

**REGIONAL STUDIES ASSOCIATION (RSA)
RSA EARLY CAREER RESEARCH GRANT SCHEME (EC)**

HANDBOOK 2026

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I. The award in brief

This award is open to single applicants in their early career (five years' maximum between the date shown on their certificate and the application deadline). Applicants must be based within an eligible higher education institution (HEI). They must be a current, early career member of the Regional Studies Association and remain a member throughout the grant and reporting period. The RSA Early Career Awards support a discrete piece of regional studies and/or regional science research. The value of the award is up to £11,000 (c. \$14,600; c. €12,500). The award has a maximum time span of 18 months, and reporting conditions apply. Only one award will be given to any successful applicant.

The quality of applications will determine the allocation of funds in each round. Up to three grants will generally be available in each round, but the association may choose to release further funds in any round.

Successful applicants will receive the full Terms and Conditions governing awards as part of the formal grant offer, based on the general terms and conditions below.

II. Submission process and assessment criteria

The RSA Early Career Grant has a two-stage application process. In the first round, applicants submit an expression of interest. Shortlisted applicants from this first round are then asked to submit a full proposal.

The estimated process for the 2026 round is detailed below, and the deadlines are as follows:

Application round	Closing Date	Recommendation of the Research Committee to the RSA Board or Executive Group, and final decision	Applicants are usually informed about the outcome.
2026 ROUND			
First round EXPRESSION OF INTEREST	3rd March 2026	n/a	June 2026
Final round FULL APPLICATION	September 2026	November 2026	November 2026

First selection round: Expression of Interest

The Expression of Interest will require you to complete the online application. If you are eligible for the Early Career RSA grant scheme, you will find the online application form in the RSA Lounge (<https://lounge.regionalstudies.org/>), under Community, Grants.

- Title of the research project
- Timings of the research
- Summary - details of research and the advances it is hoped to make – word limit 500
- Brief overview of costs and budget

The Expression of Interest should be submitted via RSA Lounge, Community, Grants by 3rd March 2026.

If you have any questions or need any help with the submission form, please send us an email to ecgrant@regionalstudies.org

Final selection round: Full Application

Successful applicants from the first selection round will be invited to submit a complete application.

The final application will include:

- Summary of Aims (200 words)
- Why this Research is Important (200 words)
- Research Methods (200 words)
- Who might benefit (200 words)
- Contribution to Career (200 words)
- Statement of Support (200 words)
- Potential intellectual property (200 words)
- Full Research Proposal (1500 words)
- Enter your institutional Head of Department (First Name, Family Name, Email)
- Enter Cost and Budget details (200 words – this is a more detailed breakdown of the original costs/budget)

In your initial application, you have prefilled the Title, Summary, and Costs/Budget fields, which are not editable.

If you have a table for your budget, this may be better uploaded as a PDF document, along with:

- A summarised CV listing a maximum of 5 relevant publications
- A supporting letter from your Higher Education Institution (HEI)
- Confirmation of early career status (a copy of your PhD certificate)

For the final round, applications must be made on the online application form, accessible via the RSA Lounge, Community, and Grants. For any queries or technical issues, please email ecgrant@regionalstudies.org.

A detailed budget must be submitted with the application form. The budget will form part of the research contract, and applicants should expect to spend the funds in accordance with the terms set out. They should contact the Association if spending patterns are expected to vary by more than 20%, as spending outside this parameter may not be reimbursed.

The Research Committee will review and assess final applications and will make funding recommendations to the RSA Board for decision.

The research is usually expected to commence at the earliest in December 2026.

A successful applicant will receive an award letter, which serves as a contract between the Association and the grant holder. The research is expected to start within 6 months of the start

date stated in the application form at the latest, or the grant will be invalidated and the award reallocated. The grant applicant and the higher education institution (HEI) must sign the award letter and any subsequent agreement.

Assessment criteria

Incomplete applications or applications arriving after the closing date will not be considered. All applications should demonstrate that RSA funds are sought for a clearly defined, discrete research project in regional studies and/or regional science that will have an identifiable outcome upon completion.

Applications will be assessed based on (i) quality, (ii) the deliverability of the proposed project, and (iii) the capacity of the early-career researcher to develop as a leader in the field.

The RSA Board will make the decision based on the recommendation of the Association's Research Committee. The Committee will reach its decision based on the refereeing of panel members; additional referees will be sought where the subject area demands this. No feedback will be provided, and correspondence will not be entered into. We regret that, as a micro-research funder and a registered charity relying in large part on the volunteer labour of our members, who are mostly academics, the Association is not able to offer feedback on applications.

