

Knowledge Exchange and Impact (KEI) Funding

Details on applying for funding

This Guide is further to the basic introduction provided in Guide #1. This guide describes approaches to conceiving KEI projects, covers several aspects of applying for KEI funding, and offers tips for successful bids, including from a perspective of review panels.

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Key points in applying for KEI funding:

1. [Understand KEI, and the purposes of KEI funding](#)
2. [Why do KEI?](#)
3. [“External” means “external to universities”](#)
4. [Know what you wish to achieve. Specify intended outcomes](#)
5. [Compare your aims with funders’ aims](#)
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7. [Compiling your funding bid](#)
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What is KEI?

[Descriptions](#) of Knowledge Exchange and Impact are annexed.

Knowledge Exchange (KE) is the mutually beneficial sharing of expertise between academia and non-academic parties.

Impact is the effects of research on society, and the economy.

KE and I are not research or public engagement. There are several other types of activity which are usually ineligible, or yield less successful bids¹.

Differences between KE and Impact:

- KE is two-way (mutual exchange with the other party). Impact is one-way (your work affects them).²

¹ **Not quite KEI:** A lot of activities are close to being KE or Impact, but are not. For example, the involvement of non-academic parties does not mean that an activity is KE and/or Impact. The following are **not KEI** (though any of them could fit into a strategic, integrated KE and/or Impact proposal, and indeed many of them often do):

- Business as usual. Working with an NHS Trust is normal in medical sciences, as is working with galleries if you are in an art department. KEI funding, intended to boost external activities above existing levels, may not prioritise supporting established or expected activities.
- Consultancy
- Publicity and Marketing
- [Research](#) conducted solely by academic institutions
- Working with Libraries, e.g. digital archiving. This tends to be dissemination, or producing accessible materials for research.
- Working with museums tends to be public engagement.
- Events which have external participants/guests. E.g. inviting non-academic parties to a launch of a Doctoral Training Centre is usually marketing and business-as-usual.
- Developing courses which will have uptake from non-academic people. E.g. a training course which will attract people from business.
- Developing new commercial products and technologies generally. This is usually covered by other funding streams and parts of the University, e.g. Isis.
- Workshops which include some externals. To make a strong KEI bid there must be a clear and unusual case, with clear intended focus on the external contributions, impact, and outcomes.

² Impact is about yielding real-world noticeable results and effects. Impact work does not have to involve external partners: you can push the impact of your work without collaborating. KE, conversely, is specifically the two-way learning with non-academic parties. A good test is “What do I learn?” A lot of supposed KE is rather one-way, typically with the academic advising the external party, while not obviously getting any knowledge benefit back through the relationship. An example of KE is learning from a practitioner about their issues, and how your research could subsequently be re-framed so that it can better inform the issues important to those practitioners and their sector. An example of non-KE, which could be Impactful, is presenting your work to a silent or non-practitioner audience.

- KE typically occurs while knowledge development/research occurs; Impact typically happens subsequently.
- KE excludes working with the public; Impact typically includes having an effect on the public.

KEI Funding Aims

KEI funding schemes are intended to start, accelerate or continue KE and/or Impact endeavours.

- ***KE funding aims to*** build or strengthen collaborative relationships with external parties, for specific intended outcomes.
- ***Impact funding aims to*** yield or boost the end effects of research knowledge through making external parties and people aware of research, and more able to use it and apply it in ways that benefit them.
- ***KE & I funding collectively aims to*** increase and demonstrate the benefits that academia has on business, policy, and other stakeholders, and ultimately for society in general.

Potential reasons to do Knowledge Exchange and Impact

1. It can be gratifying to see the fruits of your research.
2. It can improve your research.

Working with beneficiaries of your research can inform what you research, and how you do it. E.g. it can give you access to privileged data ; can inform you about the standards of rigour that organisations require in order to use research findings as actionable evidence ; can enhance the ready usability of your work outputs ; help you consider how to treat missing data for different purposes ; show needs for meta analyses ; and identify previous applied research in the area.

