The Sansom Conservation Leadership Alumni Fund: Guidance for applicants 2026-27

Cambridge Conservation Initiative

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE ALUMNI
CONSERVATION LEADERSHIP ALUMNI NETWORK

Guidance for applicants

Introduction

Representing over 280 individuals from 91 countries, the University of Cambridge Conservation Leadership Alumni Network (UCCLAN) are a highly committed group of conservation leaders working across government, not-for-profit, grassroots organisations, the private sector and international non-government organisations around the globe.

The collective vision of the UCCLAN is to deliver high impact conservation outcomes and to have lasting global conservation impact for a just and healthy planet. One way for alumni to achieve these objectives is by carrying out conservation projects, either individually or in collaboration with others.

There are already some exciting examples of this happening in practice however, a key constraint on the emergence of such projects is a lack of available funding. Making resources available to alumni would enable them to scale up their impact, with benefits for biodiversity and the strength of the alumni network itself. This represents an important opportunity to create closer and longer lasting collaborative relations between UCCLAN and the CCI network of partners.

Thanks to the generous support of Robert Sansom, the Sansom Conservation Leadership Alumni Fund has been designed to address this need by supporting high impact conservation projects undertaken by members of the University of Cambridge Masters in Conservation Leadership Alumni Network.

The Sansom Conservation Leadership Alumni Fund is administered by the Masters in Conservation Leadership Team in the Department of Geography, with grants being awarded by a Selection Panel.

Guidelines for applicants

These guidelines are intended to accompany the SCLA Fund application form, available here: www.cl.geog.cam.ac.uk/sclafund

The application form must be completed fully and must be in English. Applications should be submitted via the online application form and must inlude the completed Excel budget. You will receive an acknowledgement email with a unique application reference number within five working days of submission. Please use this number in all further application-related correspondence.

Applications are welcomed from a broad scope of conservation projects. Applications should demonstrate that the proposed project:

- addresses an important biodiversity conservation issue;
- is feasible and likely to achieve its aims;
- is appropriate to the local situation;
- is feasible to be delivered with the skills and potential of the applicant and/or the proposed project team;
- has an appropriate budget to achieve the stated outcomes.

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Projects may include but are not limited to:

On the ground species conservation projects; outreach, education, and awareness building campaigns and programs; launching a coalition or partnership; developing tools to enable conservation and partnering for conservation; projects that will lead to better conservation governance at any level; projects that improve opportunities and collective action for as well as development of advocacy, coalition building, partnerships, and campaigns; projects that link multiple issues such as addressing conservation, climate change, and human health and livelihoods; projects that advance goals of inclusivity, equity, and diversity in conservation; projects that promote and integrate traditional ecological knowledge; projects that will advance changes in policy and law; projects that address the underlying causes of biodiversity harm and loss.

Qualifying criteria

Essential

- Applications can only be accepted from a member or members of the University of Cambridge Conservation Leadership Alumni Network.
- Applications must propose a project, program, or tool that will have a clear benefit for advancing conservation.
- The impact of the project must be pragmatic, sustainable and long-lasting.

Desired

- Two or more UCCLAN members combine efforts.
- Links to the strategic goals of UCCLAN.
- Include an element to engage more UCCLAN members in the implementation.
- Projects should consider how gender considerations can be integrated into their project as well as the diversity of team members.

General exclusions

- Pure research with no obvious conservation benefit.
- Expeditions, particularly where the applicant has to raise funds in order to participate.

Permits/Permissions

Ensure you have all the necessary permits or permissions from the relevant authorities needed to undertake the work. We may need to see evidence of these before funds are released.

Please also check that the country you are located in allows for the transfer of international funding/ funding from a UK University. See the FAQ's for more information.

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Ethics

SCLA funded projects are expected to meet the following principles of good and ethical project implementation practice.

All projects must:

- meet all legal and ethical obligations of both the UK and the countries involved in the project, including relevant access and benefit sharing legislation pertaining to the utilisation of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, and follow access and benefit sharing best practice where there is no legislation or measures in country
- include leadership and participation from the communities directly involved to enhance the chances that the perspectives, interests and wellbeing of those directly affected by specific projects are properly addressed
- recognise the potential value and relevance of traditional knowledge and utilise it where appropriate, alongside international scientific approaches and methods
- respect the rights, privacy, and safety of people who are the subject of project activities whether direct or indirect
- use Prior Informed Consent (PIC) principles with partner communities

Safeguarding

By applying for the SCLA Fund, projects must adhere to the University of Cambridge safeguarding policy, which can be found here: https://www.hr.admin.cam.ac.uk/policies-procedures-z/children-and-adults-risk-safeguarding-policy

1. General information

Every project supported by the SCLA Fund will address a clearly defined conservation problem that will help contribute to the UCCLAN goal of increasing the collective global conservation impact of the network. Proposed projects should provide a clearly described set of activities to be supported by the grant, with a rationale setting out how these will help to address the conservation problem. Applications proposing creative and innovative solutions would be welcomed. Projects should be designed to include monitoring and evaluation activities that will enable lessons learned to be shared with the UCCLAN and wider conservation community.

