

The Geological Society - The Fermor Seed Corn Fund Application Guidance

1 Overview:

The Geological Society is pleased to announce and invite applications for awards to be made under the *Fermor Seed Corn Fund*. The fund honours Sir Lewis Leigh Fermor OBE FRS and is supported by a generous bequest from Lady Frances Fermor.

Attaining research funding for UK-based researchers is increasingly competitive, with much of this funding inaccessible to individuals not employed on permanent academic contracts or those with non-traditional roles. This disproportionately affects early-career researchers (ECRs) on fixed-term contracts, returners, and technical staff. Additionally, the rigid cycle of fixed deadlines associated with many of the large awards made by UK funding organisations means that researchers returning from a career break, or an extended period of ill-health, can be unable to apply for funding at key points in their careers. The aim of the Fermor Seed Corn Fund is to provide seed funding to such individuals who are unable to apply for other, more traditional research funding awards.

In recognition of the contributions of Sir Lewis Leigh Fermor to geosciences in India, who held roles such as President of the Indian National Science Academy and Director of the Geological Survey of India, the Fund also seeks to provide seed funding to early-career researchers based in India and/or to those who aim to develop international research partnerships between India and the UK. Therefore, one of the available grants will be reserved for individuals who are working in or with India on the project in question.

We intend to develop a network of Fermor scholars to come together quarterly for virtual peer support meetings. During the funded period, Fermor scholars will be invited to present on their results and progress at a one-day hybrid meeting at Burlington House.

Subjects covered:

The Fermor Seed Corn Fund should be used to develop an idea into practice, to test a hypothesis or to design a new output, with the aim to seed new discoveries, pilot ideas, and foster collaborations that will be sustained beyond the period of the grant itself.

All Fermor Seed Corn Fund proposals must align to the Fermor bequest:

...for the “furtherance of research into those branches of geology that deal with the study of the principles governing ore deposition, the occurrence of minerals and of mineral bearing rocks, and fundamental research into the origins of [Precambrian] rocks, not excluding extraterrestrial occurrences.”

As such, all subjects covered by the Society’s five broad science themes are eligible for Fermor Seed Corn support.

Finance:

The Society envisages awarding no more than five grants within the funding period, with the average award expected to be between the range of £50,000 - £75,000. Grant applications with a total value of more than £100,000 are not suitable for this scheme. The funding period for each grant is expected to range in duration from 12 – 24 months.

Allowable costs for the fund include fieldwork, laboratory access or instrumentation time, travel to partner institutions, consumables, and/or publication costs. Additionally, the award could be used to cover child or elder care or associated costs in the case of individuals with caring responsibilities, or unseen costs associated with those with disabilities or chronic health conditions, enabling them to undertake research.

This scheme is not designed to cover salary costs. Contributions to salary costs may be allowable as an extension to an existing fixed term contract where this would allow the awardee to conclude a novel research project, but these would need to be matched by the host institution and would not include overheads. Please contact Fermor@geolsoc.org.uk to confirm eligibility ahead of the deadline.

Non-allowable costs for the fund include attendance at committee meetings of IUGS and similar international bodies, conference attendance, tuition fees, associated studentships, or student projects. Standard office equipment, or any particularly expensive equipment (>£10,000), is also not allowable under this scheme.

2 Eligibility:

Applicant eligibility:

The Fermor Seed Corn Fund is open to individuals who belong to the following groups:

- Early Career Researchers (<10 years from completing a PhD), technical staff, or research assistants who are ineligible as lead investigators on standard UKRI grant applications.
- Researchers who are returning to work following a career break or long-term illness
- Early-career researchers working in India, or with plans to foster collaboration with Indian research organisations as part of this funded project (*please note a letter of support from the in-country participant(s) will be required*).

The scheme is open to all fellows regardless of geographic location. All applicants must have a PhD by the time that the funded period starts. Applicants that have not yet completed their PhD at the time of application should submit a supporting letter from the host institution where they intend to conduct the relevant research, confirming a contract and position for the duration of the project period.