Expectations and obligations

The grant holder will be expected to play an RSA ambassadorial role for the duration of the grant. This may include speaking about the grant scheme at RSA events, writing short pieces for *Regions* eZine, the RSA Blog, the RSA website, or LinkedIn, and making other nonspecific contributions to the Association's profile.

General grant conditions and eligibility requirements

- A.** Early career researchers – “Researchers who have been awarded a PhD within five years (or eight years, in case of documented significant career interruption for: maternity or parental leave; career’s responsibility; illness; National Service; or non-research employment) of the closing date for that particular round of the scheme are eligible to apply. No additional time allowance will be made for part-time employment. PhD award date is taken to mean the date of the award by the University, usually the date on the PhD certificate, a copy of which will be required.”
- B.** For clarity, this scheme is only available to postdoctoral researchers who have received their certificate by the Expression of Interest deadline at the latest.
- C.** The EC Grant Scheme supports a discrete piece of regional studies and/or regional science research. The value of the award is up to £11,000 (for your information: c. \$14,600; c. €12,500). All grant sums are quoted and paid in British Pounds Sterling. The award has a maximum time span of 18 months, and reporting conditions apply.
- D.** Applicants must be members of the Association and remain in membership throughout the grant and reporting period. Recipients of this grant must be an individual member of the Regional Studies Association in any membership band - A, B, C or D at the time of application and remain a member until the end of the reporting period and acceptance of the end-of-award report, whichever is the latest.
- E.** Applications from corporate membership are not eligible. For clarity, corporate members may not apply for this award as organisations or individuals representing corporate members.

- F.** Grants will only be allocated to single researchers. Co-authored or team applications are not eligible.
- G.** Members in any territorial band may apply for grant funding.
- H.** Grants will typically only be awarded to higher education institutions (HEI) or recognised research institutions, as grant holders will be subject to their employing institutions' research rules and ethics. Applicants must be based within an eligible HEI. RSA will allow applications from early career researchers on temporary contracts with a recognised HEI, provided that evidence is supplied showing that the agreement covers, at a minimum, the research and reporting periods as defined in the application.
- I.** The grant will be administered through the HEI, typically an institution with degree-awarding powers or a national research institute. The grant holders will be subject to the research rules and ethics of their employing institutions.
- J.** Only one Early Career grant is possible per member.
- K.** No co-funding is possible.
- L.** Only one reapplication is allowed. Where referees' comments have been given to the applicant, these should be addressed in any re-application. Candidates may reapply only if they remain eligible as early-career researchers. Note that the Association is not obligated to give application feedback, and discussion will not be entered.
- M.** Members will only receive one award across the three individual RSA research grant schemes (Early Career Grant scheme, MeRSA Research Grant and FeRSA Research Grant scheme) to maximise access to Association funding. For clarity, if you have already received an Early Career Research Grant, you are not eligible to apply for the MeRSA or FeRSA Grant Schemes.
- N.** Full details should be provided in the application form if a similar research application has been submitted or is about to be forwarded to any other organisation(s). If both are successful, the applicant must accept the RSA Early Career Scheme and reject the other offer.
- O.** The Association must solely fund the project, but applicants may consider using this funding as leverage for further funding for future projects. The grant must fund a discrete project, such as a pilot study.
- P.** The Association's grant funding will be acknowledged in all reports, presentations, and publications.
- Q.** Career interruptions of less than one month will not be considered. The following types of disruption will be considered:
 - a. career responsibility.
 - b. disruption due to international relocation for research employment not exceeding 3 months per international relocation.
 - c. illness.
 - d. maternity or parental leave; and/or
 - e. unemployment, or non-research employment for a total of one year.

Non-Eligibility

You may not apply for this grant if:

- You are a PhD student. This scheme is only available to post-doctoral researchers who have received their certificate.
- You are not an active RSA member.
- You have already been awarded an Early Career, FeRSA or MeRSA Research Grants.
- Corporate members of the RSA are not eligible to apply for this funding.

RSA Members should note that they cannot hold more than one consecutive RSA research award. For clarity, members holding a Research Network Grant, Policy Expo or Travel grant may not apply for the EC until their existing award has expired and all reporting requirements have been satisfactorily delivered and accepted by the Association. Members can only have one of the RSA Individual Research Grants (Early Career, MeRSA, FeRSA). For example, if you have held an Early Career grant, you are ineligible for the MeRSA and FeRSA grants. For clarity, after successfully submitting all deliveries for the Early Career, MeRSA or FeRSA award, a member may apply for the Policy Expo, Research Network, Travel Grant or Conference Bursaries. This is to enable access to the Association's limited resources for as many members as possible, thus supporting a multiplicity of scholars and their diverse approaches and areas of interest. It is also consistent with the Association's pluralist approach to regional studies.