3. Honours (such as learned society memberships, OBEs ...etc.) are typically bestowed for societal impact much more than for academic research which has had influence only within academia.
4. It can lead to paid consultancy work.

REF

The [REF](#) is a major influence on all UK Universities' reputations and sustainability. The REF includes 20% impact.

For the University's reputation and income – as for all publicly funded UK higher education institutions - some people, at least, must do KE and Impact. Being one of those people is unlikely to harm one's career.

Funding and sustainability

Academic institutions are incentivised to do impact, through funding formulae which reward KEI. The University gets around one fortieth of its income through KEI.³

³ One example: in 2014-15 the University of Oxford received £77.3M RAE-based funding (7.4% of the national £1.05Bn RAE-based funding). From 2016 at least 20% of such funding will be based on impact. For Oxford, through this impact stream alone, this will be of the order of £15.5M per year, or 1.4% of the University's operational budget.

“External”⁴

- “External” means non-academic: organisations and stakeholders outside of any university or college.
- “External” includes business, policy bodies, charities, NGOs, practitioners and social enterprise.
- Engaging with “external” partners *does not include* collaborating with other academics or university-based researchers or teams.
- “External” KEI collaboration excludes service providers (e.g. hiring design companies) and consultancy. It disfavours or excludes business-as-usual collaborations which are readily supported or assumed through traditional research funding (e.g. medical scientists working with the NHS, or researchers of ancient Greek culture working with museums).

⁴ “External”

KE and Impact funding calls often describe working with, or having impact on, “external” parties. “External” means non-academic partners, parties or stakeholders outside the University, and outside of academia.

In KE it typically refers to organisations or parties which are not primarily academic research and/or teaching organisations, but it does not extend to the general public.

For Impact funding “external” typically can include the public.

“External” includes companies, business, government and policy bodies, charities, NGOs, international organisations such as WHO and World Bank, practitioners such as theatre directors and writers, and not-for-profit organisations such as social enterprises.

Engaging with “external” partners *does not include* collaborating with other academics or university-based researchers or teams.

“External” KEI collaboration excludes business-as-usual, consultancy, and service providers. E.g. if you wish to develop a new product (such as a scanner, electric motor, or blood flow monitor) you may need to hire a product designer or a company to build a prototype. These are indeed non-academic contributors, but they are service providers rather than collaborative knowledge generators.

Similarly, medical scientists working with the NHS is business-as-usual. Other examples of business-as-usual partners might be when researchers of ancient Greek art and pottery work with museums, or when business management researchers interview Chief Executives. Traditional research funders such as Research Councils may expect that research bids will include such collaborations as part of typical research in those areas. In some cases this is because the type of research in question cannot readily be conducted without such interactions.

KEI funding does not duplicate research funding. Review panels can view such business-as-usual bids less favourably than bids where the nature of the collaboration is less established across a discipline, or is less readily funded by research funders.

What do you wish to achieve?

Can you envision the end benefits and outcomes? What does success look like? Can you clearly describe an intended external uptake, action, or event, or a change in society that you wish to achieve?

If you can envision direct real-world social or economic benefits then there is potential for KEI funding to support your aims.⁵

If your expectation is that benefits will arise from your research because research is intrinsically beneficial, then consider applying for research funding rather than KEI funding. If you wish to explore external partnership work and impact, beyond intrinsic research benefits, then try KEI.

⁵ Examples: will the work lead to new policies, or perhaps a new product or practical application? A new medical treatment, or a more durable electric motor, improved education techniques in schools, or informing theatrical directors about how aspects of translated plays are most effectively conveyed?

