GW4 Generator Fund Webinar 2024 – Transcript

Presented by Dr Sarah-Louise Dietz, Building Communities Manager

Title slide:

Hello and welcome to the Generator Fund Webinar. My name is Sarah-Louise Dietz and I am the Building Communities Manager at GW4.

Introduction to GW4:

This slide is an introduction to the GW4 Alliance – when we were founded & our guiding principle of collaboration.

The bulk of this webinar takes you section by section through the application form, highlighting what we want to see and pointing out common pitfalls. You can skip straight to a specific section using the navigational links below. I particularly recommend you listen to Section 11, Costs, as this is where most problems arise.

Key information:

This next slide has some key links and email addresses.

The application form and full guidance for the Generator Fund can be found at gw4.ac.uk/generator-fund. Please refer to the Generator Guidance before watching this webinar, especially Annex 2 of the guidance, which contains top tips for completing the form. Any questions you have after watching this webinar and reading the guidance, please send to communities@gw4.ac.uk

We are providing you with some previous successful applications for your reference. These are available on request from your institutional GW4 programme manager (emails on the slide displaying now and in the Guidance). You can also request the past examples by emailing communities@gw4.ac.uk

GW4 Building Communities Pages:

This is the GW4 website where I want to show you how to find details of current and previous Generator Projects. Navigate to "What we do" and "Communities" for a list of all our projects. You can filter by "Fund" and we recommend you focus just on the Generator Fund, because previous award schemes had different timelines and award values. You can also filter by discipline, using "Types" and search by keywords.

This is an excellent place to go to see the variety of projects and activities, with examples from a huge number of academic areas. If you're wondering what people do with a Generator Award, here's where to look. Workshops, sandpits, conferences, public engagement events, competitions, pilot research, interviews, scoping exercises – the list goes on – the one thing they have in

common is that they all aim to create, grow and evolve a successful and productive collaboration across the GW4.

Application Form Information:

Now we'll look at the application form itself, section by section. Please note that you can skip to the section you are interested in using the navigational links.

Section 1 asks for a name – this can be a very straightforward descriptive project name, a more generic network name, people have even managed snappy acronyms. Look at the previous communities for inspiration. Also note that the name is not judged by the panel! And it is not final, several communities have evolved their name over the community lifetime as more people became involved or as their focus changed.

Section 2 asks you to list applicants. If you have multiple applicants from one institution please just list them all in the same box, it makes things simpler. Please make sure that you identify the Principle Investigator, and if there are core Co-Investigators please highlight those as well. This is because teams have ranged from 3 people right up to 20+ and it helps if I know who are the core individuals to contact at each institution rather than including everyone.

We accept applications from any GW4 academic pathway staff, at any level. In the past this has included teams of entirely Early Career Researchers (ECRs), and teams of entirely professors, and more mixed teams. There are a three things to note here:

- First, please make sure all team members are committed to the project and activities they will be responsible for. There is no time buyout for academics.
- Second, very early ECR communities may want to consider naming mentors, this can be done in section 10A. The Panel will not penalise an ECR community if mentors are not named, but they might ask you to add mentors at the point of awarding you funds.
- Finally, if your community does not include all four GW4 institutions please add justification here. This may be simply because only 3 institutions have the specialism – such as medicine. Please make every effort to find collaborators at each institution – the panel will pick up on this. Please note that the Institutional programme managers can help direct you to collaborators and each institution has access to search facilities to identify suitable academics. Some of our most successful communities have been entirely new groupings of academics, coming together for the first time in the Generator project.

Section 3 gives key details of your application request. We expect all projects to run June – November, the dates given here. There is some limited flexibility in these dates – for example, previous awards have had delayed starts due to maternity leave, equipment installation, or immovable field trips. Occasionally longer award periods are considered, if there are good reasons. If your requested project dates differ, please amend and provide full justification. I am always happy to discuss this with you as you prepare your application, so please get in touch.

Please bear in mind that the panel reserve the right to refuse a request for a late start or an extended award period.

There is also a box for the full amount requested to go in, with full costings broken down in a later section.

The final boxes here refer to the Generator Showcase and Launch event in May. This is an in-person event, approximately 9am –3pm, in Bristol. We do expect that PIs and at least their core team of CoIs will attend the event (note GW4 will pay travel!), and ask that you acknowledge in this box of the form that you have saved the date. At the event we have lightning presentations from all the previous year's communities, and all the new communities, a Q&A panel session, and some presentations from the core GW4 team on key areas like comms, research and development and collaboration. Plus, lots of networking time, coffee, lunch and time after the event for your team to meet. Previous communities have found the event really useful, and we have had very positive feedback each year including people meeting new collaborators. Communities have said that getting tips directly from past communities' and hearing their experiences of Generator Funding, community building, running workshops set them up really well for their awards starting.