III. Reporting

Three reports are required to comply with the grant scheme:

1. **One short midterm activity narrative report** within 9 months of beginning the research
2. **The end of award report (narrative and financial)** within six weeks of completing the research. The end-of-award report will include both a narrative and a financial section. The HEI is expected to complete the financial report.
3. **An impact report** to capture impacts within 12 months of completing the research.

Please note that if the grant holder does not fulfil all requirements, the RSA reserves the right not to refund any claims.

In addition to the grant sum, the RSA will cover one Article Publishing Charge (APC) to publish an article in the RSA's Open-Access journal *Regional Studies*, *Regional Science*, which will include acknowledgement of the grant. Therefore, when assessing the application, the RSA Research Committee will consider the research proposal's potential for publication.

Any other relevant updates, in the form of brief reports, news items, pictures, pieces for the RSA Blog, the RSA website, LinkedIn, or *Regions eZine*, are strongly encouraged. Information provided in any submitted report may be used in part (extract) or entirety to promote the research within Association publications and to the members and broader community. Still, this will be in consultation with the grant holder in all cases.

Reports should be submitted using the appropriate form, which can be downloaded from the Association's website: <https://www.regionalstudies.org/funding/early-career-grant-scheme/>

IV. Financial guidelines

This grant can also be used to conduct research that would lead to a larger grant application or to explore niche and development areas that are not yet ready for a larger application.

Eligible Costs

Funds may be spent to cover the direct expenses incurred in planning, conducting, and developing the research, including but not limited to:

- Project planning and development costs (cost of travel nationally and overseas), Travel and subsistence for the researcher
- Up to a non-negotiable maximum of £2,500 teaching or research buy-out.
- Up to a non-negotiable maximum of £5,000 for research assistance.

- Up to £1,000 of the Early Career Grant may be used towards attending an RSA Conference (travel, subsistence and conference fees at the applicable country band fee) to present a paper and/or run a workshop that will include acknowledgement of the grant.
- Consumables: Purchase datasets, photocopies, microfilms, etc., and any minor items used during the project.
- Costs of interpreters in the field and transcription costs of interviews.
- Costs of preparing camera-ready copy, copy-editing, proofreading, and indexing, where the publisher does not bear these.
- Cost of setting up the research website.
- Costs of deposit of digital material in a suitably accessible repository may be considered.
- Cost of reproduction rights will be considered, provided a contract for publication is in place.

Ineligible Costs

Applicants registered with special needs may consult the Association about possible exceptions. Ineligible costs are:

- Institutional overheads
- Payment to the principal researcher instead of salary or for personal maintenance at home
- Equipment, including but not limited to computing, printing, cameras, telephones of any type, recording equipment, etc
- Software – of any description
- Subventions for direct production costs (printing, binding, distribution, marketing, etc.)
- Books
- Childcare
- Insurance
- RSA Membership Fee

Claims

The Regional Studies Association is a learned society and a registered charity. The Association has generated the funding for the Early Career Scheme. Grant holders and their institutions are expected not only to comply with the scheme's terms but also to uphold its spirit. If you and/or your HEI are unsure if an expense is eligible, please consult the Association before making a financial commitment. Expenses deemed ineligible will not be covered.

Claims may be submitted only for items listed in the application, unless the Association grants prior permission to transfer funds to new headings.

A detailed budget was submitted with the application form. The budget is part of the research contract, and applicants should expect to spend the funds as outlined. Spending outside this parameter may not be reimbursed. Any budget changes should be communicated to the RSA in advance and are subject to approval. Please note that if the grant holder does not fulfil all the requirements, the RSA reserves the right not to refund claims.

Please note that if a grant holder does not claim a refund within 6 months of the end of the award report, the RSA will not reimburse the claim.

Payment Schedule

A first payment of £5,500 (or its equivalent in dollars or euros) or half of the total grant to be awarded will be paid at the commencement of the grant, with any remainder of the grant up to

a maximum of £5,500 to be invoiced by the HEI. The final payment will be made only upon the Research Committee's acceptance of the end-of-award report. If the Research Committee finds the report unsatisfactory, resubmission will be requested, and funds will be withheld until the report is acceptable.

