



Research Today, Policy Tomorrow

**REGIONAL STUDIES ASSOCIATION (RSA) MEMBERSHIP
RESEARCH GRANT SCHEME**

MeRSA HANDBOOK 2026

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I. The award in brief

In 2015, the Association launched the **RSA Membership Research Grant (MeRSA)** that aims to reward excellence and support outstanding individual researchers on a topic related to regional studies and regional science.

In offering the Membership Research Grant, the Association seeks to raise the profile of regional research and its contribution, if appropriate, to policy and practice. All applicants must set out how they will disseminate the results of their study, not only through academic publishing but also to communities of policy and practice. Awards will be judged based on the excellence of the research proposal and the ability of the applicant to communicate the research results broadly.

The MeRSA Research Grant's procedures are provided to support a discrete piece of regional studies and/or regional science research. The grant's value is up to **£5,000**. (\$6,600; c. €5,900). The award has a maximum time span of 18 months, and reporting conditions apply. Only one award will be made to any successful applicant.

This research funding scheme is intended to provide opportunities for mid-career scholars who have already published in regional studies or science and are current Individual Members of the RSA. The full Terms and Conditions governing the grant will be provided to successful applicants as part of the formal grant offer, based on the general terms and conditions below.

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

Prioritised research themes

The MeRSA Research Grants respond to the aims of the Association. The Regional Studies Association's Development Plan highlights the Association's aims and priorities in the next planning period.

The RSA aims to

- Lead the regional research, policy and practice communities
- Develop our members and support our community
- Deliver high-quality regional research
- Influence policy debate and practice
- Innovate in publishing
- Acknowledge excellence in our field

In line with many other funders, the RSA Board operates several schemes. In some of these, it allows applicants to apply freely; in others, it requires them to contribute to the research priorities of the Association. Applicants for the MeRSA Research Grant should indicate how their application adds to research and understanding on the following prioritised themes:

1. Austerity, risk and resilience
2. Urban and regional sustainability
3. Leadership and governance
4. Geo-economy and geo-politics
5. City region building and metro politics
6. Territorial politics and policy
7. Urban and regional theory, methodology and data
8. Developing area studies
9. Socio-spatial inequalities, ageing, demography and wellbeing
10. Innovation, agglomeration, evolution
11. Firms, sectors and global production networks
12. Local and regional economic development and planning
13. Identity, citizenship and lived differences
14. Cohesion, competition and smart cities
15. Infrastructures and built environment

II. Submission process and assessment criteria

The MeRSA Research Grant operates a two-stage application and assessment process. In the first round, applicants submit an expression of interest. Shortlisted applicants from this first round will then be 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 to the RSA Board or Executive Group and final decision	Applicants are usually informed about the outcome
2026 ROUND			
First selection round EXPRESSION OF INTEREST	3rd March 2026	n/a	June 2026
Final selection 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 MeRSA 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 mersa@regionalstudies.org

Non-shortlisted applicants from a previous round may reapply only once with the same proposal.

Final selection round: Full Application

The following documents will need to be provided as part of the final application:

- 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 (2000 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)

You will have prefilled the Title, Summary and Costs/Budget in your initial application, so these will not be editable.

If you have a table for your budget, this may be better uploaded as a PDF document, along with your CV and list of publications.

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 mersa@regionalstudies.org.

A detailed budget must be submitted as part of the application form. The budget will form part of the research contract, and applicants should expect to spend the money according to what has been 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 funding recommendations will be made to the RSA Board for a decision.

A successful applicant will receive an award letter 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 piece of research in regional studies and/or regional science, which will have an identifiable outcome on completion.

Applications will be assessed based on (i) quality and (ii) the deliverability of the proposed project.

The RSA Board will make the decision based on the recommendations of the Association's Research Committee. The Committee will reach its decisions based on refereeing by 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 profile of the Association.

General Grant Conditions, Terms and Eligibility Requirements

- A. This award is open to **RSA Individual members** (excluding student, early career, retired/emeritus or corporate) and in any membership band - A, B, C or D at the time of application. Grant holders must remain members throughout the grant and its reporting period, which ends 12 months after the acceptance of the research report and after the submission of an impact and outcomes report.
- B. The MeRSA supports a discrete piece of regional studies and/or regional science research. The value of the award is up to £5,000 (for your information, c. \$6,600; c. €5,900). 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. Members in any territorial band may apply for grant funding.
- C. The MeRSA Research Grant will only be allocated to a single researcher. Co-authored or team applications are not eligible.
- D. Grants will generally 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. The RSA will allow applications from researchers on temporary contracts with a recognised HEI, provided that evidence shows that the agreement covers a minimum of the research and reporting period defined in the application.
- E. The grant will be administered through the grant holder's HEI, typically an

institution with degree awarding powers or a national research institute. The grant holders will be subject to the research rules, data protection regulations, and ethics of the institutions they employ.