Section 4 asks you to give a lay person summary of your motivation and project. The Generator award scheme is open to all academic areas, and therefore our panel is multi-disciplinary. As much as possible we match reviewers to applications in their subject area. But this section means that all reviewers will have an understanding of your proposal. If you are successful this summary will help inform our communications team as they promote the new communities. Writing these lay summaries is a really useful skill, and one that is increasingly required for publications and grant applications.

Note we have also asked you to indicate if your award falls under STEM, HASS or a mixture. This is not used for any scoring purposes, just for our reporting.

Section 5 looks at "who" you have identified for this community. In **Section 5A**, we ask you to state if yours is a new or an existing community. Existing communities can be those who have had GW4 funding before, such as through our Crucible Seed Funding or Development Awards, or just a group of GW4 academics who already work together. Give a little detail here – how long have you been working together. If you are a new community, please state that you are new – don't be concerned, some of our most successful communities have come from a single academic or a pair of academics reaching out to GW4 colleagues with an idea – that then takes off. Note that more detail on your project team structure is asked for later in the form (section 9).

In **Section 5B**, if anyone in your community has had funding from GW4 before it won't affect your chances of being successful here but it's useful for us to track the pipeline of academics coming through GW4 programmes. Previous GW4 funding includes GW4 community funding, seed funding, or a place on the Crucible scheme.

Now we have got past the straightforward questions and are getting to the detail of your project.

In **Section 6** we want you to outline the opportunity that you have identified, demonstrating its importance. This section should, briefly, give the background for the project, explaining why this project or area is important, and why now is the right time for it. Work to set the problem into the context of current wider research or innovation.

Then, outline your project focus – details come later – here, put down your key aims that you will be addressing. For example, previous communities have outlined an open challenges, they've given multiple broad goals, they've outlined a key research question – and crucially they've made sure that these are relevant, and justified in the context of the specific project proposal.

In **Section 7**, we want to understand how this collaboration will allow you to achieve more than you would alone. GW4 is all about being greater than the sum of its parts. We want you to explain why these people or groups are needed on this project, and what value is added by being a collaboration. We ask you to identify gaps, or synergies which explain why this could not be done as a single institution. For example: one academic may have links to stakeholders and another might have key skills; when they collaborate it fills in the gaps. Or synergies: your project might only work across different specialisms, whether that be accessing specific lab skills or equipment, or different research interests. Are you coming at the same area from complementary angles? How will your team harness your collective expertise into a coherent GW4 community.

And finally, "what is the anticipated level of interest across GW4": will there be wider interest across GW4? This may be because there are 40+ academics who would come to your workshop, or it may be that this is a new strategic priority for your schools and departments so you would have strong internal support. This might not be the case, your impact may apply elsewhere and be become evident later on, and that is fine too.

In **Section 8A** we want the details of your proposed activities. This is usually given as an ordered list, or workplan, of activities set within the award time period. Some people include visual aids here, eg gantt charts or timelines. Make sure to note how these activities will build on your collaboration. Where relevant, you can list outcomes and impact with the activities; or at the end of this section. For example: workshop 1 will be in month 1 with X themes, 20 attendees and the goal of developing a research strategy based on our strengths. OR This piece of pilot research will run from month 2-4, and will achieve X. Specific details of the outcomes – such as specific calls - come in section 8B.

If you are employing an RA, or an admin to support your project, make sure their tasks are outlined clearly in this section and indicate their contractual % FTE and employment period. For example, an admin may support your workshops, maintain an email list, etc; an RA may complete specific research tasks, a scoping review, interviews, etc.

It sounds obvious, but it is a careful balance here of enough activities, and the right activities, to achieve your goals without being too ambitious with your time. Previous communities have been scored lower if the reviewers felt the balance was wrong.

This plan will be referred to throughout your project to monitor your progress.

The final point here is about sustainability. Use the last part of this section to outline a plan for sustaining your community longer term. For larger communities we've seen people using a mailing list, a website, social media, engaging with external partners, seeking impact opportunities, initiating a seminar series. For smaller communities sustainability could just mean regular meetings and longer term goals or outcomes for community impact beyond the term of your award. Either way, explain how you will keep the momentum going after the award ends. Communities often forget to articulate this, and reviewers pick up on that.

