

# Application guide: Grants for social science research on solar radiation modification

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## Overview

### The research challenge

Solar radiation modification (SRM) is a controversial proposal for reducing some of the impacts of climate change by reflecting away a small fraction of inbound sunlight. For more about SRM, see [What is SRM?](#) in [Resources and frequently asked questions](#).

SRM raises numerous and diverse social and political challenges. Examples include:

- How would decisions about whether to use or reject SRM be made?
- What are desirable and undesirable characteristics of governance systems for SRM experiments and deployment? What concrete steps can be taken towards good governance systems?
- How do different publics view SRM? What about decision-makers?
- How would different ethical frameworks assess both the use and the rejection of SRM?
- How do the risks of SRM compare to the risks from a warmer world, and how would they be distributed?
- How do the political, governance, and security challenges of SRM compare to the political, governance, and security challenges of a warmer world?
- How would the research, development, and use of SRM affect efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to adapt to a changing climate?

Most SRM research—especially in the social sciences—has taken place in the Global North. Yet the social and political challenges are at least as relevant in the Global South, which has the most at stake. These are the kinds of issues that the Socio-Political Fund was set up to explore.

## About the Degrees Socio-Political Fund

The Degrees Initiative's Socio-Political Fund will provide grants to small teams and individual researchers in the social sciences in the Global South. It is the first fund aimed entirely at researchers in developing countries and emerging economies to study SRM's social and political dimensions. It supports work across social science disciplines, including anthropology, economics, ethics, geography, law, political science, psychology, risk science, and sociology.

Grants can cover project staffing costs, access to research and data, and direct research costs. Each grant also includes specific support for open-access publishing fees and participation in international conferences. Importantly, successful applicants will join—and help grow—a diverse global research community which includes some of the world's top SRM experts, benefitting from South-South and South-North collaboration and professional networking opportunities. We expect each supported project to produce at least one publication in an international academic journal.

There are several objectives of the Fund :

- to support excellent research on the social and political dimensions of SRM;
- to build the capacity of developing country researchers to play a greater role in the evaluation and discussion of SRM;
- to expand the conversation around SRM with local stakeholders;

- to build a global community and an evidence base for critically evaluating humanity’s options for dealing with committed climate risk.

## About Socio-Political Fund grants

Successful teams will receive USD 45,000, and individual researchers will receive USD 25,000, to develop, conduct, and publish their results. Of this, all but USD 10,000 (that is, USD 35,00 for teams and USD 15,000 for individual researchers) can be used for:

- Salaries, including covering a share an established researcher’s time and/or hiring postdoctoral researchers;
- Accessing or purchasing books and journal articles;
- Direct research costs.

Of the grant, USD 10,000 is set aside for:

- Payment of open-access journal publication fees (up to USD 5,000 per grant);
- Participation in international conferences during the grant’s lifetime (up to USD 5,000 per grant).

Additional funding may be awarded on a competitive basis if need is later identified in a refined proposal following the research-planning workshop.

The Degrees experience is about much more than grants. We are building a global community of SRM experts—something that we think is an essential precondition for the good governance of SRM. We therefore emphasise community-building and support activities to allow researchers to interact with each other and with SRM experts around the world.

Therefore, the Fund also supports:

- A research-planning workshop to meet fellow grantees and world-leading SRM researchers, and to refine your plans in consultation with them all;
- Collaboration with some of the world’s leading researchers of SRM;
- Connection with a wider community, in both the Global South and North;
- The opportunity to become a leading expert in SRM.

## Timeline

### 2023

- 25 October  
**Call opens**
- 20 December  
**deadline for applications**

### 2024

- January  
**Peer review of applications**

- Mid-February  
**Interviews**
- 28 February  
**Successful applicants notified**
- Week of 27 May  
**Two to three day research-planning workshop, Istanbul**
- 30 June  
**Deadline for revised proposals, based on discussions at the research-planning workshop**
- 31 July  
**Where relevant, additional funding notifications; projects begin**

## 2026

- September  
**Projects end**

We hope and expect to support many of the researchers beyond the initial grant period, helping build a global community of SRM experts, as we have done in the physical sciences.

## Programme details

### Research collaborator scheme

One of the unique benefits of the Fund is its research collaborator network—an arrangement that has worked well in our Degrees Modelling Fund. Projects will be connected with a pool of collaborators who are some of the world’s most experienced SRM experts and give their time as unpaid volunteers. The collaborators work cooperatively with the Socio-Political Fund researchers, helping them to understand the complexities of SRM and get access to the data they need (if applicable), and the key literature in their field of study. In turn the collaborators get to learn from the supported researchers: about their methods and the climate-related challenges in the regions from which they come.

