

Geographical Fieldwork Grants

• Guidance Notes and Frequently Asked Questions

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The purpose of this document is to provide additional information for the guidelines and application for the RGS-IBG Geographical Fieldwork Grants. More general advice on applying for a grant and frequently asked questions can be found at www.rgs.org.

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1. What counts as 'geographical'?


To obtain support from the Society, the proposed research must contain a substantial geographical component. Geography is the study of the earth's landscapes, peoples, places and environments. It is, quite simply, about the world in which we live. For further guidance on what the Society understands as geography please visit [Geography Today](#).

To be eligible for funding through a Geographical Fieldwork Grant, the research must involve fieldwork that aims to make a significant contribution to existing geographical knowledge. It is important that in the application it is clear how the project contributes to geographical knowledge.

Non-geographical mapping projects (e.g. simply mapping the distribution of species X) which do not meet the requirement to 'make a contribution to new geographical knowledge' will not receive funding.

2. Can I do my own research or does it have to be a group project?

The Geographical Fieldwork Grants are only offered to teams (minimum of three). However, the Society encourages applications where group members are working on individual, independent projects (for example undergraduate dissertations or Masters theses), provided they can be shown to be linked together under a coherent research theme and that overall there are benefits and advances in understanding that extend



beyond the individual projects. In the application it is important to state clearly how the individual projects are related and how the results will be integrated in presentations, reports and publications. The group must submit a single final report at the end of the project which brings together all of the elements of their research.

3. What is a team?

A team is defined as three or more people. At least one third of the team should be UK citizens and/ or registered at a UK higher education institution. We strongly recommend the inclusion of host-country members in the team (see FAQ 7).

4. Will departmental fieldtrips be supported?

The RGS-IBG wishes to encourage the highest quality research and fieldwork practice and as such we believe that academic led projects, in which students gain fieldwork experience are very valuable. However, departmental skills-based fieldtrips will not be supported. Projects that include a mix of university students and academic teaching staff will be supported provided that the students can demonstrate that they are playing a major role in the organisation of the project and in the design and implementation of the proposed research. Projects in which the majority of team members are research active academics will not be supported.

5. What if I am not 18?

Younger groups from schools, youth clubs, or training exercises where senior people organise, teach and lead younger people, under the age of 18, are not supported by this programme. A list of alternative funding sources can be found at www.rgs.org/grants

6. Are group members expected to make personal contributions?

A Geographical Fieldwork Grant from the Society will not cover the full costs of a project. In the past applicants to the Geographical Fieldwork Grant programme were required to make personal contributions towards the cost of their projects. Due to changing funding circumstances for many students this is no longer a requirement of the award. However, teams will be expected to document their fundraising strategy and how short-falls in funding will be made up.

7. Why work with the host country?

The involvement of researchers, students and members of the community from the host country is strongly encouraged.

There are several reasons why in-country involvement is important. In some cases local collaboration may be a legal requirement of your host country. More importantly, research programmes overseas involving local collaborators can give added benefit both to the communities in which you work and to your team through local knowledge and expertise. Local researchers are often aware of previous research that has been done on a topic in that area, which may well not be available to international audiences because it has not been published. University libraries in-country can be a treasure trove of local Masters and Doctoral theses that could be relevant to your study. Reciprocally, those working in poorly resourced universities in-country can be very appreciative of off-prints or e-prints of recently published work relevant to their own interests. We encourage teams to think how they can ensure that their work can be of value to their collaborators (whether local researchers or communities) and build in plans for in-country dissemination right from the start. This could be a workshop before you leave the country or a report you send. Both require funding; make sure you include them in the budget.

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The organisations that you choose to collaborate with will depend on the project you are undertaking. You should consider local universities, research institutes, NGOs and field centres. You may find it useful to make contact with local universities in the country in which you propose to work to recruit local student team members. When developing your budget, you should consider that in-country team members may not be in a position to contribute funds and money needs to be built in to support their participation.

Geography Outdoors (GO) can provide suggestions on how to develop collaborations. A list of field centres can be found on the Society website. (www.rgs.org/fieldcentres). Further information can also be found in the Expedition Handbook which can be accessed online at www.rgs.org/gopubs > Planning and organisation > Working with the host country.

To read more about what it might mean to collaborate with host countries see Jenny Robinson's 2003 article '[Postcolonialising geography: tactics and pitfalls](#)' in the *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*. Volume 24 pages 273-289. (to access this PDF click on Volume 24 from the list then select Issue 3 and click on the article)

8. How should I choose my project and plan my fieldwork?

Selecting a project and setting objectives can be the most daunting and challenging part of planning fieldwork. In your application you will need to provide us with the background and context of your project, as well as being clear about what you hope to achieve. You should think carefully about your aims and objectives and remember that less is often more. You must make it clear how your project and the questions you aim to answer will advance geographical knowledge. Further guidance can be found in the Expeditions Handbook which can be accessed online at www.rgs.org/gopubs > Field research projects > Choosing a project.

