination of results
- Costs already incurred prior to submission of the proposal
- Subawards

### Assessment Criteria

All applications will be peer-reviewed and evaluated based on the following criteria. A joint selection panel of academics from LSE and Tsinghua University review and decide on awarded projects.

Criteri	Seed Research Fund	Scoring Model
<b>a</b>		
<b>1</b>	<p><b>Originality</b>  <i>The Panel will consider the originality of the seed research idea/research question, and its potential to contribute to the state of the art and break new ground.</i></p>	4 – Outstanding 3 – Excellent 2 – Good 1 – Average
<b>2</b>	<p><b>Significance</b>  <i>The Panel will consider the ambition and significance of the research idea. Why is this research important and timely? Why do we need it and how critical is the question it will answer?</i></p>	4 – Outstanding 3 – Excellent 2 – Good 1 – Average
<b>3</b>	<p><b>Implementation</b>  <i>Research-focused projects: Quality of the methodology and research design. The Panel will consider the scientific merit, rigour, and feasibility of the research method and implementation plan, the strength of the research design, feasibility and timeline of the project. Workshop-focused projects: Quality of the proposed implementation plan. The panel will consider the suitability of the project's chosen format, the clarity of objectives and expected outputs, the extent to which proposed activities are concrete enough to deliver the intended outcomes, as well as the practicality and feasibility of the timeline.</i></p>	4 – Outstanding 3 – Excellent 2 – Good 1 – Average
<b>4</b>	<p><b>Potential</b>  <i>The Panel will consider how the project, if funded, may: 1) result in external joint funding proposals, identifying potential funders or schemes; and/or 2) contribute high quality, peer-reviewed co-authored research papers for publication in top journals in the relevant field of research and/or high-quality policy-related papers; and/or 3) strengthen long-term academic collaboration between LSE and Tsinghua University.</i></p>	4 – Outstanding 3 – Excellent 2 – Good 1 – Average

### Reporting:

Successful applicants will be required to submit a post-award report summarising the activities, achieved outcomes, and future collaboration plans. The LSE International Strategy and Academic Partnerships Team and/or the Tsinghua University Research and Innovation Office may request additional updates after the final progress report as well to determine the impact of the funding.

In addition, the fund may include annual joint workshops and conferences, where funded teams will be invited to present the progress and findings of their research.

### **Key Dates**

- **Call opens:** July 2025
- **Expression of interest deadline for online sandpit event:** 15 August 2025
- **Online sandpit event (LSE and Tsinghua University researchers):** September 2025, exact date TBC
- **Intent to apply deadline (required):** Friday 17 October 2025
- **Application deadline:** Friday 14 November 2025
- **Outcomes announced:** by late December 2025
- **Project commencement:** no later than late January 2026
- **Project completion:**
  - One-year projects: no later than late December 2026
  - Two-year projects: no later than late December 2027

### **Contact:**

For programme application, the Lead PIs should contact the LSE Manager and the Tsinghua University to indicate their intent to apply as soon as possible and no later than **17 October 2025**. Applicants must apply using the LSE- Tsinghua University Sustainability Research Seed Fund Application Form 2025/2026 by the deadline of **Friday 14 November 2026**. LSE contact: [global@lse.ac.uk](mailto:global@lse.ac.uk); Tsinghua contact: [wenjuan\\_dong@tsinghua.edu.cn](mailto:wenjuan_dong@tsinghua.edu.cn)

For general scheme inquiries, LSE staff should contact [global@lse.ac.uk](mailto:global@lse.ac.uk), and Tsinghua University staff should reach out to [zhang-han@tsinghua.edu.cn](mailto:zhang-han@tsinghua.edu.cn)

For assistance with budget costing, please contact the Global Research Partnerships & Alliances Manager at [global@lse.ac.uk](mailto:global@lse.ac.uk) at LSE and [zhang-han@tsinghua.edu.cn](mailto:zhang-han@tsinghua.edu.cn) at Tsinghua University as soon as possible, and no later than **two weeks before the submission deadline**.