The Fermor Seed Corn Fund grants are intended to support individuals who cannot easily apply for funding by other means. This is likely to be an individual on a fixed-term academic contract, or a non-academic contract with research capacity, to complete a period of novel academic research. Further, the Fermor Seed Corn Fund grants are primarily intended to fund a research project by otherwise employed researchers who are not able to access other forms of research funding, rather than to form the basis for, and support the salary of, a new position. This is a research grant, rather than a fellowship, so it is not intended to support the staff costs of research. Should a contribution to salary costs be requested, we would expect no more than 50% of the salary to be requested in any application for the panel to review, with applicable justification. Any salary costs would also need to be matched by the host institution and would not include overheads. The fund is not intended as additional funding to support an applicant who is otherwise employed to conduct an ongoing research project, i.e. research fellows or permanent academic appointments where there have been no interruptions to careers.

All applicants are required to be Fellows at the time that funding is awarded. Any queries specifically regarding eligibility should contact Fermor@geolsoc.org.uk ahead of the closing date.

Host organisation:

Funded research must be conducted at suitable host organisations such as universities or research institutions. The awards will be payable to the host organisation, as opposed to the individual, in arrears and upon submission of quarterly claims against approved expenditure. Therefore, awards will require evidence that an agreement with the desired host organisation is in place at the point of submission, in the form of a **letter of support**.

Please note, this does not need to be the applicant's current institution or department, where the applicant intends to move if awarded funding. In this case, a letter of support will be required prior to an award being made.

3 Application and Assessment:

Application:

The application form asks applicants to consider a range of information. In addition to a project rationale, awardees will be asked to consider:

- The desired impact of their research within their academic field.
- The project plan and cost breakdown of their proposed research.
- The sustainability and environmental impact of the project.
- Make equality, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility considerations.
- Discuss outputs in terms of open access publications and data management.
- Training/development – have you identified any training opportunities within the scope of this project
- If the outcome of the project will entail a proprietary product or patent, then please detail how these will be held and made available to the community. This also applies if there is a commercial partner for the research project.

In addition to the form, applicants are asked to submit a detailed budgetary breakdown using the linked budget template (linked on Fermor website). This should be accompanied by a Justification of Resources (up to 2 A4 pages) explaining why the various items are necessary for the project.

Review process:

All applications will be subject to an eligibility check to ensure that they meet the appropriate criteria as detailed in the previous sections of this document. Depending on the number of applications received, the Society may conduct an initial sift to ensure that the number of applications reviewed in full at the panel are manageable.

All applications will be assigned to two panel members who will pre-score the proposals (the 'sift'). Based on the pre-scores, the lowest scoring proposals will be sifted out with agreement from the panel chair ahead of the award meeting. Eligible proposals that pass the sift stage – or where no sift has been required - will be blind assessed by a panel of geoscientists with expertise covering the range of the Society's scientific themes. Each application will be reviewed by two panel members that have the most relevant scientific background.

Applications that are successful at the review stage may be invited to virtual interview with a panel convened by the Geological Society. Whilst we intend to fund 2-3 projects in this round,

the Society reserves the right to not make an award in the event that no suitable applications are received.

Assessment criteria:

Proposals will be assessed by the panel based upon:

- A meaningful research question and plans for accessible research dissemination.
- Impact – the anticipated scientific and societal outcome of the study.
- Feasibility – how practical is the study?
- Budget – how realistic is the project within the defined budget?
- Project sustainability
- Appropriate consideration of equality, diversity, inclusivity and accessibility.

4 Timetable:

Call for applications open:	1 st July 2025
Call for applications closed:	1 st October 2025
Results of initial assessment:	October 2025 (tbc)
Interviews:	November 2025 (tbc)
Final results:	December 2025 (tbc)

5 Support:

Inquiries

For any inquiries about the Fermor Seed Corn Fund that are not explained in this guidance document, please use the contact details below.

- E-mail: fermor@geolsoc.org.uk

Disability support

We welcome applications from disabled applicants and will accommodate adjustments to the procedures to ensure that these applicants are able to participate fully in the selection process. Adjustments to the application procedure could include:

- Extension of the application deadline
- Additional support to complete the application form
- Technical support during interviews for candidates with hearing or visual impairments
- Support during interviews for neurodiverse candidates and candidates with mental health conditions

If you have any queries about accessing the support described in this section, please use the contact details above.

As this is a new award scheme, the Society will update our website with the answers to frequently asked questions that come in relating to this award. Therefore, do please check the website for any FAQs before submission.

6 Use of Data

The information that you submit in your form will be processed by the Geological Society for the purposes of administering your grant application. It will only be shared with external referees from the relevant committees as part of the review process. For more information, please refer to the Privacy Notice on our website www.geolsoc.org.uk/privacy.