



COLLABORATORY
Research Hub

Guidance for Teams Submitting PhD Project Proposals

Research Project Co-Creation, Cohort 2027



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1. KEY INFORMATION

1.1. Making a Submission

All project proposal submissions must be received through our online proposal submission form. There is one form for Research Placement projects and one for PhD projects. Any submissions sent in any format other than through the online form will not be considered.

- All Collaboratory project proposals are expected to be the result of collaborative efforts between academic and community partners.
- The named Lead Academic supervisor should coordinate the completion and submission of the proposal form. This is because we ask for some university-specific information that community partners will not know.
- The online form allows you to save your progress and return later, but it is recommended that proposals are drafted in a separate word document.
- An offline copy of the proposal form questions is available to download from our website. This is for planning purposes only.
- Each proposal must be submitted with 2 complete peer reviews.
- Please be aware of minimum and maximum word counts. All word limits include citations.

1.2. Peer Reviews

Peer reviewers should have expertise in an area relevant to the proposed research project, and where possible, expertise in participatory action/community engaged research. Peer reviewers can be academic colleagues from any higher education institution with relevant expertise. We strongly recommended that colleagues from Collaboratory partner universities are approached in the first instance as they will likely be more familiar with local community contexts and the aims of Collaboratory's work.

It is the responsibility of the academic members of the proposal team to contact their own peer reviewers and email their responses to info@collaboratoryresearchhub.ac.uk, as part of a complete submission.

Our peer reviewer form can be [downloaded from our website](#).

1.3. Deadline

Proposals must be submitted by 11:59pm Monday 07 September 2025

Submission forms will automatically close after the deadline. All project teams will be notified of outcomes by 01 October 2026.

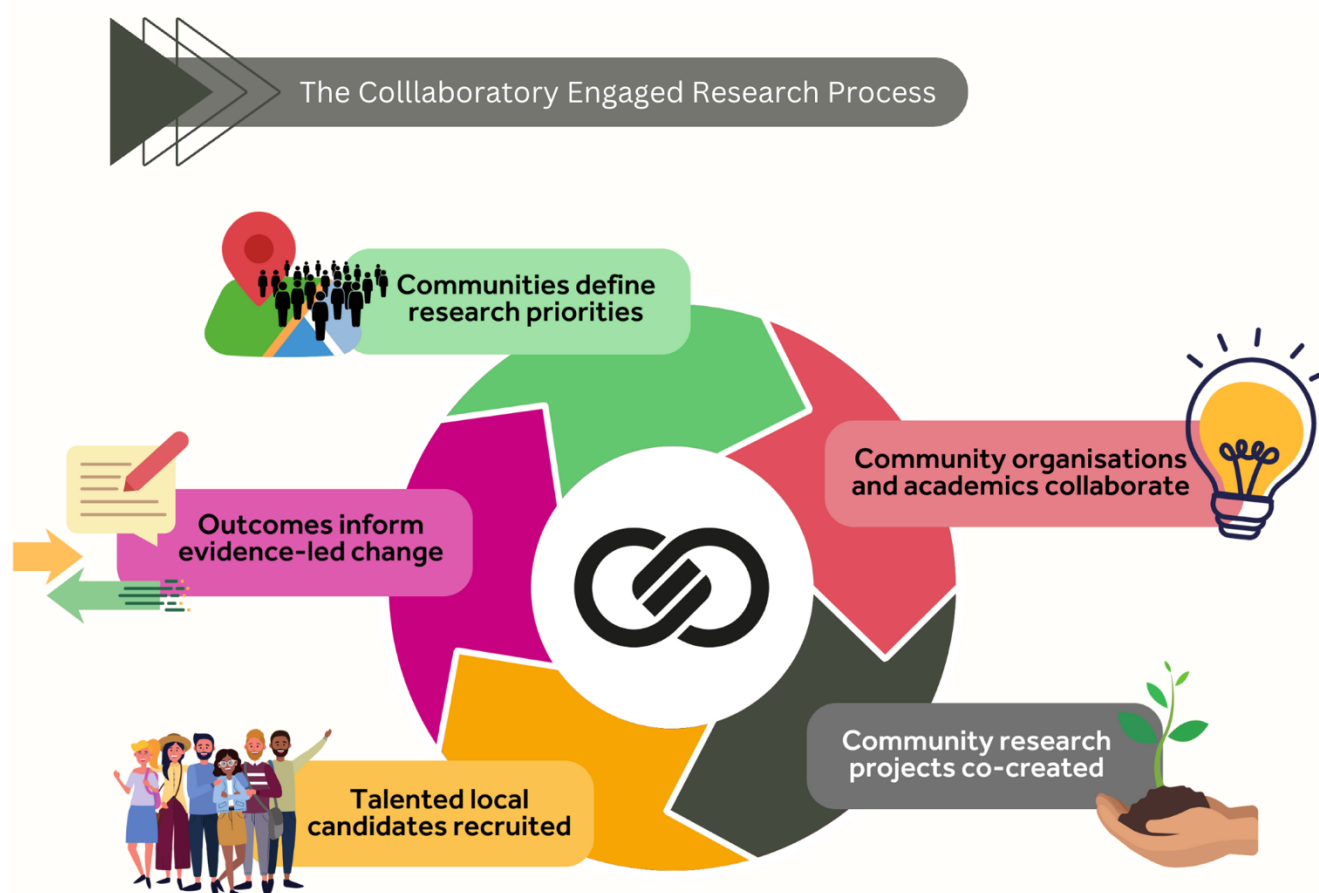
2. OVERVIEW OF COLLABORATORY PHD STUDENTSHIPS