The “So what?” test. If the project does not proceed, so what? Who would care? This challenging approach derives from newspaper editors’ tests of whether a story is worth researching, writing and printing. See http://www.streetdirectory.com/travel_guide/16482/marketing/put_your_marketing_to_the_so_what_test.html or <http://policyviz.com/the-so-what-test/>

To get funding you need to explain your KEI idea in a way that generates interest. Can you do so? If not many people would care much, then consider whether the work will really be impactful, or is likely to be funded.

It is worth testing your ideas on a couple of people who are distanced from your academic research focus, and are honest enough to say “no-one will care” or “other people are already doing that” if that’s what they think (though they may not be right).

“Who cares?” can inform you about who might fund it. This is a stakeholder issue. Is there a funder that supports the interests of people outside academia who would care whether your proposed work gets done? If so, consider them as a funding source (either as a full funder, or a part-funder through [matching](#)). If those people will get it, and will care, then the body or funder representing them will see an interest in funding your proposal.

Do your aims and plans suit the funder's KE or Impact aims?

Not all KEI funding schemes or funders are alike. Funders' expectations vary, and many funders run more than one KEI funding scheme, each with very specific aims.

Check that what you propose matches the potential funders' expectations of KE or Impact work⁶. Check that what you wish to do is aligned with the aims of the funding scheme(s).

How to check compatibility:

1. Read the funding call specification⁷.
2. Check examples of previous funded projects: many funders provide examples of what they have funded. Often such examples are provided to elicit similarly conceived bids. This should help you understand the aims of their fund, and what they wish to be associated with. Read the examples both with a view to where your work is similar, and where it is different. Do not just spot the similarities and thereby conclude that they will like your proposal. Similarly, where yours differs from given examples, it may be that the examples were never intended to cover every aim of a funding scheme, and you may be hitting a niche they want or need to address. There will probably not be a clear answer to this, however it should help you work out which aspects of your project to focus on, which should be an easy sell, and which aspects will need more persuasion.
3. Read the funder's definitions of KE and Impact, and their strategy and similar statements.
4. Get opinions from colleagues, and those experienced in KE.

You may find that your proposition matches some aspects of a funding scheme, but is not strong across all aspects. There may then be scope for negotiation with the funder.

⁶ KE funds will typically not support Impact or Public Engagement work. Impact funds will typically not support Public Engagement work. None will fund research in the classic academic sense of [Frascati-defined research](#) conducted solely within academia with no external partners.

⁷ Read the specification: Do not assume that the call covers or will prioritise what you are thinking of doing, and avoid contacting the funder to ask about their aims unless you have already read and digested the written guidance they provide – they provide such written guidance to save their own time and yours.

Consider seeking further advice from colleagues (such as departmental administration and Research Facilitators, or KEIT), particularly if your proposal:

- includes additional benefits that the funder does not mention.
- has strong potential for matching. If your planned proposal only partly matches the specification of a funding scheme, a funder may still consider part-funding your project, in conjunction with other parties funding the other parts.
- covers more disciplines or business or policy areas than the funder covers (e.g. your proposal is more interdisciplinary or cross-sectoral than the funder's remit covers).

Support for your KEI endeavours

If you wish to explore KEI opportunities, help is available.

While KEI is generally not “research”, as a product and adjunct to research some of its support falls within the remit of [Research Services](#), in particular the [Knowledge Exchange and Impact Team, ‘KEIT’](#).

Below are some roles and work areas in the University. Become familiar with what they do: click the links below and read the brief descriptions about their functions; and ask your colleagues about what these people do, and any experiences with them.

That way, when you need to, you will have an informed basis to contact a suitable individual:

- Colleagues who have done KEI before, or are starting
- Research Facilitators. Most departments have at least one Research Facilitation representative (e.g. [Humanities contacts](#) ; [Mathematics](#)) who should be easy to find
- Grant officers/administrators in your department/faculty/unit
- Your Departmental Administration / Faculty Board Secretary, or equivalent Business Development Teams (MPLS, MedSci)
- [KEIT](#)
- [Oxford University Innovation](#), for consultancy, Technology Transfer, proof-of-concept, innovation, and Intellectual Property

To consider or demonstrate when writing a bid...