You need to demonstrate how you plan to achieve your aims and objectives whilst in the field. Your timeline should include details of days spent traveling, days undertaking fieldwork/ data collection, rest and recreation days, down time (including evenings), and personal time (for example traveling at the end of the project).

Your methodology needs to clearly describe the activities you plan to undertake in order to satisfy the aims and objectives of your project. You should provide details of any specific methods that will be used and their implementation (i.e. sampling sizes, extent of research areas, specific equipment and previous experience in its use etc). If you are undertaking social surveys, examples of your questionnaires etc should be included.

The RGS-IBG will look for evidence that your team has selected methodologies that are appropriate for your project, the specific environmental conditions of your field area, and that team members have the appropriate training and expertise to conduct the work. If you are planning to use social science methods i.e. interviews/questionnaires etc, but you have no training or experience in using these methods then the RGS-IBG may choose not to support your project. Many students make the mistake of thinking that using a questionnaire is an easy option for undertaking research, but you should consider that social science methods have very real social, cultural, and moral implications. You should seek guidance from experts and think about the expertise that can be provided by your in-country counterparts. You should demonstrate that you have reviewed relevant published resources and the appropriate academic literature. (see also FAQ 12).

9. Who has "ownership" of my project?

A key element of the newly approved British Standard (8848) for overseas fieldwork is the identification of the venture provider- the institution or individual(s) ultimately responsible for the project. Just because all members of your project attend the same higher education institution does not mean that the institution will take full responsibility for your project. You need to determine who has legal and financial responsibility for your project, whether this is you as a team, your university department, or another organisation.

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The RGS-IBG will consider you to be endorsed by an institution only if you have been given official confirmation from that institution that you comply with their rules and regulation.

10. What should I include in my risk assessment and safety management plan?

Your risk assessment and safety management plan is where you should identify potential risks and hazards associated with your proposed project. This document should reflect what you feel are the greatest threats to your health and safety and how you are minimising and mitigating these potential threats.

If you are affiliated with an organisation (e.g. a university) then you may already be required to complete their risk assessment forms. The RGS-IBG will accept a copy of your institutional risk assessment form as part of your application provided it covers the risks associated with:

- **The team**
Health & fitness (including pre-existing medical conditions), attitude and behaviour, training & experience, personal protective equipment
- **The environment**
Mountain, savannah, tropical forest, urban, climate and weather conditions, wildlife (including insects), altitude, river crossings, muggings, route selection
- **Health**
Endemic disease (Dengue, Malaria, HIV/AIDS), polluted water, contaminated food, environmental health (heat/cold related illness)
- **Local people**
Political instability or civil unrest, theft, personal attack, rape, attitudes to foreign visitors, cultural differences, appropriate dress code and behaviour.
- **Fieldwork activities and methods**
Natural hazards (avalanche, rockfall, deep water), use of specialist equipment (electrical equipment, chemicals, climbing harnesses, ropes, theodolites)
- **Travel and camp life**
Transport (public/private), road/water conditions, other road users, camp hazards (stoves/fires/flooding/ burns/drowning/suffocation), accommodation, fire, electrocution, serious injury, disease, mugging, attack

Your risk assessment should include, but not be restricted to, all of the areas outlined above. Further advice on Risk Assessment and Crisis Management are given in the Risk Assessment chapter of the Expedition Handbook www.rgs.org/GOPubs > Expedition Handbook > Health & Safety

11. How is a crisis management plan different from a risk assessment?

A crisis management plan outlines the plans you have in place to deal with an emergency situation, should one occur. In short, we would like to know what you will do if things go wrong. This should include details on emergency evacuation, insurance, proximity to medical facilities, plans for communicating with the relevant people i.e. local services, your home contact, the British Embassy or High Commission etc.

12. What sort of environmental, social and cultural impacts should we consider?

It is inevitable that our actions have consequences and will affect the people and environments around us. The RGS-IBG is committed to ethical research and to supporting projects that carefully consider and attempt to mitigate negative environmental, social and cultural impacts. Thinking about ethics involves consciously attempting to anticipate the consequences of your expedition's actions. Could your work offend the cultural sensitivities of the people you are working among? Might your research practice favor some people over others in the societies where you are working? What impacts are you having on the physical environment by carrying out your research?

More information on planning fieldwork and mitigating environmental impacts can be found in the Expeditions Handbook. This can be accessed online at www.rgs.org/gopubs > Expedition Handbook > Health and Safety. In addition, several academic associations have a formal ethics code to which they expect their members to adhere; these can be an excellent place to begin your reflections. The American Anthropological Association has one of the most thoughtful and thorough codes which you can see on their website at: <http://www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/ethicscode.pdf>. Your own university may well have an ethics code that they expect you to use in your research. You could also read Clare Madge's chapter in '[Postgraduate fieldwork in Developing Areas](#)' published by the Developing Areas Research Group of the RGS and edited by Elspeth Robson and Katie Willis. Even though this is addressed to PhD students it provides a useful and clear summary of ethical issues. An additional source of advice is Jenny Robinson's 2003 article '[Postcolonialising geography: tactics and pitfalls](#)' in the [Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography, Volume 24 pages 273-289](#) (to access this PDF click on Volume 24 from the list then select Issue 3 and click on the article).