Collaboratory's PhD Research projects are an integral part of our work to create a comprehensive cycle of community engaged research. The Collaboratory programme has been funded specifically to develop and implement novel approaches to inclusive, community engaged research using the latest evidence and best practice from across the Higher Education sector.

As a place-based research programme, we are looking for proposals which embody the values of the programme and seek to deliver meaningful change for local communities by addressing locally specific challenges through academically rigorous and genuinely collaborative research.

Collaboratory seeks to remove structural barriers, making research degrees more inclusive and accessible to strong, promising local candidates who otherwise may be excluded from traditional routes into PhD study. Furthermore, this approach also aims to support the growth of more equitable and meaningful partnerships between researchers and community-focused organisations.

Our cohort-based PhD studentship scheme is a pioneering initiative developed through many hours of specialist insight and support. Each project and its candidate represent an investment of approximately £120,000 by Collaboratory.



3. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

3.1. General Criteria

- Proposals must address one or more of the 2026 Community Priorities for Research, for the relevant programme chapter. These details are available on the main cohort 2027 proposals webpage.
- All supervisory partners named on a proposal must attend an information webinar or review the webinar recording.
- Where possible, we will be prioritising new teams that have not yet engaged with Collaboratory, but the following will apply:
 - Academic supervisors who have previously or are currently acting as Lead Academic Supervisor for a Collaboratory PhD project are NOT eligible to be named as Lead Supervisors.
 - Academic colleagues who have previously or are currently acting as Academic Co-Supervisors are eligible to be named as Lead Academic Supervisors.
 - Civic and community partner organisations who have previously or are currently acting as Community Supervisors are not eligible to be the primary Community Supervisory partner but may be named as secondary partners or informal advisors.
- We will NOT consider proposals with a majority focus on artificial intelligence (AI) or engineering specialist approaches. This is due to significant, sector-wide recruitment challenges leaving PhD stipends unable to compete with entry-level salaries in engineering and AI fields.
 - Proposals that touch on AI or engineering in a minor way may still be eligible; please speak to a member of the Collaboratory team about suitability before submitting.

3.2. Supervisory Team Requirements

All PhD project supervisory teams require the following named partners, as a minimum:

A lead Academic Supervisor

At least 1 Academic Co-Supervisor

At least 1 Community Supervisor

A formal representative of a local community-focused organization within either Nottinghamshire or Leicestershire.