Reasons for rejecting your bid: do not give them any

Bids are usually a competitive process. Review panels wish to fund good work, but they must be selective. They therefore have to find reasons not to fund proposals. Where there are a lot of strong bids, everyone panel member is looking for reasons to reject bids.

You may think that your bid has enough strong aspects to override any weaknesses it may have.

It can only take one reason for a proposal to be rejected. Do not give them any.

Specify what you will do

Most important is what your project will do. Not how important the topic is.

If your topic fits the funding call, that is enough. If a bid is eligible, the funder already believes in the topic. Funders are not looking for evidence of shared belief: they want results.

Briefly describe your project's topic area, particularly if your ideas address a newly emerging area of importance, while remaining conscious of the risk of pontification.

Many bids describe how important their topic or challenge is. Consider carefully the many messages this sends to members of review panels, and its likely effect on your bid's success.

- 1) Reviewers do not need to be persuaded that you are dedicated to your chosen area.
- 2) Researchers are valued for their ability to conduct objective research. External organisations often value the University's collaboration as a mark of impartiality. Emphasising the importance of a topic can make an applicant look biased.
- 3) Researchers are trained and recruited for skills in research techniques, rather than for passionate personal opinions.

- 4) It wastes word limit.
- 5) Bids are rejected when applicants show they have not understood the funding call specification and criteria.⁸
- 6) It is unlikely that all Review Panel members will agree with suggestions of topic importance.⁹
- 7) Impartial professionalism is valued when assessing an applicant's likely effectiveness in managing the project.¹⁰

It is the work that matters. Specify not what you believe, but what you will do.

⁸ Check whether a primary selection criterion is the applicant's personal conviction in the importance of the topic. There will probably never be such a funding call.

In competitive funding calls the funder specifies the range of priority areas, and it is the funder's and panel's role to allocate funding across the portfolio of areas within the call's remit, including making decisions of relative importance. That is not the role of the applicant. Reviewers make collective decisions according to the funding call's specification and selection criteria. Bids which demonstrate a misunderstanding of these aspects of funding call are rejected.

Panel members are selected mainly on the basis of collective range of expertise, experience of project planning and management, objectivity, ability to spot both brilliance and concerns, and ability to debate and reach collective decisions. Reviewers wish to support good work, and generally believe that all academic and KEI endeavour is worthwhile, whether or not they personally value any particular topics. They consider scale, as this can readily be assessed objectively (e.g. curing a disease versus treating one symptom).

Reviewers are not expected to make subjective moral value judgements. To put them in a position which appears to expect them to do so demonstrates an applicant's inability to understand the funding call and process. Bids are usually rejected if it appears that the applicant does not understand the written call specification and process.

If you give cause for doubt to even one member of a review panel, the doubt will almost certainly spread to most or all panel members. Reviewers for competitive bids will see many strong bids, and have to find reasons to reject many. If one panel member gets one doubt, they will almost certainly express it to their colleagues, since their role on a panel is to express their opinions. Those other reviewers, who hear the doubts, also need reasons to reject bids.

⁹ Members of review panels are professional. Many are achieved academics, with their own topics, to which they have usually chosen to dedicate their life. If a reviewer does not already feel passionate about a particular topic, they are unlikely to change their view on the basis of a description in one funding bid. If a panel member already works in that area, they often feel that the applicant has misused bid-writing time that could have been put towards achieving results. They may feel that the applicant has wasted their reading time.

Where panel members are not already passionate about a topic, the effect can be that an applicant is effectively telling reviewers that the applicant's own topic area is more important than the area to which the reviewer has dedicated their career.

