What Works Centre for Children Social Care (WWCSC)
Spark Grant Scheme
July 2022

Frequently Asked Questions

This note provides answers to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) relating to WWCSC grant funding and is intended to supplement the guidance document.

1. Eligibility (of applicants)

Q. I am an independent researcher and not affiliated with an HEI or IRO, am I eligible to apply?

We would advise you to email us at programmes@whatworks-csc.org.uk as soon as possible to discuss your eligibility.

Q. Do I have to be based in England?

Applicants can be based anywhere in the UK, but the project must be focused on children's social care in England.

Q. Are international co-applicants/ collaborators allowed?

Yes, international co-applicants and collaborators are allowed. However, the lead applicant must be based in the UK. Furthermore, full justification for collaborators must be provided in your application.

Q. Can I apply more than once?

Candidates are allowed to submit more than one application to the scheme. However, should more than one application be recommended for funding, we will only fund one project per applicant.

Q. I am currently a PhD student, but have extensive research experience prior to this, can I apply?

Funding is available for early career researchers (ECRs) (final-year PhD students must have submitted their final thesis prior to the project beginning to be eligible to apply) and/or those from underrepresented backgrounds. If you are a current PhD student, and from an underrepresented background but with relevant research experience then you may be eligible to apply.

Q. I do not have a full-time permanent contract. Can I still apply?

We have no particular rule that you need to be on a permanent, full-time contract at your organisation/institution to submit an application. However, you must ensure that you have the appropriate approvals from your supervisor/ institution and ongoing support from them for the duration of the research project to be able to deliver.

We are unable to provide funding to individuals directly, and the lead organisation (usually, where the lead applicant is based) will be responsible for signing to the grant agreement, the terms and conditions and the management and disbursement of funds with WWCSC.

Q. I applied in the previous round and was unsuccessful. Can I apply in this round?

Yes, you can apply in this round. If you choose to resubmit an application for the same research project, we recommend that any comments or feedback you were provided with your initial application is addressed in this round.

2. Scope (of projects)

Q. What if my project is not in one of the highlighted areas, can I still apply?

You are able to apply if the topic of your proposal is not in one of our organisational highlight areas - but, it must be focused on children and families in contact with the children's social care system in England.

Q. What if my project is not one of the three types of the projects, can I still apply?

We consider the three types of projects the most feasible given the size of the budget per project, the timeframe for delivery and are the most applicable to the aims and approach of WWCSC and understanding 'what works' within children's social care.

Q. My project is similar to one that was funded in the first round, can I still apply?

We would not fund the same project, but could fund a similar project as long as they are clearly distinct. We recognise that projects can broadly be on the same topic and/or type as previously funded studies. Each application will be assessed on its own merits.

Q. How often are the Spark Grant funding rounds?

The first round of the Spark Grant scheme was launched in June 2021, and this second round July 2022. At present, it is yet to be confirmed if/when the next round of Spark Grant funding will be available.

Q. How many awards are given in a cycle?

In the first round, we funded a total of seven projects. For this round (as for the previous) we do not have a pre-specified number of projects we will fund per round.

Q. To re-analyse the datasets from EEF old projects, should we apply for the data separately or WWSCS will help with the application? How long will the application for the data take normally?

Obtaining the necessary data permissions, access and approvals for any dataset (EEF or otherwise) will be the responsibility of the applicant. Each dataset/authority (e.g. ONS, SAIL, NHS etc) will have their own approvals processes and timelines. These can take weeks or months, so please do investigate this in advance and factor this into your application.

You do not have to have obtained the data/access prior to application. If you do not yet have access to the required data, please outline in your application form, where in the approvals process you are, the steps that you will need to take, including the indicative timelines and any risks/mitigation to these.

3. Costs and budget

Q. Should I include VAT in my costing?

Funds will be awarded as grants and therefore we would not expect costs to attract VAT.

Q. Where can I apply for the additional £2,500 for the dissemination funding?

This would be within the same application form, there is a separate section of the application form and costing template for this part of the funding.

Q. Do I have to apply for dissemination costs?

No. You do not have to apply for any funding for dissemination in addition to the direct research costs for the project.