If the applicant's HEI is outside the UK, it should be noted that the grant is awarded in Great British Pound Sterling (GBP) and that the HEI must ensure the exchange rate risk. Transfers will be made in GBP sterling at the prevailing exchange rate. The HEI will bear the costs where transfers are made by bank transfer.

V. Recognition / Intellectual property / Knowledge transfer

The support of the Regional Studies Association should be acknowledged when presenting the research results. Copies of any publications should be given to the Association. The receipt of the grant should be acknowledged in all publications. Where possible and appropriate, the Association expects that datasets arising from the research will be deposited in a public repository and that the whereabouts of the dataset will be made known.

The Association wishes to have the opportunity to support all its researchers. Therefore, if any events or promotions are to be organised as part of the research, the RSA should be alerted so they can assist with marketing.

The RSA requires the right to access all unpublished papers, records, data or collections resulting from the work carried out under an RSA Early Career Grant scheme, some of which may be required for Annual Reports and Board Meetings. For clarity, this clause is intended to ensure that the RSA can maximise exposure of published outcomes from RSA-funded research and reference them within RSA reports, websites, blogs, etc. It is not intended to require sharing information collected under conditions of anonymity and confidentiality. Grant awardees with concerns about this should contact the office for further explanation. At any time, the RSA may require detailed information on the work results funded through the scheme for use in reports and financial audits.

Knowledge Transfer

The RSA recognises and encourages knowledge transfer and actively supports partnerships and other schemes that enable this. Recipients of the EC Grant Scheme are encouraged to ensure that the outcomes of this research investment are used to the benefit of the regional studies and/or the regional science community, and should inform the Association where research materials are deposited.

VI. Ethics, misconduct and liabilities

The RSA accepts no responsibility for the views or opinions of the grant holder. The HEI is responsible for ensuring that the research is organised and undertaken within a framework of best practice that recognises the various factors, including rigour, respect, and responsibility, that may influence or impact a research project. Grant holders must comply with their HEI's ethics code, which will be referenced in the document signed off by the HEI.

The HEI is responsible for ensuring that all necessary permissions are obtained before the application is sent to the Association and that the roles and responsibilities of those involved in the research are clear.

The grant holder and the HEI are responsible for any matters arising from the grant process. The holder's research, the institution holding the grant or the research results.

The grant holder and the HEI are responsible for any human resources-related health and safety issues (the HEI health and safety regulations will apply). The Regional Studies Association accepts no responsibility for problems, directly or indirectly, arising from the funded research, the grant holder, or other organisations and individuals involved.

GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation)

The HEI ensures that the research complies with the correct GDPR, the Data Protection Act, and PECR (Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations).

VII. FAQ

1. Are virements between headings allowed?

A 20% virement is allowed between headings without prior permission, except for teaching/research buy-out, which is capped at £2,500, and research assistance, which is capped at £5,000.

2. Can members hold more than one RSA grant/award at a time?

No. Members should note that they cannot hold more than one consecutive RSA research award at a time. For clarity, members holding a Research Network Grant, Policy Expo or an RSA Individual Research Grant (Early Career, FeRSA or Travel grant) may not apply for the MeRSA until their existing award has expired and all reporting requirements have been satisfactorily delivered and accepted by the Association.

Members are permitted only one individual grant. For example, if you have held an Early Career grant, you are ineligible for the MeRSA and FeRSA grants.

For clarity, after successfully submitting all deliveries for the Early Career, MeRSA, or FeRSA award, a member may apply for the Policy Expo, Research Network, Travel Grant, or Conference Bursaries.

3. Can the researcher take time out of work during the grant period?

This is at the discretion of the Chair of the RSA Research Committee and the RSA Chief Executive and would not usually exceed six months, but may, in exceptional circumstances, extend to one year.

4. What is the latest that a grant holder can delay the start of their project?

Six months maximum – not negotiable. After this period, the Association reclaims the money.

5. Can part-time researchers apply for the Early Career Grant?

Part-time researchers can apply, but the project must be completed within 18 months.

6. Can researchers apply for funding for a project which has already started?

No, retrospective funding is not allowed.

7. What about insurance, health, safety, and liabilities while the researcher is working?

Please consult the section on ethics, misconduct and liabilities.

8. Is the Early Career Grant portable?

Yes, if there is a common agreement between the grant holder, the original and the new host institution, and only with advance written permission from the Association.

9. Is a change of scientific theme, methodology, strategy, and/or objectives allowed during the grant?

Any significant changes in the project's direction will require written permission from the Association.

VIII. Application Queries

Any queries should be addressed to ecgrant@regionalstudies.org or by telephoning +44 (0)1273 698 017.