¹⁰ Reviewers may feel that the applicant is more focussed on convictions than on rigour, objectivity, or action. This reduces reviewers' confidence that the project would be managed and completed effectively. E.g. reviewers may feel that the applicant could prioritise who they work with based on potential partners' or work colleagues' views, rather than the collective effectiveness of a team's work. Or that the applicant may be prone to changing their mind, which could compromise colleagues' confidence, and thus project delivery. Or the applicant might prioritise project workstreams based on personal convictions, which can conflict with the most effective and efficient order for timelines and outputs.

Partners' interest and commitment

Are non-academic partners involved? Demonstrate their current level of engagement.

KE bids tend to be stronger if you already know the external partners. If you have started to work with them, or are planning to and they seem receptive, bids will usually be stronger, since the funding would make for new work based on existing collaborative trust (which inspires funder confidence).

Prove such involvement in your bid. Seek a letter of support from partners, where they describe their reasons for working with us, or for wanting to.

Confidentiality check with the potential partner: Check with the potential partner before sharing any of their communications or information.¹¹

How to provide evidence

For many funds the funder and the application process explicitly welcome and encourage evidence of partners' commitment, typically through supporting statements.

In some cases they do not.

A strong supporting statement¹² will generally help you, whether or not one is requested. Find a way to send some evidence to the funder (e.g. email it to someone at the funding body who you have spoken with by phone), even if this is not requested - unless doing so will prejudice against you.¹³

¹¹ Confidentiality is crucial to the trust of a collaborative partnership. Before using in a bid, or otherwise sharing, any documents or communications or information about an external party, check specifically with the partner or potential partner to ensure that they know what you propose to share, and how, and that they permit it. It may seem innocuous to mention to a funder that Company X may wish to work with your group on a vaccine, or a new play production, or a carbon credit mechanism. However there can be massive damages to a company if their interests are divulged. If you pass such information to a potential funder you do not know or control whether that info will go any further (e.g. to other companies, or the press). A blog post or news article stating "Company X is working with Oxford on a measles vaccine" could make readers think that Company X is weak in the area of malaria vaccines, or that there must be something wrong with company X's existing vaccines; this could affect their sales and share prices, and lead to redundancies. "Theatre company X is working with Oxford on interpretations of Russian plays" could lead other theatre companies to explore and realise contemporary relevances of performing those works – relevance that had not occurred to any other companies - causing company X to blame you and the University for compromising their timing advantage. Such breaches can stop the company from working with you, damage your/our reputation, and discourage other companies from considering working with us. Get specific clearance before sharing external parties' information.

¹² Strong supporting statement: clear, concise, specific to you and your proposal, and from a credible partner, typically on their headed paper and signed by a senior authority at the organisation.

¹³ E.g. if it is clear that any such extra information will render your bid ineligible, or is otherwise definitely unwelcome, and may be seen as cheating or illegitimately trying to gain favour.

Matching and buy-in

Is your Department, or anyone else, contributing funding or other resources to the project? Resource commitment (“matching”) is typically more persuasive to a funder than verbal-only support for the work and aims of a KEI project.

“Matching” is where someone else also contributes resource (e.g. funding, staff time, an intern, machine time, studio or rehearsal facilities, or office or lab space). It includes “contributions in kind”, which are resources with value rather than actual money.

Some external parties are less able to contribute money than others. For example not-for-profits, theatres, or organisations staffed mainly by volunteers, where resources are measured in time as much as in money, are typically less likely or able to offer funding than banks or pharma companies.

“Match funding” is where someone else will contribute funding to the endeavour.

“Matching” typically implies an element of mutual dependence: “We will give £10k *if they* give £5k.” I.e. the funding will be provided collaboratively, by more than one provider, on condition that the others also contribute.

If you are bidding to a funder, and your Department (or another part of the University, e.g. internal University funding streams) is willing to contribute resource towards the project, then the funder could count the Department’s contributions as “matching” for their purposes.