Each supervisory team must include academic supervisors from at least 2 different institutions within the chapter. I.e., x2 different Nottingham universities or x2 different Leicestershire universities.

All supervisory team partners should be chapter specific. For example, for project proposals being submitted to the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Chapter of Collaboratory, academic supervisors should be from Nottingham Trent University and University, with a Community Supervisor from a Nottinghamshire-based organisation.

3.2.1. Academic supervisor requirements

- All academic supervisors named on a proposal **must meet their local institutional and departmental supervision regulations**. These differ between institutions, with different variations in requirements around capacity, number of supervisors, type of employment, etc.
- Named academic supervisors must receive approval from their line manager to confirm their eligibility and capacity to take on a PhD supervision.
- It is the responsibility of each named supervisor to confirm their own eligibility to supervise a PhD candidate from 1st April 2027 whether as lead or co-supervisor. After the submission closing date, local university teams will confirm the eligibility of each named academic supervisor to take on a PhD supervisor. After submissions close, the eligibility of named academics to take on a new PGR supervision will be checked by local teams. **If any named academic supervisor on a proposal is NOT eligible to take on a supervision, the whole proposal will not be considered.** There is no flexibility on this.
- As a minimum, each project supervisory team must have an academic lead and co-supervisor, both of whom should come from at least x2 different universities within the Chapter region.
 - For Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Chapter proposals, a combination of supervisors from any two of the Chapter's three universities will be suitable. It is not a mandatory requirement to have UoL, DMU, and LU represented on the supervisory team.
- Beyond the Lead Academic Supervisor and the Academic Co-Supervisor, additional academic co-supervisors may be named on the proposal, but only where relevant to the needs of the project (e.g., where further PGR supervision experience is needed, or a specific area of academic/practice expertise is needed).
 - **PLEASE NOTE:** As a collaborative programme, Collaboratory supervisory teams tend to be larger than other PhDs. To mitigate the challenges that a larger supervisory team can present to PhD candidates, where any further co-supervisors are named on the team in addition to the lead and 1st co-supervisor, it must be clear what their unique and necessary contribution to the project will be.

3.2.2. Community Supervisor requirements

- Named Community Supervisors must hold an active, formal position with a community-focused organisation. This can be any form of formally contracted position where the named individual has relevant permission and responsibility to carry out work on behalf of the organisation.

- Named Community Supervisors must bring expertise from an area of practice relevant to the proposed project, based on their real-world, professional expertise and experience working with relevant communities. They can also provide access to defined communities, data, resources, etc., where relevant.
- Management and supervision experience is not necessary for someone to be named as a Community Supervisor – Collaboratory will provide necessary guidance and training for those on successful projects.
- If the proposal is successful, Community Supervisors will be required to engage in regular contact with the candidate, fellow supervisors, and Collaboratory. If the named person holds a more senior role where capacity for this engagement is limited, an additional colleague from the organisation should be named.
- To be eligible, a Community Supervisor's organisation must be based within the relevant Chapter's county region (Nottinghamshire or Leicestershire & Rutland), and must work with one or more defined communities within the region.
 - Organisations based outside of the chapter and/or who work with communities beyond the chapter region (i.e., national organisations) are not eligible to be the main Community Supervisor, however they may be included as secondary Community Supervisor or an informal advisory partner to the project.
- Collaboratory defines a community-focused organisation as any organisation whose primary function is to provide one or more services to defined communities, for the broader social good of the people and region.
 - Please see project profiles on our website for examples of previous and current Community Supervisory partner organisations.

3.3. Additional Considerations

- Priority will be given to projects that focus on community priorities not yet addressed by existing Collaboratory PhD or Research Placement projects.
- We are particularly interested in proposals with a life sciences, chemistry or physics subject focus.
- We are particularly interested in proposals which will employ engaged methodologies (i.e., participatory action methods or similar) which actively embed communities within the PhD research process as equitable participants.