13. What should I include in the budget?

Funds can be requested to cover the direct expenses incurred in conducting the research. You can download a spreadsheet with some key headings related to travel, equipment, subsistence etc. that might provide a useful starting point.

Consider the following when putting together the project budget:

- Make sure you research costs fully – the review panel will evaluate these carefully
- Build in a contingency of at least 10%
- If items are to be donated by other supporters (e.g. equipment), make this clear
- Remember to include funds to cover costs of in-country participants
- Include details of other applications for funding that has been received or is pending, so the review panel can assess your progress on fundraising

14. Do we need insurance?

Obtaining comprehensive insurance for all members of your team is absolutely crucial. Teams who do not have sufficient insurance and proof of it before they go into the field will not be supported by the RGS-IBG. Insurance presents team members and the expeditions as whole with financial protection should problems arise. Further information can also be found in the Expedition Handbook which can be accessed online at www.rgs.org/gopubs > Health and Safety > Insurance for expeditions.

14. Will I get called for interview?

The RGS-IBG interviews many of the groups who apply. However, not being invited for interview does not necessarily reduce a group's chance of obtaining approval or support. The priority for interviews is given to particularly challenging projects, undergraduate groups who lack past fieldwork experience, and those whose applications have either given the panel cause for concerns or whose applications are being considered for a large grant.

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Interviews will be held in London with options for some to be interviewed via Skype. The interviews focus on the research and research methodology, and health and safety. Three group members will be invited to attend the interview. It is important that the group leader and other members key to implementing the research methodology attend the interview. For teams consisting of academics and students, normally only the student members of a team will be asked to participate in interviews.

15. Will I get all the money that I apply for?

Applicants should be aware that if awarded financial support it may not be at the maximum level. Many worthy projects apply for funds and resources are limited. The level of financial support awarded will reflect the quality of the proposed research, involvement of those in the host country, and financial need.

16. Does the RGS-IBG have terms and conditions for grant recipients?

Research teams and expeditions awarded *support* and/or *approval* may mention this recognition in their literature and use the Society's logo (which will be supplied on request). The Society should be acknowledged in any outputs (papers, presentations, videos etc). No other use of the Society's name or logo is permitted. The Society accepts no responsibility for the projects it approves. Research teams must *not* describe themselves as *sponsored* by the Society.

For all projects which are approved and/or supported by the Society an online preliminary report must be completed within one month of returning from the field, including three high resolution JPEG images which capture the essence of the project (the research problem, methods and findings). A full final report must be submitted by **1 September** of the year following the award. The final report should be submitted in PDF or Word format and in hard copy and must include an abstract of 250 words, a description of the project and its key findings, three to five digital images that capture the spirit of the project and its findings, a final budget and explanation, an incident report, and details of presentations, publications and any other outputs.

A *Guide to Writing Expedition Reports* is included in the Expedition Handbook and can be accessed at www.rgs.org/gopubs > Recording your expedition. A database of previous project reports held by the RGS-IBG can be searched from the website (www.rgs.org/go). Past reports are available for reference at the Society and may be consulted by appointment. Contact Geography Outdoors on go@rgs.org or telephone 020 7591 3030 to arrange an appointment. Reports can be viewed Monday-Friday, 10.00am – 5.00 pm.

17. What happens if our plans change?


The Society should be informed immediately of any changes to the project, including changes to the budget, participants and to the programme of travel and fieldwork. The Society will review the changes to the project and may request more information before deciding if support will be continued. Minor alterations to projects are unlikely to result in the withdrawal of funding.

If a project is abandoned or postponed the Society should be informed. Any funds received from the Society should be returned to the Grants Officer, with a covering letter to explain the circumstances.

18. Where can I get more advice?

Further questions regarding eligibility or questions about the grant and its application process should be directed to the Grants Officer at grants@rgs.org.

Geography Outdoors (GO) provides information, advice and training to anyone planning overseas fieldwork. Groups are strongly advised to contact the Geography Outdoors at an early stage in their planning. GO keeps a database of projects and expeditions which are being planned each year to help those planning



similar ventures. GO can also advise on other sources of funding and publishes the booklet *Fundraising and Budgeting for Field Research and Expeditions* which includes a directory of grant giving organisations (£2.50 from GO or available free of charge on www.rgs.org/gopubs). Full details of the services of GO are available on the website (www.rgs.org/go).

More information on planning and undertaking fieldwork can be found in the Expeditions Handbook. For example, the handbook contains specific information on finance and fundraising, transportation, keeping records, and working in different environments i.e. mountains, arid areas, tropical forest and Polar Regions etc. This can be accessed online at www.rgs.org/gopubs