Discuss collaborations early with external partners

External partners do not make resource commitments lightly. Commitments which are significant and persuasive can take months to agree, particularly if you want the partner to state them in writing to a potential funder who may well be in contact with the partner’s rivals about similar project or product ideas. Evidence of partner commitment is worth considering from an early stage.¹⁴

¹⁴ You may feel that a proposal needs to be worked up fairly thoroughly before discussing with potential partners whether they will provide resources towards it. Earlier stage liaison can be beneficial: while partners want to see your confidence and clarity of vision, any valuable contributing partner will also insist on shaping their own involvement. In practice this happens most effectively when ideas and plans have been discussed and mutually defined from an early stage. Requesting resource from a partner early on can put them off. Trust must be built first. Discussing ideas early means that the partner relationship can be developed and the project proposal co-owned (thus co-resourced). Also your KEI ideas are likely to be better informed through early discussions with non-academic partners, and there will be more time available before discussing and establishing the partner’s willingness to contribute resources. Providing evidence of partners’ interest and commitment means discussing ideas with them from an early stage.

External buy-in

Supporting statements by other parties are persuasive if they describe concisely but clearly their specific interest in you (or your team, department, and other specific areas of the University) and your proposal. Such supporting statements should be specific.¹⁵

Match funding versus offering non-financial resources

If a collaborator states they will contribute in kind, e.g. through staff time, this is usually less persuasive than financial contributions. In the humanities and some social sciences and social aspects of care work, relative to large for-profit companies, there is generally less ability to offer actual money. However it still holds true: the commitment of money is usually seen as stronger collaborator commitment than contributions in kind.

It is worth seeking match funding to make bids stronger (though not always).¹⁶

Matching is persuasive to review panels. Here are reasons why:

1. Importance and relevance. It seems more likely that a project is important, timely and relevant, if more than one party wishes to resource it.
2. Departmental/unit/team contribution. If the department will subsidise the project then the department clearly wishes it to succeed, and is likely to support the project.¹⁷

¹⁵ A letter is persuasive if it states how your proposal specifically matches the partner's priorities. It is not persuasive if it could be describing any project or University, or says generally that working with a University is a good thing.

¹⁶ For organisations which have relatively small budgets or limited flexibility on how to use their funds (charities, voluntary organisations, etc.) contribution in kind is persuasive. Conversely non-financial resource can also be persuasive from organisations that are known to consider their resources fiscally and rigorously, and to keep tight monitor of resource use (e.g. banks and pharmaceutical companies will rarely give any of their own staff's time without financial business justification).

In some cases, resources in kind can be viewed - and reviewed - as a low-value show of commitment. It can be viewed that an organisation is offering spare capacity (e.g. offered staff time could be that the offered role/post-holder may be going through a period of inactivity, or that offered office/lab space is anyway not being used, and costs the organisation nothing to provide, thus does not necessarily show dedicated commitment).

Match funding is typically the most persuasive. It is rare that money is surplus to any organisation's requirements, or that the organisation could find no other way of using it. Match funding means commitment.

¹⁷ E.g. the department is likely to ensure that the project will have adequate space, IT, etc., and that any problems it may encounter will be resolved as a priority. The department will see expenditure from its accounts every time departmental budgeting and financial forecasting occurs. Someone with budgetary responsibility will then ask whether that expenditure is effective. Where money has been committed by a department, and cannot be retracted, that money must be made to be useful.

3. Buy-in. The departmental example above illustrates the literal meaning of “buy-in”: it does not just mean that someone ideologically believes in a project. It means they have literally bought a part of it, paid for it to deliver something, and are thereby invested in its success, and helping to ensure its success.
4. It is easy to spend someone else’s money. If full funding is offered to host or run a project, few people would reject the offer - whether or not they intend to prioritise the project’s success. Match funding can greatly reassure the review panel that someone will prioritise the project.¹⁸
5. Skill and resource sets. Project can usually tap into funders’ knowledge and resources. More funders means more resources and networks for the project.¹⁹
6. Risk and success. Matching spreads the risk of funding something. If other parties wish to support a project it suggests that they believe it will succeed. If one funder pays for a project, they take all the risk of the project’s success or failure. The more funders, the more spread the risk.
7. Oversight. Funders can check on progress, and cajole a project along. With matching there are more interested parties who will be making sure a project progresses effectively.
8. Cheaper. Each funder pays less than if they paid for the whole project.
9. Follow-on. At the end of the project, multiple funders will report on it, often publicly. This boosts recognition and impact of outcomes. It can also help secure subsequent funding to develop a project into further stages and new places.