The researchers are free to define how they work with their collaborators and there is no obligation to work with them at all. But most of our past teams in the physical sciences have reported that it is one of the best parts of their experience, with a number of the scientists continuing to work together outside their Degrees-supported projects—for instance by submitting joint funding proposals or by working on other projects.

### Research-planning workshop

After making decisions on the researchers that will receive grants in late February 2024, the Socio-Political Fund journey then begins with a two to three day research-planning workshop in Istanbul in the last week of May. One or two members from each supported project must attend—this is an essential part of the process. The research collaborators will also participate.

At the workshop, the researchers will learn more about SRM and present their initial research plans for review, discussion, and refinement. Perhaps most importantly, the workshop participants will get to know each other as they join a growing international community of SRM experts.

After the workshop, researchers are expected to submit a more detailed plan. At this stage, additional funding may be requested and later awarded on a competitive basis if the need is identified—for instance, where larger teams are needed to carry out the planned work.

## Community building

The Degrees Initiative places a great emphasis on community building. Every project will receive funding to send researchers to conferences. Additionally, the Degrees Initiative will organise monthly calls to allow Socio-Political Fund researchers to stay in touch with each other and the latest SRM news, and to present their work for discussion and feedback. In the past, Degrees has also provided additional funding to allow its supported researchers to attend major SRM events and has organised additional workshops to enable them to meet up, present their work, and learn from each other. We plan to do more of this in the future.

The Degrees Initiative is not prescriptive about the focus of DMF research projects or the methods used to undertake the research. The research can address any aspect of physical climate change, or any climate impact, such as extreme temperature or rainfall, agriculture, ecosystems, or water resources. The first round of DMF studies explored how SRM could affect, amongst other things:

- Rainfall in West Africa
- Extreme droughts in Cape Town
- Dust storms in the Middle East
- Extremes of temperature and precipitation in Indonesia

## Your Socio-Political Fund application

An application to the Socio-Political Fund is relatively light-touch. Applicants need to submit a CV, a research statement that explains what they would like to study, why the topic of study is important, and how they plan to conduct their work.

We recognise that there has been little or no SRM research in most countries. Applicants are not expected to be SRM experts and so are not expected to submit a full research plan at the application stage. Instead, they need to show that they have a strong track record in research within their social-science discipline and a promising general description of what they would like to study, how, and why, if they are awarded a grant. Previous experience working on related topics, such as climate change or emerging technologies, is an asset.

The Degrees Initiative is not prescriptive about the specific research question, methods, or outcomes of projects. The proposal can address any socio-political aspect of SRM. However, proposals that would help developing countries or regions, or the wider Global South, better understand what SRM might mean for them will be more likely to receive funding.

The Degrees Initiative has run nearly 30 engagement workshops on SRM across the Global South over the past decade. Participants at these workshops were consistent and clear that they wanted to understand what SRM would mean for their regions and the Global South. Good Socio-Political Fund projects will generate new knowledge that will help stakeholders understand the implications of SRM. More abstract proposals, including proposals to study how SRM is being researched, are not excluded but are less likely to score well at peer review.

## Further reading on SRM and inspiration for research topics

Applicants looking to better understand the social and political dimensions of SRM and for ideas for possible research topics can read the report *Reflecting Sunlight: Recommendations for Solar Geoengineering Research and Research Governance* (US National Academies, 2021, see particularly the [section “Social dimensions,” pages 233-245](#)). Additional ideas can be found in the article “Social science research to inform solar geoengineering” (Aldy, Joseph E., et al., *Science* 374.6569 (2021): 815-818 [[PDF](#)]). There are many other possible topics.

## What makes a good application

Overall, applications will have a better chance of funding if they:

1. Have a clear, interesting research topic;
2. Propose methods that are suitable for addressing the topic;
3. Come from researchers or teams with the expertise to complete the work to a high standard;
4. Demonstrate some clear research and thinking around the challenges of global warming and SRM;
5. Consider the risks of SRM in the context of risks of climate change;
6. Explain why their proposed research would help developing countries or regions, or the Global South as a whole, understand and evaluate SRM.

Capacity-building is also a key objective of the Socio-Political Fund. Degrees is looking to support researchers that show promise to become regional leaders in the field of SRM research. Applications that have a mix of experienced and early-career researchers, that include or are led by women, and/or that are based in least-developed countries (LDCs), will be looked on favourably.

Applicants are welcome to discuss potential projects with the Degrees Initiative before submission by emailing [grants@degrees.ngo](mailto:grants@degrees.ngo). But please note that we do not have the capacity to review proposals or comment on the likelihood of success.