4. FUNDING OVERVIEW

4.1. Collaboratory's PhD Offering

All successful PhD project proposals selected to be funded by Collaboratory will receive a funding package comprising the following:

- A 3-year, full-time PhD stipend for successful candidates, paid monthly at the UKRI basic stipend rate.
- Full payment of the PhD candidate's tuition fees. This includes any fees for the thesis-pending 4th year.
- Purchase of a laptop for the PhD candidate to use for the duration of their studies.
- A total Research Training and Support Grant of £1,500. This is to be used towards the candidate's specialist training and development (attending conferences, external training, etc), and research consumables such as participation incentives, etc. This fund cannot be used to be personal equipment or for PAYE costs.
- Support payments of £50 per half day for Community Supervisors to support their participation at essential events such as candidate shortlisting, interviews, induction, and regular project meetings.
- PhD candidates receive full access to both partner universities represented on their supervisory team.
- Extensive, specialist support and training for PhD candidates, developed and delivered by the Collaboratory team, and researcher development teams at all partner universities.
- Extensive, specialist support and training for PhD supervisory team members, developed and delivered by the Collaboratory team, and researcher development teams at all partner universities.
- Candidates will take part in our Championing Engaged Research training module, created in partnership with the [National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement](#), which aims to develop our researchers as future leaders of community-engaged research.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Any project costs that exceed the funding offering outlined above must be sourced by the project team from other sources. Details of any additional funding requirements must be outlined in the proposal submission form. **Proposals with unconfirmed and/or unfunded additional costs will NOT be considered.**

4.2. Conditions of Funding

The conditions below apply to all PhD project proposals which go on to be successfully selected for funding by Collaboratory.

- Collaboratory studentship funding (including candidate stipend, tuition fees and all other associated project funds) will be tied to the candidate recruited onto the project, and not the project team. Collaboratory will retain ultimate control of project funds.

- Funding and candidate start dates cannot be deferred. All projects must commence with the April 2027 intake period.
- All supervisory team members are expected to engage fully with Collaboratory's inclusive recruitment approach and mandatory training requirements. This is a core purpose of Collaboratory's funded work.
- All supervisory team members must attend the following, mandatory training requirements:
 - Inclusive candidate recruitment (1hr, online session, during candidate recruitment period)
 - Inclusive applicant assessment and interviews (1hr, online session, during candidate recruitment period).
 - Inclusive Supervision (1.5hrs, online). Multiple instances are run each year. All supervisors must attend one instance within the first year of the project.
 - Candidate and Supervisors full team induction event (1 full day, April 2027).
- The Collaboratory Doctoral Training Programme is designed as an in-person degree programme, only. While Collaboratory will be supportive of requests to work remotely or at-distance for short periods of time when due to extenuating circumstances, candidates are expected to carry out their PhD in a manner consistent with standard in-person degree programmes.
- All successful PhD candidates will be required to engage fully with all mandatory training, tasks, and events that comprise Collaboratory's bespoke approach to researcher training and development, as a condition of their funding.
- **Collaboratory is more than just PhD funder.** It is a holistic research programme that is funded to develop and trial a unique, inclusive, place-based and community-engaged approach to PhD-level research. Supervisory teams are expected to engage with and support this ethos, and to encourage and support their candidates to engage fully with the Collaboratory programme throughout their PhD studies.
- Continued disengagement from the Collaboratory programme or refusal to adhere to mandatory Collaboratory or local institutional processes by any member of the supervisory team may result in removal of individual supervisors, withdrawal of funding from the full supervisory team, or re-allocation of the candidate to a different supervisory team.

4.3. Key Dates

The following are key dates for teams whose proposals are successfully selected for funding.