In section 8B we ask for detail on your outcomes – be as specific as possible. If you can identify particular funding calls, an important conference, publication plans, themed issues, news outlets etc that suit your project, that is perfect. Not to be too cliched here, but the panel want to see SMART goals, specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound. Communities get lower scores if their outcomes are too vague or general. If you want help identifying calls or potential outputs, please talk to your local research development managers – also, your school manager or our GW4 institutional programme managers can help signpost you.

Section 8C asks you to provide details of external partners. These might be academic or non-academic. If you do not have external partners, that is fine – not all projects do. If you do have external partners, or plan to involve them, please list them here. The panel want to see both how you will engage with them (workshops? 1:1? Consultancy/policy/reporting?), and why are you engaging with them – what do they bring to the project (will they improve impact, bring equipment, subject knowledge or area expertise).

In Section 9 we want details about your team. This should include their experience and track record – for ECR communities this may be weaker, but this is understood by the panel. ECRs still have strengths and experiences which should be articulated here.

Every community should explain how your team will work in terms of roles and responsibilities – who will lead and why, are different work-packages or activities assigned to different individuals and why? What strengths and knowledge does each person bring and how are you leveraging those to achieve your goals?

If any key external partners are a core part of the team, please include them in this discussion of team structure and strengths.

Section 10 is just for communities that include ECRs somehow. You do not have to include ECRs, but we do encourage it. In **section 10A** please indicate if the PI or core team members ECRS. Or if your community encourage ECRs to join your activities for example as workshop delegates.

In **Section 10B** you can elaborate on the support your community will give to ECRs. If you are a completely ECR led community you could name a mentor, identifying training opportunities, or highlight how leading and supporting this project will develop new skills (such as facilitating, grant writing, report writing). Maybe you build ECR engagement into events (inviting them to give presentations, display posters, or take part in networking), or perhaps you include specific funding for ECRs at events or in pilot projects.

Section 11 is the last big section – costs. Please do listen to this section. We require a detailed breakdown of your project costs, and this should be developed and approved with your local finance teams or research office – note there is a box to tick to confirm that you have followed the approval process correctly. Generator Funded projects can have budget at multiple institutions, but we do encourage budget to be held at one institution where possible. If you do split your budget across institutions, be aware that Finance require that costs at the CoI institutions should only be for workshop expenses, staff salaries and lab/research expenses. Any confusion, please get in touch.

PLEASE DO NOT just put "£3k" on travel, "£2k on venue" etc etc. This is not properly or accurately costed and I will return the application and ask that you redo this section to avoid criticism from the panel.

So, running down these different types of costs given:

- Costs for Travel and subsistence – should only be held at the lead institution, (note that anyone from other institutions can still claim travel & subsistence, but those claims must go through the lead institution). Please roughly work this out – eg give a per person cost per event, and a number of attendees per event.
- External speakers and facilitators – some people use a facilitator, or an illustrator for events (we can give you recommendations). Please get accurate quotes where possible.
- Venues – venues are often provided free by institutions, so there may be no cost here. Please note that the use of expensive venues needs to be justified, the panel have flagged the value for money of events in the past.
- Administration and RA support – If you have an RA, admin, technician, etc being employed on the project please give the expected grade or spine point of the person, the %FTE, and the number of months employment – and calculate the total based on these. A vague "£5k on an RA", is not good enough and I will return the application for clarification.
- Other – for example, people have given prizes, lab costs, transcription costs, reward for surveys, design costs, websites. If you want to check that a cost would be allowed, please get in touch.

I frequently have to send back applications for clarifications on costs – there is not enough detail, totals are incorrect, or costs are incorrectly allocated to CoI institutions. I am always happy to answer questions as you write the application and I'd rather you got in touch earlier rather than right on the deadline.

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In **Section 12**, we ask for EDI information, from the PI only. This is voluntary. We use this only for monitoring processes, it is anonymized, never connected to your application or to any contact details, and is appropriately aggregated before being presented anywhere. If you have any concerns or questions about this please come to me.

In **Section 13** we have a few statements about data protection, and how we process and use the information on the form. Again, any questions, please come to me.

Finally – **Section 14**, please don't forget to sign and date before you submit. The submission should go to communities@gw4.ac.uk by midnight on the closing date, which for the sixth round when this was filmed, is Monday 3rd February 2025. Please double check your application form and the website if you are watching this for a later round.

I am very happy to answer questions at communities@gw4.ac.uk, please do email me to discuss your application or any queries related to the scheme.

Thank you for watching this webinar, and I wish you all the very best with your application.