Organisation Universitaire Interaméricaine
Inter-American Organization for Higher Education
Organización Universitaria Interamericana
Organização Universitária Interamericana

FUNDING OPPORTUNITY FOR UNIVERSITY COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Introduction

In September 2015, the Heads of State and Government members of the United Nations (UN) adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 associated targets. The SDGs provide an innovative and timely framework for social change across various critical development areas that matter most to our communities –e.g., promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, ensuring access to clean water and sanitation, and reducing social-economic inequalities. Unlike the 2000 UN Millennium Development Goals that applied largely to developing countries, the UN SDGs are universally applicable to all countries of the world.

The SDGs represent a revolutionary global consensus that nations across the world and all sectors – not only national governments– need to work together to achieve economic, environmental and social sustainability. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development can be considered "the most ambitious and socially significant global agreement of the modern era" (Tillbury, 2017). As indicated by the UN Economic and Social Council (2017), if we are to succeed in meeting the ambitious 2030 Agenda, we must work in partnership across regions and sectors, including academia, local communities and governments, and other relevant actors. Similarly, the European Commission (2016) has expressed support for a broad vision of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the post-2015 framework, noting that science, technology and innovation should not be centered only on the transfer of existing technology but on involving all partners in innovative collaboration. Finally, "if the SDGs are to realize their promise of reconceptualizing development so that it is inclusive of all people", Howard and Wheeler argue that "this challenge cannot be met without a sustained approach that supports the less powerful to build alliances and develop strategies for change" (p.18).

Empirical evidence and a rich literature illustrate the numerous advantages for policy- and community-change agendas that occur when university-based academics come together with front-line civil society organizations (CSOs) to co-create knowledge around society's most pressing issues. CSOs play a constructive role in achieving the SDGs by (i) translating global agendas into national priorities that reflect provincial, regional and local needs; (ii) bringing citizens' voices to national debates and the development of national strategies, and (iii) assisting governments with effective SDG implementation (Bizikova & Reilly-King, 2017; Salamon & Haddock, 2015; Edwards & Ross, 2016). CSOs also have a crucial role in monitoring progress by collecting and providing citizen-generated data that can complement stand-alone national-level SDG tracking processes and systems. Similarly, the 2030 Agenda recognizes education as essential for eradicating poverty, promoting prosperity and well-being for all, and protecting the planet. Accordingly, it sets five targets related to higher education, mostly focused on ensuring equal access to university and tertiary education, especially technical and vocational skills for enhancing students' employability (United Nations, 2015).

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Despite these positive considerations of higher education for reducing inequalities around the globe, there are at least two main interrelated drawbacks: (i) the UN SDGs place a strong emphasis on technical and engineering disciplines at the expense of social science and the humanities –a reductionist idea of education as a mere supplier of human capital for the labour market (Boni et al., 2016); (ii) the technical and human capital-centred view of higher education excludes other forms of knowledge produced by communities, practitioners and other (non-technical) disciplines, which are adequate to tackle environmental and societal challenges as the 2030 Agenda demands (O'Brien et al., 2010; Zuber-Skerritt, 2012; St. Clair, 2014). These limitations constrain the contextual and global capacity of higher education and communities to contribute to sustainable development that, by accepted definition, is broad and encompasses a variety of social, economic and environmental dimensions (Boni et al., 2016; Sachs, 2012). Recent studies indicate that the problems the 2030 Agenda focuses on –such as tackling climate change (SDG 13), ending poverty and hunger (SDGs 1 and 2), achieving gender equality (SDG 5)– are at the heart of society and need collaborative solutions and different knowledge and perspectives that will link learning and action organically in order to generate relevant responses to the UN SDGs (Neubauer & Calame, 2017; Tandon et al., 2016).

Higher education institutions (HEIs) can jointly address this knowledge deficit by mobilizing and bringing together diverse knowledge communities and stakeholder networks to co-create practical ways to achieve results around specific challenges, thus having a positive impact on decision making and implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Jeffrey Sachs (2015), senior UN advisor and leader in sustainable development, indicates that engaging with diverse knowledge communities is extremely important because governments by themselves do not have the expertise to guide action and make critical recommendations about what actually to do to achieve the SDGs. A message from the Association of Commonwealth Universities (2015) also points in this direction: "The higher education sector's efforts to prepare to respond to the Post-2015 agenda require new thinking in terms of scale and modality. As national institutions addressing global challenges, universities need to be able to incorporate diverse demands and diverse stakeholders into their own agendas" (p. 5). Such a contribution from post-secondary institutions is possible if higher education is viewed within the larger societal context (Tandon, 2017).