- Candidate applications open: Monday 5th October 2026
- Candidate applications close: 11:59pm, Sunday 28th November 2026
- Applicant shortlisting panels:
 - Nottinghamshire Chapter - Monday 14th December 2026
 - Leicestershire Chapter - Tuesday 15th December 2026
- Applicant interview period: 4th Jan 2027 – 5th Feb 2027
- All successful PhD candidates start: Thursday 1st April 2027
- Mandatory full team induction day (full supervisory team and candidate):
 - Nottinghamshire Chapter – Wednesday 14th April 2027
 - Leicestershire Chapter - Tuesday 13th April 2027

5. ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSALS

We strongly recommend that teams interested in submitting a project proposal explore the [profiles of our previous and current Research Placement projects](#) to understand the nature and scope of the work we will fund. Each project profile also includes a link to our candidate profiles which allow you to learn more about the kind of people we recruit.

All proposals will be assessed by a panel comprising members of the Collaboratory team, academic researchers from relevant chapter universities, as well as members of local community-focused organisations. All proposed will be assessed against the following areas:

5.1. Project Focus

- Projects must seek to address one or more defined local challenges relevant to one or more defined local communities.
- Proposals can take the approach of any combination of academic disciplines.
- Each proposal must be of appropriate scope for a full-time, PhD-level research project.

5.2. Community Basis

- Projects must demonstrate a strong and well-informed grounding in the needs of one or more defined local communities.
- The local challenge(s) which the project seeks to address must be explicit and clearly informed by relevant community practice and evidence.
- The community basis which the project seeks to address must explicitly align with the Community Priorities for Research, as detailed on our project proposals webpage.
- Projects must seek to address an area of genuine community/civic need. Collaboratory is looking to fund research centred around the nuances of place-based challenges and their relation to people and place, rather than research that could be carried out anywhere and just happens to be carried out in a local, regional setting.
- Evidence of collaboration and input from the Community Supervisor(s) in the development of the proposal must be made clear.
- The community context underpinning the proposal must be made explicit. Proposals where the connections to community/civic need are assumed or implicit will be ranked lower.

5.3. Academic Basis

- Projects must demonstrate a strong, logical academic basis with a clear intention to make a novel contribution to one or more academic fields.
- There must be an academically robust justification for the proposed methods, and approaches.

- Sufficient detail about the proposed methods and approaches must be provided for their suitability to be judged in relation to the project's rationale, aims, and make-up of the supervisory team.
- Each proposal must be submitted with x2 complete peer reviews. Peer reviews should be reasonable and broadly supportive of the proposal.
- Collaboratory is an interdisciplinary, "discipline agnostic" programme. As such, academic details should be written in accessible language to ensure that the range of colleagues on our selection panels can effectively understand and evaluate the proposal details.

5.4. Potential for Impact

- Proposals should demonstrate a logical and realistic pathway from research to real-world impact that is achievable within the scope of the work and funding available, to one or more local communities through the scope of the proposed work.
- The impact and benefit of the research for to the Community Supervisor's organisation must be made explicit.
- The potential impact of the project must be realistic and achievable given the scope of the work and funding available.
- Sufficient detail should be provided to rationalise how such impact would be achieved through the proposed project, highlighting aims for potential outcomes, where relevant.

5.5. Suitability of Supervisory Team

- Each project supervisory team must have an appropriate combination of relevant knowledge, skills, and expertise to guide a PhD Candidate in the defined research activities, and to ensure the project is successful.
- The combination of academic supervisors must provide sufficient supervisory skill and experience to effectively support a "non-traditional" PhD candidate to successful completion.
- The balance of expertise from academic and community supervisors should be appropriate for the area of focus of the proposed research, and the wider needs of the project.
- Community Supervisor(s) and their organisation(s) should be appropriate partners for the described project and bring relevant experience and insights from their sector and practice.
- Supervisory teams must demonstrate how each named member has the experience and expertise necessary to ensure the project's success.
- Named academic supervisors must meet their local intuitional and departmental supervision regulations. (See [3.2.1. Academic supervisor requirements](#)).

5.6. Additional Considerations

In addition to the criteria mentioned above, the selection panel will also need to consider the following factors when making funding decisions.

- The balance of topics being addressed by projects within each cohort portfolio.
- The wider strategic priorities of the overall Collaboratory programme.