- F. Applicants must be members of the Association and remain in membership throughout the grant and reporting periods. Recipients of this grant must be members of the Regional Studies Association at the time of application and remain members until the end of the reporting period or the acceptance of the end of the award report, whichever is the latest.
- G. Applications from corporate members are not eligible. For clarity, corporate members may not apply for this award as organisations or individuals as representatives of corporate members. No co-funding is possible.
- H. 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.
- I. 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. Only one MeRSA Research grant is possible per member. Non-shortlisted applicants from a previous round can reapply once with the same proposal.
- J. 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 decide whether to accept the MeRSA Grant and reject the other offer.
- K. The Association's grant funding will be acknowledged in all reports, presentations, and publications.
- L. Career interruptions of less than one month will not be considered. The following types of interruption will be considered:
 - (i) career responsibility.
 - (ii) disruption due to international relocation for research employment not exceeding 3 months per international relocation.
 - (iii) illness.
 - (iv) maternity or parental leave; and/or
 - (v) unemployment, or non-research employment for one year.

Non-Eligibility

You may not apply for this grant if:

- You are a post-doctoral researcher supported by a senior investigator's funding.
- You do not hold a current RSA Individual membership at the time of the application.
- You are a student, early career, retired/emeritus or corporate RSA member.
- You hold a FeRSA Fellowship (FeRSA) status of the RSA. You are a PhD student or an early-career researcher.
- You have already been awarded an RSA Early Career Grant, FeRSA or MeRSA

Research Grant.

- 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 MeRSA 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 in the interest of enabling access to the Association's limited resources to as many members as possible and thus to support a multiplicity of scholars and their different approaches and topics of interest. It is consistent with the Association's pluralist approach to regional studies.

III. Reporting

The following reports are required to comply with the RSA Membership Research Grant scheme:

1. **A short news article** published in the *Regions* eZine or the RSA Blog with appropriate photographs, graphs or figures.
2. **An end-of-award report, including a financial report**, within three months of finishing the project. The end-of-award report will include both a narrative and an economic section. The HEI is expected to complete the financial report.
3. **An impact and outcomes report**, twelve months after the award's end date.

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*. The article will include an acknowledgement of the grant, and therefore, the RSA Research Committee will consider the research proposal's publishable potential when assessing the application.

Additional relevant updates, such as brief reports, research summaries for the website, news items, pictures, and pieces for the RSA website, Facebook, or Twitter, are strongly encouraged.

Information provided in any submitted report may be used in part (extract) or in its entirety to promote the research project within the Association's publications. 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 at

<https://www.regionalstudies.org/funding/membership-research-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 and accommodation nationally and overseas, and subsistence for the researcher)
- Teaching or research buy-out up to £1,250
- Research assistance up to £2,500
- Consumables – purchase of datasets, photocopies, microfilms, etc. and any minor items that will be used during the course of 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 costs
- 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 that there is a contract for publication in place
- Up to £1,000 of the MeRSA 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.

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, 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 MeRSA Research Grant Scheme. Grant holders and their institutions are expected to comply not only with the terms of the scheme but also with the scheme's 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 only be submitted for items listed in the application unless prior permission from the Association is granted for the virement of monies for new headings.

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

A detailed budget was submitted as part of the application form. The budget is a part of the research contract; applicants should expect to spend the money according to what was set out, and 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.

Payment Schedule

A first payment of £2,500 (or its equivalent in dollars or euros, depending upon the exchange rate) will be paid at the commencement of the grant, with any remainder of the grant up to a maximum of £5,000 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, and deliverables have not been delivered, 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 British Pounds 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 the research results are presented. 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 that they may assist with marketing.

Knowledge Transfer

The RSA recognises and encourages knowledge transfer and actively supports partnership and other schemes that enable this. Recipients of the MeRSA Research Grant scheme are encouraged to ensure that the outcomes of this research investment are used to benefit the regional studies and/or 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. It is the responsibility of the HEI to ensure 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 on 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 out of 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 resulting 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 movements between headings allowed?

A 20% movement is allowed between headings in the budget without prior permission.

2. Can members hold more than one RSA research 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 only permitted to have 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 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 money is reclaimed by the Association.

5. Can part-time researchers apply for the RSA Membership Research 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 RSA Membership Research Grant portable?

Yes, provided that 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 mersa@regionalstudies.org or by telephoning +44 (0)1273 698 017.