¹⁸ Fully funding a KEI project can result in an approach by the project’s host or PI that the main objective, rather than commence the project and pursue it effectively, is to spend the money before it is clawed back, or delay its spend until there is time to work on it after other priorities. Put simply, there is little incentive to use the money as effectively as possible.

The risks to the PI of non-delivery are their reputation, and relationship with the funder. For KEI funding these are unpersuasive: a PI’s reputation tends to be based on their research rather than on KEI ; there is less money involved (KEI funding levels tend to be less than for research projects) ; and KEI funding streams currently have short runs (e.g. the KE Seed Fund ran for 2 years) thus there is a no clear need to maintain a good long-term relationship with the funder. Review panels see such risks in fully funding KEI projects, thus can favour proposals which include matching.

¹⁹ The University of Oxford prides itself on excellence and broad disciplinary coverage, where researchers can readily get advice from world-leading expert colleagues. This principle of access and networking can be applied beyond the University. If a project has a funding partner whose work/business includes advanced manufacturing, or liaising directly with policymakers or arts practitioners, then those skills, resources and networks can further help the project.

Do you really need the money?

Make it clear why you need the funding.

Can your proposed activities be done without the funding you request? I.e. is the funding essential, or could the work happen without it?²⁰

This raises a question: Will a funder give you money for something that you would probably do anyway? Answer: They may do...

Funders/reviewers may wish to fund a project in order to be able to report on the outcomes you will achieve, and claim them as successes of their own funding.²¹

Is it business as usual?

KEI funding review typically includes considering whether any of the proposed work is part of a department's or researcher's normal work and duties, i.e. is it their "business as usual". Funders rarely give money to cover costs or activities which are already funded through other means. Funders are reluctant to duplicate or subsidise other funding streams.

²⁰ In many cases a funding review panel may feel (often accurately) that the proposed KEI work will happen anyway, without those involved actually needing to have salary contributions, or travel grants. In which case the funder will see no need to fund your proposal.

²¹ In such cases they may offer you less funding than you ask for – just enough to help you deliver your project quickly, to claim legitimate control over the work (e.g. to insist that deadlines be met), and claim some credit.

This is a VfM (Value for Money) matter: funders wish to maximise their use of their funding, which can mean getting maximum leverage from their funds. Instead of fully funding one project, a funder may prefer to part-fund two projects and thereby claim credit for more outcomes. An informal phone call, with a contact person for the fund, can be a useful way to ask whether they might be interested in an aspect of your project which pertains to them - and which they might consider funding, and thereby adding to their portfolio of work and achievements they can show they have supported.

VfM: Cost for what you need, not what you can ask for

Funders want to maximise their return. This is done by not being wasteful or overindulgent. Funders want value for money (VfM).

Include what you need, but avoid basing your costings on how much you can ask for.²² Asking for money at the top of the funding limit can suggest that you are costing opportunistically rather than with VfM. Calculate your costings based on what you need in order to deliver the project well, without excessive risk of failure or compromised quality. Make sure you include and cost for what is needed to deliver the project, within the call specification²³. Avoid cutting corners and undercosting. Consider carefully before adding cost items to fill up your budget to the call's budgetary limit, if those cost items are not clearly essential in achieving your project's aims.