Please note that DMU, UoL, and LU academic leads for Collaboratory will be running an internal sift of proposals to ensure a strong range of submissions from each partner university. Details will be made available internally.

6. RECRUITMENT OF PHD CANDIDATES

6.1. Collaboratory's Recruitment Aims

A core area of work that Collaboratory is funded to undertake is to pilot new, evidence-based, inclusive recruitment mechanisms, with the aim of creating more accessible pathways into doctoral research for promising local candidates who might otherwise be excluded from more traditional academic opportunities.

It is essential that all named supervisory team members understand that aims of Collaboratory's work, as it pertains to candidate recruitment. All project teams whose proposals are successful in being selected for Collaboratory funding are expected to engage fully with our approach to PhD candidate recruitment. This is as a non-negotiable condition of Collaboratory funding.

Recruitment Aims

- To support promising local candidates with strong potential to succeed in PhD research to get onto and succeed in a PhD degree. Especially those classed as "non-traditional" candidates by the Higher Education sector.
- To develop, trial and implement novel, inclusive approaches to PhD candidate recruitment which enables anyone to apply and showcase their suitability for a PhD, regardless of how they acquired their skills and experience.

What do we mean by "non-traditional" candidates?

- Those with a non-linear career and/or a non-linear education pathway.
- Those who do not have "standard entry" qualifications, i.e., 2.1 at Undergraduate or 2.2 at Undergraduate with a Masters.
- Those with strong equivalent, or better, professional experience than an undergraduate degree.

- Those who would otherwise not have the opportunity to access PhD study, i.e., due to socio-economic status, family/caring responsibilities, other minoritised identity, etc.

6.2. Applicant Eligibility

6.2.1. General Eligibility Criteria

- Candidates must live in the UK as their country of permanent residence.
- Collaboratory CANNOT consider candidates who qualify as international students for the purposes of tuition fees.
- Candidates must not be a current doctoral level candidate, nor already hold a PhD or other doctoral degree, including any degree awarding the title of Doctor (i.e., Doctor of Medicine).
- Candidates cannot be a current formal employee of either Nottingham Trent University, the University of Nottingham, De Montfort University, the University of Leicester, or Loughborough University, working in a research or research supporting/adjacent role. Those working for partner universities in roles not affiliated with research, such as general administration, estates, catering, etc., may still apply.
- We cannot consider applications from those who wish to conduct a PhD at distance/remotely.
- We cannot consider applications from those who wish to conduct a PhD on a part-time basis.

6.2.2. Minimum Qualifications for Entry

Anyone can apply to be a Collaboratory PhD candidate, regardless of the academic qualifications they hold. Collaboratory has created two different application routes for candidates to take, based on the extent to which an individual meets the current minimum academic qualifications for entry.

Route 1: Application by Standard Admission

- Applicants hold at least an upper 2nd class (2.1) undergraduate degree or equivalent degree, or a 2nd class (2.2) undergraduate degree with a master's degree.

These applicants who meet the general eligibility criteria AND minimum qualifications as described above must apply by Application by Standard Admission. These applicants provide evidence of their qualifications and answer our main contextual application questions.

Route 2: Application by Professional Equivalency

- Applicants who do not meet the minimum qualifications for entry, as described above, even if they have a different combined of qualifications (i.e., 2.1 at undergraduate plus a PGCE) must apply by Application by Professional Equivalency route.

These applicants have the option to provide evidence of any relevant qualifications, but this is not essential. They must ALSO submit a Portfolio of Professional Equivalency which includes:

- At least one example of an extended* piece of analytical, academic or technical writing (*If this piece of writing is less than 5,000 words, we recommend applicants upload additional examples.)

- A professional CV which demonstrates substantial experience in a relevant sector(s).
- A cover letter (maximum x1, A4 page) which demonstrates how and to what extent they meet the core and project specific competencies outlined in the PhD project advert.

