

SCOTLAND BEYOND NET ZERO SEED FUND

Call for proposals

Scotland Beyond Net Zero seed fund for 2026-2027 is now open. The fund is designed to support climate and net zero research collaborations across Scotland.

Key information

Application deadline: 5pm, Monday 27th April

Networking webinars: Please visit <https://scotland-beyond-net-zero.ac.uk/events/> to find a suitable time and sign up. Please note these are not primarily information sessions and will be focussed on making connections across universities.

Expected project start dates: On or any time after 1st August 2026

Award amount: Small awards of £5,000; large awards of £15,000. Awards must be split evenly across university project partners.

Scotland Beyond Net Zero mission and goals of the seed fund

Scotland Beyond Net Zero's (SBNZ) mission is **to catalyse high-impact research, partnerships and collaborative activities that respond to Scotland's climate and environment challenges.**

The SBNZ seed fund is designed to spark potentially high-impact research which has been co-created with business, industry, government and communities in support of Scotland's ambitious net zero and just transition goals.

'Beyond' net zero means we see net zero and climate targets in a holistic way, including dimensions of climate justice, biodiversity and nature to consider what a 'good' society might look like in Scotland once net zero policies and targets have been achieved. Scotland's net zero policies are one component of a broader transition which encompasses technological innovation along with natural, social and cultural change, rooted in dynamics of politics, culture, history, power and narrative. We therefore welcome applications from across all disciplines including physical, natural and social sciences, arts and humanities, economics and policy, engineering and technology, and inter and cross-disciplinary approaches. We particularly



welcome proposals that have been co-created across project partners, and which lay foundations for further high-impact collaboration.

We invite researchers to develop their ideas in line with one or more of our six priority themes of built environment, food, finance, energy, natural systems and transport. We will also consider projects working in a cross-thematic way (for example, on issues of climate justice or circular economy which cut across these research themes).

Proposed projects must involve collaboration across at **least two participating university members of SBNZ**, and clear plans for engagement or partnership with at **least one other organisation** (e.g. community group, third sector organisation, local or national government or industry). In particular, we will award projects which show strong evidence that the research proposal has been **co-created** across the project team, including external partner(s).

Examples of suitable projects include, but are not limited to:

- Research which advances, informs, develops or helps to deliver national climate change and sustainability policy.
- Projects which broaden or deepen collaboration between academia and external partners (for example towards a specific funding opportunity), with an emphasis on co-creation with external partners.
- Projects which pilot or trial new technologies, methods, data or approaches to climate change mitigation or adaptation, or that promote adoption and take-up of such approaches across the public, private and third sector.
- Place-based projects which explore particular contexts and challenges, potentially using participatory or arts-based approaches to work closely with communities.
- Projects across disciplines that don't usually intersect are welcome.

For more information on projects we funded under previous schemes, please visit:

- 2025 projects: <https://scotland-beyond-net-zero.ac.uk/seed-fund-projects-2025-awarded-2/>
- 2024 projects: <https://scotland-beyond-net-zero.ac.uk/seedfund/> and <https://scotland-beyond-net-zero.ac.uk/2024-seed-fund-project-impacts/>

What we are looking for

Projects will be assessed against the following criteria. Each criteria carries equal weighting in the scoring process:



- **Quality and relevance**

Proposals should clearly explain the objectives of your research or collaboration activities, how you will go about fulfilling them, and likely results and insights. Proposals should strongly align with SBNZ's mission, and the goals of the seed fund as described above. Research should also align with one or more of the Scotland Beyond Net Zero themes (or develop a cross-thematic topic), and this should also be clearly described in the proposal. Proposals will be assessed on overall alignment with the seed fund's priorities, along with the soundness of the research concept and its potential to lead to future high-impact collaborative research.

- **Impact**

Applications should describe how the proposed research or collaboration activity will contribute to the relevant field of research and to Scotland's transition to net zero (and beyond) as described above. We also want to know about your pathways to impact - if your research and collaboration were to be scaled up, what contributions would you make to Scotland's transition net zero (and beyond), and how would you achieve that impact? We understand this is a relatively small award so are also interested to hear about potential future impact were your collaboration to continue. Your proposal should also explain how the findings will be communicated to different audiences (e.g. blogs, workshops) as well as any proposed academic outputs.

- **Co-creation of research**

Applications must propose a partnership between **at least one other participating SBNZ university member (listed below) plus a partner from a non-university organisation** (e.g. industry, community group, local or national government). This can be a brand-new partnership, or can be new activity between partners who have worked together before. You should set out how your partnership will work together to co-create relevant research challenges and activities. You **must** include evidence for the proposed partnership arrangements (e.g. letters or emails of support). You should also outline how the partnership has emerged and how you intend to work together in the future as a way to demonstrate genuine shared goals and co-creation of research challenges and activities.

- **Project plan and costs**

The proposal should provide a credible project plan with milestones that are achievable with the budget and timeframe available. The budget should clearly set out the resources requested by each university partner, as well as the total award requested (noting restrictions on funding provision set out below). In addition to ensuring compliance with your own university's policy on sustainability in research (for example, your own sustainable travel policies), we invite you to



set out how your research will comply with priority areas of [Concordat for the Environmental Sustainability of Research and Innovation Practice](#) where those areas are relevant to your proposal.

