

Royal Historical Society

Grant Applications: An Introduction for ECR historians

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Introduction

Applying successfully for grants is an essential part of developing a research profile and career in history. External grants are of value for many reasons, including:

- allowing you to undertake costly research trips to archives, libraries and museums;
- funding research assistants who can undertake research on your behalf or translate sources for you;
- supporting conferences and workshops that help to develop and disseminate your research;
- supporting periods of research leave from teaching duties;
- providing external evidence (through peer review) of the calibre of your research;
- assisting with the costs of publications

This brief guide starts with some general advice to help you formulate your grant applications, and then explores potential funding opportunities for different kinds of research activity.

General Advice

- **Start small, build up a profile, and then expand your ambitions:** There are many schemes that offer small grants to early career historians (including from the RHS) to cover research expenses, conference travel and event organisation. You can often apply to multiple schemes over the course of a PhD. Making applications to these funds will hone your application skills and success will build up the 'Grants' section of your CV. This will help you gain the momentum, experience and profile to submit successful applications for larger projects.
- **Know your grants:** Many grants are advertised on a regular cycle, with deadlines at established points each year. If you ask advice about, and familiarise yourself with, the available funding landscape in your field before you require funding, you can plan ahead, and apply at the right time for the right scheme. Don't try to force your project into a funding scheme for which it is not appropriate, or for which you are not eligible. Instead, find a scheme for which you and your project are an appropriate fit.
- **Read, address and adhere to the application criteria:** Address the specific criteria of the funding scheme to which you are applying, answering every question you are asked. Aim for clarity, and avoid jargon. Applications will often be read by assessors who are **not** specialists in your field of history. Be careful to convey what research questions your project addresses, why those questions are important, and how you are addressing them. Do not exceed the word/page length specified in the grant application. Carefully check any budgets you provide, and make them as specific as feasible. If you know someone who has made a successful

application to the scheme you are applying for, ask if you can read their application in advance of submitting your own.

- **Work to the application's deadline:** Many grants require letters of support from supervisors or other academics who know your work. You will need to ensure that anyone writing on your behalf has a copy of your application and CV in plenty of time to write a reference by the application's stated deadline. Also factor in time to ask for feedback on your drafts from senior scholars. Don't assume that your application will be accepted if submitted late: most funding bodies automatically reject applications that miss the deadline, or that are not accompanied by the relevant supporting documents.
- **Proof-read your application carefully:** A grant application with many grammatical, spelling or other errors makes a very poor impression on the assessors. Funding bodies typically have far more applications than they can support. Don't auto-eliminate by detracting from the substance of the application through careless presentation.

Conference attendance

- **Your 'home' institution:** This is always the place to start. Most (but not all) internal funding opportunities are advertised at roughly the same time each year within a given institution. Acquainting yourself with the normal deadlines for these internal pots of money (including your own department) in your first months/year of study will increase your likelihood of being funded, and enhance your ability to coordinate internal and external funding applications.
- **Royal Historical Society:** The RHS provides funding to assist doctoral candidates and postdoctoral early career historians to give papers at national and international conferences. There are four deadlines each year. Remember that the total number of RHS applications you can make is limited: don't lose the opportunity to apply for an expensive conference late in your degree by applying for multiple less expensive, local ones early in your studies. <https://royalhistsoc.org/grants/conference-travel/>.
- **Scholarly societies:** Scholarly societies that organise or offer financial support for conferences often offer bursaries to assist some ECRs to attend their events. Information on this funding will normally be provided when you register for a conference or submit a paper for consideration.
- **The conference itself.** Conference organisers are increasingly aware of the financial barriers that may prevent postgraduate and early career scholars from attending an event, and their funding often include funds to offset or reimburse attendance costs, particularly for presenters. Check the organisers' publicity material, and registration documents, and be aware of deadlines for submitting an application.

Conference organisation

- **Your 'home' institution:** Again, the most sensible place to start. Many departments, faculties and graduate schools offer ECRs funding to organise conferences. You will often enhance an application for external funding if you have already applied for/secured internal funding of this kind.