6.2.3. Collaboratory's Competency Framework

All candidates are assessed against Collaboratory's inclusive competency framework. This framework has been designed to identify candidates with potential to succeed in community-engaged research, value skills and experiences that universities cannot teach but which are of value to the project and to moderate the value of skills and experiences that universities can and will teach candidates at PhD level. It recentres the purpose of the PhD on being a training opportunity and development opportunity.



Category	Competency
Comprehension and evaluation	Strong understanding of the project and its subject matter.
	Analytical, researcher mindset with keen attention to detail.
	Communicate complex concepts with clarity and precision.
	Able to identify connections, patterns, gaps, and irregularities in information/data.
	Able to interpret data/information confidently with logic and empathy to derive meaning.
Social and emotional	Demonstrable experience of responding effectively changing contexts, information and demands.
	Ability to persevere in the face of challenges/failures and to remain constructive in developing solutions.
	Demonstrable passion for learning with clear drive and curiosity to undertake this specific research project.
	Willingness to immerse oneself in the research subject matter and make a contribute to new knowledge through a PhD.
	Strong desire to make a positive community impact through the research.
	Willingness to think deeply about complex concepts and engage with academic ideas and theory.
Preparedness and potential for success	Experience of working, collaborating and communicating effectively with different stakeholders.
	High level of self-motivation and ability to work with minimal guidance.
	Strong organisational and time-management skills with the ability to balance and prioritise multiple tasks.
	Ability to identify potential challenges and complexities and thoughtfully consider possible solutions.
	Able to identify the technical, personal, or professional skills required for a task and take action to develop these.
Community Context	Genuine desire to undertake community-engaged research over more traditional approaches to research.
	Understand the impact of and need for the inclusion of diverse experiences and points of view in research.
	Appreciation/understanding of the importance of community insight and experience in the generation of new knowledge.
	Awareness/understanding of the broader societal context related to the subject matter of the project.
Project specific competencies	Specific to each project, as identified by the project supervisory in proposal.

6.3. Recruitment Process

6.3.1. Process overview

- Collaboratory will create a project advert based for the Collaboratory website based on the details provided in the proposal submission.
- The application window will run for two months and will include a series of in-depth pre-application support, webinars, and advice sessions.
- After closing, the Collaboratory team will run a basic eligibility check on applications before producing anonymised version that are shared with all supervisory teams to view.
- The Collaboratory team will chair a series of shortlisting panels where supervisory team members will be invited to support discussions to shortlist applicants for theirs and other projects. Decisions are made by consensus, by the group present on the day.
- In-person interviews are led by panels comprising, at minimum, x1 academic and x1 community supervisor, x1 member of the wider Collaboratory team, and x1 current PhD candidate. Final decisions are made by group consensus by the panel present on the day.

6.3.2. Marketing of studentships

Candidate recruitment is run centrally by the Collaboratory team with support from institutional academic leads for Collaboratory, and local institutional communications and marketing teams. This includes promotional messaging, applications, shortlisting, and interviewing.

Promotions will target local candidates via non-academic channels; primarily through promoted social media posts.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Support from Community Supervisors and their organisations is ESSENTIAL to successfully attract strong candidates with relevant skills. Community Supervisors of successful projects will be asked to support in disseminating details of the studentship opportunity through their relevant networks.

6.3.3. Project Adverts

All successful projects are advertised in a job advert-style format which provides a breakdown of core Collaboratory competencies, as well as project-specific essential and desired competencies.

Adverts will be written based on details submitted as part of the project proposal. Supervisory teams will be required to proof the advert descriptions to ensure accuracy with the original proposal.

To help you write an effective project summary and to define appropriate essential and desirable competencies, please see the following examples: [Example 1](#), [Example 2](#) and [Example 3](#).

Final project specific competencies may be edited by Collaboratory before advertising to align with our methods and wider approach to our work on candidate recruitment. Suggested project specific competencies which can reasonably learnt or attained throughout the course of the PhD programme, such as specific methodologies not possible to learn outside of academic settings, will not be included in the final advert.