Project title

Provide a short, clear descriptor that identifies the project.

Project summary

Summarise the essence of your project in a few sentences.

Project duration

Projects may be between six months and three years in duration. Applications can be made for existing projects, but with clear aims and objectives to be delivered within the proposed start and

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end date of the project (in the format day/month/year). In order to allow time for grant processing we advise that projects should not plan to start before 1 March 2027.

Name of the lead applicant
Name one individual applicant who will take the lead for the grant administration. Responsibilities will include the coordination and submission of the interim updates and final report, along with financial reporting responsibilities and relevant communication with the Conservation Leadership Team on behalf of the project team. The Lead Applicant can be a different individual from the Project Lead whose skills and expertise can be outlined in section 5.

Amount requested
Maximum permitted is £60,000.

Principal Project Countries
Where the project will take place. If there is no specific location associated with the project you can enter 'Global' or 'Not Applicable'.

Applicants
List each alumnus and organisation (where appropriate) involved in the project (plus any additional non-UCCLAN collaborating individuals/organisations). The Lead Applicant can be a different individual from the Project Lead whose skills and expertise can be outlined in section 5. Where alumni do not have all the skills and expertise needed to deliver a project, other collaborators may be included in the project and funded by the grant. The contribution of these additional collaborators must be clearly specified and justified.

2. Project rationale

2.1 Origin of your work
Please explain why you decided to undertake this work.

2.2. Rationale
Describe succinctly the conservation issues your project is trying to address, and why. Any relevant policy, academic or practical background should be included.

3. Project description

3.1 Aims and objectives
Describe what your project hopes to achieve, including its aims and objectives and what you intend to achieve with respect to the conservation issues outlined in the rationale.

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3.2 Methodology

Describe the methods you will use to conduct your project including the key activities you will carry out and when these will be undertaken. It should be clear how activities contribute to the overall aims of the project.

Please briefly identify whether you are aware of any potential challenges or risks at this stage that may affect project success, and what these challenges and risks might be. Note this may include external factors that are outside of the control of the project team (e.g. political, climatic, data availability). Please explain how these challenges and risks would be mitigated.

3.3 Social and environmental impact assessment

Biodiversity conservation projects aim to have a net positive impact on the environment, as well as avoiding negative social impacts (and enhancing positive social benefits where possible). Conducting a social and environmental impact assessment as part of the development of a project is an important step to help strengthen the project, improve its performance, avoid conflict and harm to both people and environment, and enhance the prospect of long-term success and sustainability. The SCLA Fund: social and environmental impact assessment (found here: www.geog.cam.ac.uk/sclafund) summarises a number of issues relating to social and environmental matters that you may need to consider as part of your project, depending on the nature of your proposed work. Please indicate how you will assess the environmental and social impacts that your project might have, and the measures you will put in place to avoid negative environmental and social impacts as a result of your project.

3.4 Measures of success

List the main outputs anticipated from the project. These are the products you anticipate producing as a result of your project e.g. toolkits, policy briefs, papers, databases. It is important to consider the dissemination and monitoring and assessment of the impact of project outputs.

Describe the expected project outcomes. These are the likely effects of the project resulting from its outputs.

Explain how these outcomes will translate into conservation impacts in the long term?

It may be useful to consider creating a communications strategy for your project, to ensure that project outcomes involve and reach the desired audiences.

Explain how the outcomes and/or impact of this work be monitored and recorded? How will you know if your project is successful and that SCLA funding is contributing towards the project's goal?

Identify who will be responsible for project monitoring and evaluation. Consider how you will monitor project progress, and also describe how you will evaluate outputs, outcomes and impacts. Referring to the CCF Conservation Measures Project Evaluation Tool may be helpful (https://www.cambridgeconservationforum.org.uk/resource/ccf-project-evaluation-tool/)
We appreciate that ultimate impacts may be difficult to assess for a variety of reasons, including the fact that they may not become apparent until some time after the project activity has ceased.

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Therefore, please be aware that we will be expecting to work with you after your project has come to an end, to assess the impact of your work.

4. Budget

Provide a financial summary (in pounds sterling) of the project, broken down into appropriate headings on an annual basis, and presented in tabular form in an Excel document. The budget should show the costs associated with each alumni. The budget should include core project staff costs, travel, subsistence, materials and any other associated costs. The amount of overheads should also be tabulated and clearly shown independently of other costs: all alumni will take the same flat rate overhead of not more than 15% from their agreed portion of the grant. Thus the overall overhead for any one project will not exceed 15% of the total grant awarded. This overhead is intended to cover management and operational costs, which should not also be included elsewhere in the budget. Overhead expenses are what it costs to run the business, including rent, insurance, and utilities (but does not include salary costs). Please budget for contingencies, and include a note on inflation (for multi year projects).

