

# AHRC Catalyst Guide for Researchers

AHSS Research Facilitation

University of Cambridge

January 2026

|                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Aims of the Scheme</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Remember that the core goal of the scheme is the development of researchers and their ideas. You need to show how the grant will strengthen your professional development (include mentoring, training, advisory board)</li><li>The projects are expected to be “ambitious and complex” - think beyond the individual fellowship model, include collaborations</li><li>It is beneficial to include non-academic partners and collaborators. Make strong plans for non-academic engagement and impact.</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Organization and formatting</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>You can log in to the portal at any time by clicking “apply”. Test your access to the portal, look at various sections required.</li><li>Draft your application using the questions available on the call website. You will find detailed guidance pertaining to each question under the “How to apply” tab.</li><li>Remember to address all the bullet points, including, for example, risks.</li><li>References must be included in the word count for the relevant sections. Prioritise those most pertinent to the application.</li><li>Subheadings are a useful tool for organising the content of the proposal and leading the reviewers through the text. They enhance readability.</li><li>Consider using a Gantt chart or another visual model to represent the project timeline. It is very effective.</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Writing</b>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Do not use too much space for the literature review. Focus on clearly setting out the project plan and implementation.</li><li>Use active language to help sell the project. Saying what you will do, rather than what you hope/would like to do, is an effective way of instilling confidence in the reviewer.</li><li>Show your excitement and passion for your project- do not be afraid to write in the first person.</li><li>Explain to the reviewer why it’s important, why you are the right person to lead this project and how you are going to do this.</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Notes on various sections</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Vision:</b> this is the “sales pitch”. Explain why the project is important and timely.</li><li><b>Approach:</b> This is the “how” of the project. Set out clear objectives, methods, outputs. Provide as many details as possible. For example:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>If you are creating a project website - who is going to manage it, who is the intended user, how long is the website going to operate.</li><li>If you are doing archival research: What archives, what documents you expect to find there, how long will the visit last, what is the contingency plan if you don’t find what you expect?</li></ul></li><li><b>Applicant and team capability to deliver:</b> Use the template provided. Clearly link your past skills and experience to the current project. More resources can be found <a href="#">here</a>.</li><li><b>Ethics and responsible research and innovation:</b> This section includes questions on data management. You can have your data management plan reviewed by the University <a href="#">DMP Support Service</a>.</li><li><b>Resources and cost justification:</b> do not try to make the project “cheap”. Ensure you have the resources needed to deliver the project. The reviewers are assessing feasibility.</li><li><b>Project Partners:</b> Discuss the difference between a “Project Partner” and a “Collaborator” with your RGA. Ensure you have enough time to obtain support letters from Project Partners.</li></ul> |
| <b>General Tips</b>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Get as much feedback as possible on your application, from:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Your mentor, other senior colleagues in your field , colleagues with experience of the scheme, non-specialists – is anything unclear?</li><li>Give yourself at least two months to put together an application. Remember internal institutional deadlines.</li></ul></li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

## Resources

- [Cambridge University Research Operations Office](#): Latest updates on internal deadlines
- [AHRC Curiosity and Catalyst schemes webinar](#): learn about the AHRC vision for the scheme
- [Research Professional](#): Database of funding opportunities