- **British Academy:** The BA/Leverhulme Small Grants scheme can be used to organise workshops or conferences. <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/funding/funding-opportunities>.
- **Economic History Society:** The Society provides funding, on a competitive basis, for conference organisation on topics related to economic and/or social history. <https://www.ehs.org.uk/the-society/grants-awards-and-prizes/>.
- **Paul Mellon Centre:** This centre provides funding, once annually, for conferences in the field of the history of art and architecture. <https://www.paul-mellon-centre.ac.uk/fellowships-and-grants/funding-opportunities>.
- **Royal Historical Society:** The RHS provides funding for conference organisation with four deadlines a year. <https://royalhistsoc.org/grants/conference-organisation/>.
- **Past and Present Society:** three deadlines a year in February, June, and October for conference funding. <https://pastandpresent.org.uk/fellowships-and-funding/>.
- **History UK, the Social History Society and the Economic History Society BME Events and Activities Small Grants Scheme:** grants of up to £750 to support activities and events run by BME historians or on subjects relating to BME history: <https://socialhistory.org.uk/funding/bme-events-and-activities/>.

Public engagement and/or impact work

- **Your 'home' institution:** Many UK universities offer training and/or funding to undertake public engagement/impact activities. Especially if you hope to gain employment in the UK HEI sector (whether as an academic or in an administrative role), it is very much to your advantage to take up these opportunities. A strong track record in public engagement as a doctoral student will significantly enhance your subsequent application for a research assistantship on a collaborative project in the UK (or for employment in many parts of the charitable sector).
- **AHRC/ESRC:** The research councils occasionally offer training and/or funding for public engagement activities. Keep an eye on their websites for more information, and for contextual information on public engagement and impact more broadly: <https://ahrc.ukri.org/> and <https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/funding-opportunities/>.
- **NESTA:** This UK charity seeks to enhance innovation across a range of public domains and at intervals provides funding for public engagement for which academics can apply. See <https://www.nesta.org.uk/help-me-innovate/>.

Post-doctoral projects

Very few historians gain permanent academic employment immediately upon completion of their doctoral degree. Most historians who succeed in gaining such posts experience one or more years of part-time or fixed-contract teaching, or serving as a research assistant on a senior academic's grant, while they build a publication profile.

Gaining an external postdoctoral fellowship in your own name (usually through a competitive application process) allows you to focus on publishing your doctoral research, and crafting a new postdoctoral research programme.

In the UK, postdoctoral fellowships are often advertised in *Jobs.ac.uk* (<http://www.jobs.ac.uk/>). But you should also keep an eye on the Tuesday edition of the *Guardian* newspaper:

<http://www.theguardian.com/education/higher-education>, H-Net <http://www.h-net.org/> and the *Times Literary Supplement*.

Increasingly, postdoctoral opportunities are shared widely on Twitter using the hashtags #twitterstorians, #ECRchat #ECR or #PGR.

Most postdoctoral schemes advertise with only one application deadline per year. If you start investigating possibilities a year before your PhD viva, you will know well in advance which deadlines you will be eligible to apply for, based on your viva date.