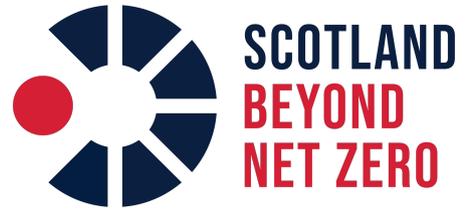
Expected outputs

Along with academic outputs specific to your proposal (such as conference presentations, policy briefs or academic papers), SBNZ seed fund awardees are expected to:

- Stay in regular contact with SBNZ and update about project impacts and proposals that have arisen as a result of the collaboration. In particular, please inform SBNZ about any relevant grant applications.
- Provide a short mid-point and end of project summary which demonstrates your project impacts.
- Provide a short, accessible paragraph plus an image at the start of your project which can be used for communications purposes.

Funding provision

- There are two awards available: a 'small' award of **£5,000 in total**, and a 'large' award of **£15,000 in total**. In each case the award will be split between participating members. For example, if two universities partner together to apply for a large award, each partner university will receive £7,500 each. This variation has been introduced this year to enable more efficient allocation of funds across universities, while maintaining flexibility in project type. It is important that your project is achievable with an even budget split, and the budget must be designed in this way.
- Expected duration – projects can propose a start date after 1st August 2026 and a finish date before 31st July 2027.
- Eligible and ineligible costs follow your university's rules for internal funding. Generally, we will fund staff time; costs associated with partnership and network building; travel and subsistence; and necessary equipment where a clear need is demonstrated (excluding laptops). See appendix 1 for details.
- Payments will be made to each university's researchers via internal transfer. On award, you will be advised the specific arrangements for your own institution.
- External partners (non-University) cannot receive funding, though it may be possible to support travel and subsistence to permit external partners to take part.



Eligibility

Proposals should include researchers from at least two *participating* Scotland Beyond Net Zero members, along with at least one partner from outside higher education in Scotland such as local or national government, industry, charities or community groups.

The list of participating Scotland Beyond Net Zero members for 2026-27 can be found on the SBNZ website at <https://scotland-beyond-net-zero.ac.uk/funding-opportunities/>

Projects should have a Principal Investigator (PI) from each participating university who is a *member of staff within their university with responsibility for research* (this can include staff with technical or knowledge exchange responsibilities as well as traditional academic posts). Postdocs can be part of research teams but cannot lead in this round. External partners cannot receive funding.

If applying for follow-up work from a previous SBNZ seed fund award, please describe the outcomes from the previous application and how this second application will generate different outputs and outcomes to deliver new impacts e.g. a potential new impact route that has been identified from undertaking the previous project.

Application process and form

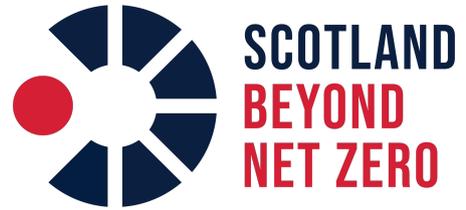
Please apply using the form which is available on our website at <https://scotland-beyond-net-zero.ac.uk/funding-opportunities/>.

This form should be completed and emailed to k.symons@ed.ac.uk and sbnz@ed.ac.uk by 5pm on the deadline given above. **Your email *must* contain the phrase 'seed_fund_application_2026' in the subject line.**

More information and questions

We will be holding a series of webinars focussed on making connections between potential university partners. Please visit <https://scotland-beyond-net-zero.ac.uk/events/> to find a suitable date and sign up. Please note these are not intended as information sessions, so attendees are encouraged to read the guidance in detail. There will be opportunity ask questions.

You can contact the Scotland Beyond Net Zero Senior Research Partnership Manger, Dr Kate Symons on k.symons@ed.ac.uk with any questions. Kate may also put you in touch with a local contact in your institution.



We will maintain a Q&A on our website which will be updated with commonly asked questions. Please check back to this link throughout the application process to access the Q&A:

<https://scotland-beyond-net-zero.ac.uk/funding-opportunities/>

Selection process

Projects will be selected by a panel convened by Scotland Beyond Net Zero and made up of representatives from participating universities.

Projects will be judged on their alignment with the criteria given above.

Applicants will be informed of the outcome of their submission by end of July 2026.

Appendix 1 - costs

Projects will be awarded at 100% full economic cost. Funding must not be used for indirect or estates related costs at the institution you are based in. Eligible and ineligible activities include:

Activity/Cost	Eligibility
Travel expenses: Train, rental car, lodging, meals etc. Please note we will not fund any air travel within the UK or where a reasonable rail alternative is present (for example, London to Paris) and expect researchers to travel in the most sustainable way possible in line with their institutions' sustainable travel policies.	Eligible
Costs for hosting seminars/conferences or workshops (e.g., venue rental, catering, lodging, etc.)	Eligible
Conference registration (related to collaborative research)	Eligible
Consumable materials and supplies (we expect this to be as sustainable as possible and would like researchers to consider the environmental implications of any supplies requested)	Eligible
Publications and printing (related to collaborative research)	Eligible
Hiring research assistants and associates to help with research project (subject to each institution's recruitment policies).	Eligible
Replacement teaching buyout	Check with your university
DA (directly allocated) staff time	Not eligible, but in-kind contributions of staff time welcome.
General teaching or instructional programs	Not eligible
Stipend payments to non-Edinburgh or non-partner individuals	Not eligible
Student scholarships	Not eligible



Website development	Not eligible
Mobile phone cards	Not eligible
Entertainment costs	Not eligible
Computers, laptops, printers, standard software, basic computing accessories (access to high-performance computers or other applications that are justified by the project are allowed)	Not eligible

A note on sustainability: You must abide by your own institution's policy on sustainability, for example any relevant sustainable travel or catering policy. In keeping with the ethos of the fund, we welcome applications which go beyond local policies where appropriate.