Where cost effective to do so, the alumni may seek matching funds from other donors to support individual projects. If you have secured any match funds, state where from and the total sum. Please also disclose if you have any match funding in the pipeline. Note the Fund has no matching fund requirement.

Please note that the Selection Panel review proposed budgets as part of the selection process.

5. Team profile

5.1 Project Leads skills

Please list in no more than 500 words why the Project Lead is qualified to lead this project. This includes relevant skills and experience they bring to the project: List the unique skill sets they have that will be beneficial to implementation of the project. Describe the skills and knowledge they will gain through this project: List the key conservation skills and how the project will build their capacity through the experience of implementing the project.

5.2 Team roles

Explain each team member's responsibility within the context of the overall project. For example, team responsibilities could include: project leader, conservation education expert, first aid officer, species surveyor, etc. It should be clear that each team member has the ability and experience to accomplish the tasks for which they are responsible and contribute to the overall success of the project.

5.3 Diversity and inclusion

Use this space to demonstrate how gender considerations have been integrated into this project as well as the diversity of team members.

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6. References

Each application requires the support of two referees (appropriate peers) from outside the UCCLAN. The names, email addresses and phone numbers of referees should be listed in the application.

Please ask your referees to complete the referee form (available here: www.cl.geog.cam.ac.uk/sclafund), which should be submitted by the deadline of 5pm (BST) on Monday,14 September 2026. Reference forms should be submitted electronically from the referee to the Conservation Leadership Networks Manager, (sr445@cam.ac.uk)

Note: if more than two references are requested, only the first two received by the Conservation Leadership Networks Manager will be considered.

Application process

Applications must be received by the Conservation Leadership Networks Manager by 5pm (BST) on Monday, 14 September 2026. Please note that applications received after the deadline will not be accepted

Applicants will be informed of the outcome of their applications within 10 weeks of the closing date, providing the application has all the information required and that the two references are received on time. The Conservation Leadership Networks Manager will acknowledge receipt of applications via email with a unique application reference number within five working days of submission. Please use this number in all further application-related correspondence with the Conservation Leadership Networks Manager. The Conservation Leadership Networks Manager will ensure that the application falls within the remit of the SCLA Fund and seek any further information from the applicant before submitting applications to the Selection Panel.

The project leads of the successful applications will be informed by the Conservation Leadership Networks Manager in an email. Following confirmation that the project still wishes to proceed, each alumni will receive a grant contract for signing. The contract will include details of payment timetable and reporting requirements. Payments will normally be disbursed as follows:

- 60% of grant given on acceptance of all of the signed grant contracts for the project and receipt of a short summary by the applicants of the project (which will be uploaded onto the Masters' website).
- 30%* midway through the project following the submission of interim reports.
- The final 10% given following the sign-off of a satisfactory final report and financial report.

**where projects are sixth months in length, the final 40% will be given following the sign-off of a satisfactory final report and financial report.*

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This disbursement schedule could be negotiated with the grantee based on the project's length and schedule of activities. Applications for variations in the conditions of a grant should be sent to the Conservation Leadership Networks Manager by email, who may need to refer them to the Selection Panel before responding.

Reporting and communications

Interim updates

If the project runs for more than six months, short joint interim updates are required at six monthly intervals and by the dates specified in the project contract. This content will be used to create news stories and items on the Masters' website and other social media platforms. A template for the joint interim update will be sent by email to the Lead Applicant from the Conservation Leadership Networks Manager one month before the deadline.

Final report

Successful applicants will be required to provide a final report (including a detailed financial report) no later than eight weeks after the completion of the project and by the date specified in the project contract. Although this will not be published online, some of the content may be used to develop a case study or other news stories in partnership with the Lead Applicant. A template will be sent by email to the Lead Applicant from the Conservation Leadership Networks Manager one month before the deadline.

Project follow-up

The CL team are keen to keep in touch after the end date of the project and plans to be in touch with the Lead Applicant following the end of the project for a brief update regarding any further developments related to the original project.

Seminars/talks

In addition, successful applicants will be expected to give seminars/talks on the progress and outcomes of the project for the UCCLAN and for CCI partners within six weeks of submitting the final report.

Applicants should note that outputs arising from funded projects will have to be made freely available via the Masters' website. Successful applicants will be asked to acknowledge the Sansom Conservation Leadership Alumni Fund in any publications, materials and communications that arise from the project (copies of all such material, and any presentations made on the project, should be sent to the Conservation Leadership Networks Manager). We operate an open access policy for any data and information acquired during a project supported by the Fund, and for the outputs arising from a project supported by the Fund; recipients will be required to agree to this as a condition of accepting the grant.