A variety of recent publications have focused on the decisive role post-secondary education plays in driving the processes that lead to a more sustainable present and future. The research emphasis has mainly been on designing and implementing system-wide reforms within HEIs (Van't Land & Herzog, 2017; Salmi, 2017), teaching sustainable development (Howlett et al., 2016; Leal Filho et al., 2015), the role of education in policymaking –specifically responding to SDG targets and matching national development needs (Hoballah et al., 2017)– and, more generally, on how to transform higher education systems and institutions into more locally and globally engaged actors (Grau et al., 2017). While the integration of the SDGs into the strategic thinking of universities and their global impact is gaining traction across the globe, effective models for partnerships for impact on the SDGs are still lacking. Organizations like the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) have sought to address this gap by offering guides to support universities in this effort.

At the same time, Latin American and Caribbean HEIs have a long track record of prioritizing sustainability and working to advance the SDGs (Benayas & Blanco-Portela, 2019). A global survey conducted by the International Association of Universities (Van't Land & Herzog, 2017), which received responses from 120 HEIs from all continents, demonstrates that universities increasingly collaborate on sustainable development issues, engage with sustainability networks, and look for examples of how to integrate the different SDGs into curriculum, research, and campus management. The survey shows that 70% of the HEIs are collaborating with other institutions on sustainable development issues, especially at local (55%), national (53%) and regional (43%) levels.

Given the importance of collaborative processes whereby academics and community-based knowledge workers can co-create knowledge that is locally contextualized and globally significant to address the SDGs, the Inter-American Organization for Higher Education (IOHE) and its VP-Canada Advisory Group (Simon Fraser University, Royal Roads University, Lakehead University and École Nationale d'Administration Publique) aims to engage IOHE members in a research consortium and network towards the advancement of the UN 2030 Agenda for sustainable development. In particular, pairing Canadian HEIs with Latin American HEIs together with their respective community partners could make a significant contribution to the global agenda.

IOHE will provide seed funding to stimulate new and/or existing partnerships and collaborative initiatives, to conduct research, document the initiatives, and mobilize knowledge about such initiatives to its member organizations. The long-term goal is to encourage IOHE members to replicate positive actions for fulfilling the SDGs at a large scale while sharing the expertise developed within its network.

This document is a call for proposals to apply for seed funding to **support collaborative research between IOHE members on the implementation of the UN SDGs**. Not only will IOHE consider research initiatives to fulfill any one or more of the SDGs but also and, perhaps more importantly, the relationships among the SDGs, and ways in which effective collaboration and partnerships among stakeholders can further the achievement of all of the SDGs.

Scope of the call

In line with IOHE's mission to contribute to the transformation of HEIs to respond to their social and political contexts through the creation of, and support to, Inter-American collaboration, the goals of this call are twofold:

> **Goal** 1. To promote collaboration and partnerships among IOHE members, and between members and local communities to advance the implementation of the UN Agenda 2030 through the creation of knowledge that is locally applicable and globally relevant; and

> **Goal** 2. To learn from exemplary partnership models between HEIs and communities to further the SDGs, which can be effectively adapted for use by others in the IOHE network

In order to achieve these goals, IOHE and a group of eight Canadian partner institutions have raised a total of CAD $100,000 and will provide seed funding up to CAD $10,000 per project to its members and community partners to conduct 12–18 months collaborative projects that contribute to the fulfillment of the SDGs. Projects can focus on implementing one or more of the SDGs in a given region, or improving the capacity of the University to address the SDGs in curriculum, research, outreach and partnerships. Some examples of partenered initiatives that will be supported through this funding include:

- building new community-university research partnerships to co-create knowledge that address local and global problems in line with the UN SDGs (e.g., how to meet gender equality and women's empowerment through the implementation of gender budgeting and increasing women's participation in decision making –SDG 5–; how to address climate change in a particular region through education, knowledge and social innovation –SDG 13–; how to reduce hunger and achieve food security in a particular region by promoting sustainable agricultural practices –SDG 2–);

- creation of a framework for advancing the SDGs that aligns with the university's strategic plan;

- mapping what the HEI and its community partners are already doing toward the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda (e.g., community engagement activities, knowledge transfer and dissemination);

- synthesis/macro analysis of existing collaborative initiatives;

- integration of the SDGs within organizational strategies, policies, and plans of participant universities and community organizations;

- use of SDGs to guide curriculum and pedagogical practices/instructional strategies to build competencies for sustainable development; and

- monitoring, evaluating and communicating institutional actions to further the SDGs.