## Eligibility

Principal investigators must have a PhD and should have appropriate research experience. They must be citizens of one of the following countries AND should work at a university or research institution in one of the listed countries:

Albania, Algeria, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belize, Benin, Bhutan, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cambodia, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, China, Colombia, Comoros, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini (Swaziland), Ethiopia, Fiji, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Jamaica, Jordan, Kenya, Kiribati, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Maldives, Mali, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Mexico, Micronesia, Moldova, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nauru, Nepal, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Palestine, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Rwanda, Samoa, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Togo, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Tuvalu, Uganda, Ukraine (except the Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk regions), Uzbekistan, Vanuatu, Venezuela, Vietnam, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

Applications from an emerging economy with a Human Development Index greater than 0.8 and that are located in developing regions will still be considered, but applicants would have to make the case for why they need research support and how their research will help developing countries to understand the impacts of SRM. This includes for example Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Malaysia, Panama, Türkiye, Uruguay etc.

Due to country-wide sanction regimes and/or operational limitations, we are unable to fund projects in Afghanistan, Cuba, Iran, North Korea, South Sudan, Sudan, and Syria. Nationals of these states who are based in eligible countries can still apply for grants.

Please note:

- The principal investigator must be employed by the host institution where the project would take place. However, other team members can be based at other institutions as long as they fall within the eligibility criteria.
- The Degrees Initiative will only consider applications that can be supported within the limits of applicable sanctions from the United Nations, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.
- To create a level playing field for applications and to encourage capacity-building in the Global South, Degrees will not consider applications that have established SRM experts from the Global North as team members. Researchers will be connected with their collaborators by the Degrees Initiative after Socio-Political Fund grants have been awarded.

## **Eligible social science disciplines**

Projects in anthropology, economics, ethics, geography, law, political science (including security studies and international relations), psychology, risk science, and sociology (including public perception and opinion) are eligible. Proposals in other social science fields might be eligible; please inquire by emailing [grants@degrees.ngo](mailto:grants@degrees.ngo).

## **Review process**

The review of applications and the allocation of funding will be made according to the following process:

1. **Peer review:** All eligible applications will undergo independent peer review by social scientists who are SRM experts. They will be evaluated against the following criteria:
  1. Applicants' experience and knowledge. Do they have the necessary experience and capacity to carry out the project, and have they demonstrated expertise in the proposed research methods? A history of publication in respected academic journals is an asset.
  2. A well-developed research topic and suitable method. Does the proposal aim to address an important socio-political question regarding SRM? To what extent is the proposed research designed to return new, interesting or useful knowledge? Is the method sufficient to address the research topic?
  3. Project feasibility. Can the research reasonably be conducted in the time frame allotted with the researcher(s) proposed?
  4. Benefits to the country or region. Has the application made a strong case for how the research would inform discussions of SRM in developing countries or regions, or the Global South as a whole? Proposed projects that explore socio-political contexts, processes, and issues that affect lives and livelihoods are likely to score higher than projects that explore, for instance, more theoretical or abstract concepts.
2. **Interview:** The principal investigators of the most promising applications will then be invited for a short video interview to discuss their proposal further. These interviews are expected to take place online in mid-February 2024.
3. **Funding decisions:** A selection committee will make final decisions on the projects that will receive funding (pending the successful completion of a due diligence process).

## Notification of decision

The selection committee will meet in late February 2024, and notification of the results will be made shortly thereafter upon approval by the Trustees of the Degrees Initiative. Applicants shortlisted for a grant will receive a conditional award letter addressed to the principal investigator and the head of their institution and undergo a due diligence process. Shortlisted applicants that meet the due diligence requirements will then be officially awarded the grant upon completing, after the research-planning workshop, a budget that describes how funds would be used and signing a grant agreement.

## Grant administration

Grants will be awarded and administered by the Degrees Initiative through an agreement between the Degrees Initiative, the principal investigator, and their institution.

Each successful applicant will be expected to publish at least one paper in a respected international academic journal, and principal investigators must submit a final report at the end of the grant period

Successful applicants will commit to undertaking their Socio-Political Fund research according to the agreement, and the host institution will commit to providing the appropriate resources and facilities necessary for the project. Equipment, software, and literature provided for the project through the Fund will remain the institution's property after completion.

The funds for salaries will be paid to the awarded institution in arrears pending the receipt of satisfactory progress reports as established in the grant agreement. The funds for the research (that is, excluding the support for conference attendance and publication fees) will be paid up-front upon signing the grant agreement.

## How to apply

- Complete and submit the electronic application form by **20** December 2023 (now closed). Incomplete applications cannot be considered.
- Each researcher named in an application should provide a copy of their passport or ID card and a CV with their full list of publications.
- A researcher may only submit one application as principal investigator for this call. There are no limits to the number of applications on which a researcher is listed in other roles.
- Each applicant will receive an automated email to acknowledge receipt of an application. If you do not receive such an acknowledgement within 24 hours, please contact us at [grants@degrees.ngo](mailto:grants@degrees.ngo).