- **Arts and Humanities Research Council:** The Early Career route within the AHRC Research Grants scheme funds projects with a full economic cost (fEC) between £50,000 and £250,000 for a varying duration up to a limit of 60 months. <https://ahrc.ukri.org/funding/apply-for-funding/current-opportunities/researchgrantsearlycareers/>
- **British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowships:** This highly competitive fellowship scheme is open to UK or EEA nationals and persons who have completed a PhD in the UK, within 3 years of completion of the doctorate. An outline application is made in the autumn; short-listed candidates complete a more detailed application in the New Year. The scheme funds up to 3 years of postdoctoral research. In preparing your application, it is essential to liaise carefully and well in advance with the proposed host institution and supervisor, which must support your application: <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/funding/british-academy-postdoctoral-fellowships>
- **European Research Council Starting Grants:** These grants are designed for researchers with 2-7 years of postdoctoral experience. If planning to apply for an ERC award, make use of any and all training events organised by your home institution as ERC applications are quite bureaucratic: <http://erc.europa.eu/starting-grants>
- **Economic & Social Research Council:** Historians of any nationality with a social science emphasis are eligible to apply for ESRC *Future Research Leaders* postdocs within 4 years of submission of the PhD. It is essential to liaise well in advance with your proposed host institution, which must demonstrate a robust programme of support for your research. The application deadline for this scheme is normally in the autumn. See: <https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/funding-opportunities/>
- **European University Institute:** The EUI, based in Florence, offers a number of residential postdoctoral fellowships for ECRs. Details are available from: <http://www.eui.eu/ProgrammesAndFellowships/Fellowships.aspx>
- **Fulbright:** The US Fulbright Commission offers postdoctoral fellowships, which can be held at US universities. If applying for a Fulbright, give serious thought to applying outside the US equivalent of the 'Golden Triangle'—that is, the north-east coast, Chicago and California. The scheme is designed to send Fulbright postdocs throughout the US. By applying to be based at an appropriate university outside these areas you may enhance your chances of success. For application details, see: <http://www.fulbright.org.uk/study-in-the-usa/short-term-study/postdoctoral-study-and-research>
- **Humanities Centres & Institutes of Advanced Study:** Both within and outside the UK, these specialist research institutes often offer residential postdoctoral fellowships that typically range for 3-24 months and provide some combination of office space, library access, research funding, salary or stipend and/or housing. Examples include:

Central European University IAS, Budapest: https://ias.ceu.hu/Junior_Senior

CRASSH, Cambridge University: <http://www.crassh.cam.ac.uk/programmes/fellowships>

IASH, Edinburgh University: <http://www.iash.ed.ac.uk/fellowships/>

Simon Fellowships,

Manchester University: <http://www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/research/simonhallsworth/fellows/>

Warwick IAS: http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/ias/current/prf/

- **Institute of Historical Research, London:** The IHR serves as the umbrella organisation for a number of postdoctoral fellowships funded by UK scholarly societies and charities, including the RHS, the Economic History Society and the Past & Present Society. Applications are typically accepted from January to c. March each year. See <http://www.history.ac.uk/fellowships/junior>
- **Junior Research Fellowships:** JRFs, typically of 3 years' duration, are advertised each year by several Cambridge and Oxford colleges, and occasionally by other UK universities. Some JRFs are open to postdoctoral researchers in any field of study; others specify history as an eligible or desired field of appointment.
- **Leverhulme Early Career Fellowships:** ECRs with a recent UK PhD or a fixed-term (not permanent) UK academic appointment are eligible for this scheme, which funds 3-year postdoctoral fellowships with limited teaching duties. Because the host institution must share at least 50% of the cost of the fellowship with the Leverhulme Trust, not all universities support applications. Investigate whether your preferred institution supports application in the autumn, to ensure that you can locate a host institution well in advance of the February application deadline. (Many institutions have internal deadlines for this scheme that are significantly earlier than the Leverhulme's deadline). Note that you cannot apply to hold this award at the institution from which you obtained your PhD. For details, see <http://www.leverhulme.ac.uk/funding/ecf/ecf.cfm>
- **Marie Skłodowska-Curie Research Fellowships:** These European Commission awards fund 2-3 year postdoctoral fellowships with generous funding for relocation, research costs and salary. The scheme's emphasis is on mobility, so expect to hold the award if successful in a country other than the country of your PhD. Advance planning and communication with your proposed host institution is essential. The UK Research Office <https://www.ukro.ac.uk/mariecurie/> offers helpful workshops about these applications annually at various locations in the UK, and many universities also offer specialist guidance on applications, which are highly competitive. For details of the scheme, see <http://ec.europa.eu/research/mariecurieactions/>
- **Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowships:** The US Mellon Foundation funds a number of humanities-based postdoctoral fellowships which combine teaching and research. Most are based in the US or Canada, but a few UK institutions also offer Mellon postdocs.
- **Specialist Libraries:** Several of the specialist libraries noted above under 'Research Trips' also offer 3-24 month residential fellowships for national and/or international postdoctoral research fellows. See their websites for details and deadlines.
- **Wellcome Fellowships:** The Wellcome Trust funds a number of multi-year postdoctoral fellowships each year in the medical humanities (including history of medicine and history of science). For details see: <http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/Funding/Medical-humanities/Funding-schemes/Fellowships/index.htm>.

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