Q. Instead of dissemination costs, can I apply for £27,500 on the direct costs of research?

No. You may apply for up to a maximum of £25,000 for the direct costs of research, and up to an additional £2,500 for dissemination only. These should be included separately within the application.

4. Ethics and Data protection

Q. My ethics application is currently being reviewed, what do I do?

Please specify this in the application form. Research requiring ethical approval must have the appropriate approvals in place before the research activities begin.

Q. How do I obtain ethics approval?

We would advise you to speak to your organisation about obtaining ethics approval. In cases where you do not have access to an independent research ethics committee (REC), you can submit to the WWCSC ethics committee. Please note that you must specify this in your application form. This REC sits quarterly, and ethical review can take up to 6 weeks. Please ensure you allow for this in your timeline.

Q. I am not sure about the GDPR and data protection policies my organisation/institution has?

We would encourage you to contact your organisation/ institution as soon as possible on who is best placed to advise on this matter. Every organisation has a legal obligation to ensure GDPR compliance and it is likely you will have a Data Protection Officer (or equivalent) within your organisation/ institution that can support this.

5. Project team

Q. Who can I include in my project team, and can they be costed?

You may cost project members as necessary into your project. The funding will cover the time spent working on the project.

This includes any supervisory support (e.g. from a supervisor) or research support (e.g. research assistant), or those with the necessary expertise (e.g. a statistician). The role and responsibilities of all team members will need to be included within the application form. The lead applicant will ultimately be responsible for the project and its delivery.

You should also ensure you (will) have the appropriate agreements in place as necessary e.g. for any data sharing.

Q. Do research assistants have to have a PhD, or any specific qualifications?

No. Research assistants do not have to have (or be studying for) a PhD or any other specific qualification unless necessary for their specific role (e.g. a social worker must be qualified to deliver social work/services).

Q. I will need to recruit externally for my project team, is this allowed?

Yes. We do not pay for recruitment costs, but funding can be used to cover team members' time on the project (as a direct cost of research), this includes anyone that will need to be recruited. Projects will need to be set up and delivered within 12 months, so the considerations, risks and impact of any delays to recruitment on the project should be appropriately considered.

Q. Do all the project team members have to be from the same organisation/institution?

No. Project members do not have to be from the organisation/ institution as the lead applicant.

The lead applicant will ultimately be responsible for the project and its delivery, and the lead organisation (usually, where the lead applicant is based) will be responsible for the management and disbursement of funds among any collaborators/partners.

You should also ensure you (will) have the appropriate agreements in place as necessary between individuals and/or organisation e.g. for any data sharing.

6. Application Process

Q. What can I attach to the application form?

We would expect to see a costing table, project timeline, CV of the lead applicant and where appropriate, supporting letter from supervisor or institution.

Q. What do you mean by needing to gain supervisor/institutional approval?

We require candidates to obtain a written approval letter from their supervisor or institution to confirm that they support the application and that, if funded, will grant them permission to take the required time to conduct this piece of research and provide support (i.e. with regards to signing grant agreements, receiving and disbursing funding, GDPR compliance, and providing practical support for the research).

Q. Does the project need to be linked to a business? Is specific access to a business account or any specific reporting requirements about finance/budget.

WWCSC will conduct the necessary due diligence for any prospective project.

We are unable to provide funding to individuals directly, and the lead organisation (usually, where the lead applicant is based) will be responsible for signing to the grant agreement, the terms and conditions and the management and disbursement of funds with WWCSC.

If you are not linked to a business organisation, then please email us at programmes@whatworks-csc.org.uk so we can assess your application and due diligence on an individual basis. However as it is a grant scheme, it is preferable that you do have a link to an established, legal and eligible organisation, e.g. HEI, Local Authority, Research Organisation etc.

7. Assessment Criteria

Q. Will a project with a smaller budget be more favourable?

We have no preference on the size of the project. Value for money is a criteria that will be considered, but this does not mean that any project will be favoured for being of either high or low budget proposals. You do not need to apply for the maximum available funding if your project does not require this.

Q. Are you looking for anything in particular in the application?

A "good" application will, at a minimum, should have a clear rationale, for what the issue is that you are trying to address and how this is relevant to the children's social care sector in England, as well as the potential impact to influence practice or policy. We expect to see a clear research question and an outline of how you plan to complete your research project within the 12 month time period.