Buyouts

Buyouts of staff time are often problematic for funders. For KEI this is exacerbated. Whereas it is normal for research funding to pay for staff time, it is not yet as readily accepted that KEI funding should do so. Three examples of what you should think about before budgeting for staff buyout:

1. Only include salary costs for time buyouts if the proposed activity is reasonably beyond the expectable activities of the post being bought out.²⁴
2. Is that person/post appropriate for the proposed work?²⁵
3. State in your bid how the Department will use the buyout money.²⁶

²² For example, if a funding call specifies "Awards will be made of up to £50,000", a bid for £49,995 may seem to have been costed on the basis of what the applicant felt they could ask for, rather than what they genuinely need in order to complete the work to a high standard. There can be a view among review panels, on receiving many bids at the top end of the funding range, that it is unlikely that the majority of suitable projects under a £50k limit really would cost £49,995. It can appear to funders that a bid priced at £36,500 is more likely to be realistically and responsibly costed according to need and VfM.

Review panels take this seriously. Many reviewers are typically academics who themselves also have to seek funding. Funds given unnecessarily are effectively compromising the funding base which remains available to them and their colleagues to pursue their own projects. Reviewers would not wish their own work to be jeopardised through funds being used unnecessarily. Accordingly they do not support this in the funds which they assess.

VfM is usually a stated assessment criterion. If unstated, assume it will be considered, as all funders have financial responsibilities (e.g. Research Councils and charities are publicly accountable for responsible use of funds, and commercial funders and foundations are typically accountable to Boards or shareholders). No funder is at liberty to ignore VfM.

²³ In call specs there is often a section on eligible costs, stating what the funding stream will and will not cover.

²⁴ E.g. a researcher attending workshops, or buying meta datasets, may be considered part of their regular research job, and not something that needs to be fully paid for again. It may be suitable for the funder to contribute towards such costs.

²⁵ Buying out a postdoc to run a conference could be useful, though perhaps that work could be done by a professional conference organiser at lower cost. If the Department has an events co-ordinator, is it part of their role?

How to find KEI funding

1. Ask Research Facilitators and colleagues, particularly those with KEI funding experience.
2. Research Council Knowledge Exchange or Impact related funds, such as Follow-on Funds, staff exchanges, KTPs, IPS, or Business or Policy Fellowships.
3. <https://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/funding>
4. Use search engines such as [Research Professional](#) and Google.

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²⁶ Review panels may wonder where buyout money is going. Will the money pay for a replacement to cover the post-holder's regular work, or will the person's contract be extended if they get this extra funding? Is the person under-employed? If the funding would simply save the Department some salary money then what the funding is effectively supporting is whatever other activity the saved money gets used on. As reviewers will not know what that is, they will probably not support the buyout. Indeed, in such cases the only thing the review panel can be sure of is that the funding will effectively end up being used for anything except the stated purpose.

Not all panels go into such depth, though it only needs one panel member to raise the issue for it to be a point of discussion in the funding decision process. Applicants wishing to protect against such potential assessment may wish to find out from departmental management how their proposed buyout funding will be used, and state it in the bid.

Descriptions of Knowledge Exchange and Impact (KEI)

Knowledge Exchange (KE) is the mutually beneficial sharing of expertise, experience, ideas, and cultural understanding, between academics and non-academic parties. It purposefully affects all involved. It informs and improves your research and how to apply it, and it informs and improves organisations' operations, effectiveness and/or productivity.

Impact refers to the effects of research on society, and the economy.

KEI is Not research or PE: KE and I are not research²⁷ or 'public engagement'²⁸.

'Knowledge exchange' defined by:

[TORCH \(Humanities\)](#)

[ESRC \(Social Sciences\)](#)

'Impact' defined by:

[ESRC \(Social Sciences\)](#)

²⁷ "Research" in this context means increasing or revising current knowledge through academic investigative methods.

²⁸ "Public engagement" means sharing your research conclusions and outcomes with the public. The 'public' includes individuals and groups who do not currently have a formal relationship with a higher education institution (HEI) through teaching, research or knowledge transfer (HEFCE).