The successful applications will be tracked throughout the execution and completion of the projects with the goal of documenting valuable experiences and best potential practices learned from these joint initiatives. The outcomes will be shared and presented in the form of case studies and a data base of research findings.

Eligibility

- Eligible projects are those which address one or more SDGs or promote the inclusion of the SDGs in curriculum, course design, research, outreach and partnership development to promote the fulfillment of Agenda 2030.

- HEIs applicant must be a member of the Inter-American Organization for Higher Education

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- The research project must include at least one (1) international partner from another member country of the Americas. Such partners can potentially be another IOHE member and/or a community partner.

- Priority will be given to projects that engage local community partners (e.g., civil society organizations) in the definition and development of the project.

- The proposal will have a duration of up to 18 months.

- IOHE contribution to budget of each proposal is up to CAD $ 10,000

- Submission deadline: December 5, 2021 at 23h59 EST (UTC - 4 hrs).

Institutional Requirements

- Applications must be submitted by a member or team of HEIs members of the IOHE. Institutions can submit more than one application.

- Applications must be submitted electronically by an authorized research grants officer, or equivalent, from the IOHE member institution demonstrating support by the institution for the application.

- Applicant HEIs must be up to date with IOHE Members' Obligations as stated in Article 12 of its Declaration of Principles and Statutes.

- The Principal Investigator (PI) must be affiliated with the applicant HEI, which will provide a letter of institutional support for the project.

Size of award

- IOHE will provide funding for research proposals up to CAD $10,000 per project.

- Applicant institutions and their partners (HEIs, NGOs, CSOs, etc.) must secure together, over and above the budget requested from IOHE, a 35% minimum cash and/or in-kind contributions during the life of the grant (up to 12–18 months).

  - Exemple: IOHE contribution: CAD$ 10,000 and Cash/in kind contribution: CAD$ 3,500

- The lead PI will be responsible and accountable for the administration of funds received.

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Application process

This grant will have a two-stage adjudication process. Only applicants successful in Stage 1 will be invited to apply in Stage 2. No funds will be available after Stage 1.

Stage 1 – Letter of Intent

The Letter of Intent should be submitted using the online form below and include the following information:

- Application title – Provide a short title for the project.

- Type of partnership/initiative – Indicate whether this is a new or existing partnership/initiative. A new partnership is one that was developed for the purpose of submitting an application to this funding opportunity.

- Lead organization and partners – Enter complete information about the applicant institution that will manage the grants funds, including the PI in the organization, and contact persons in the partner organizations (HEIs and/or community organizations) who will take part in the proposal and the initiative, if funded.

- Principal Investigator (PI) – Provide complete information about the PI (i.e., a 200-word bio, institutional affiliation, and contact information).

- Partnership arrangements – Describe the partners involved and their role in the initiative.

- Areas of research – Indicate and rank up to three (3) areas of research related to the proposal (the first entry indicate the most relevant area of research, and the last entry the least relevant).

- Brief description of the project/initiative (max. 1000 to 1200 words) – Provide a summary of the project and partnership objectives, research questions, methods, expected outcomes, and should identify one or more SDGs to be addressed if the initiative is funded, and how they will be addressed.

- Budget outline – simple itemized summary of expected expenses related to the execution of the project.

The application package must be submitted to IOHE by completing this electronic form by December 5, 2021 at 23:59 hours, Eastern Daylight Time (UTC - 4 hrs):

https://forms.gle/GueetCXh6iEu4rAi8

Applications received after this deadline will not be accepted.

Stage 2 – Full Proposal

A selected number of applications successful in Stage 1 will be invited to apply in Stage 2. Applications in Stage 2 must contain the following information/documentation to allow informed evaluation of the quality and level of commitment of the proposed formal partnerships:

- Full description of the research project/collaborative initiative (maximum 2500 words). Describe the project's research and partnership objectives, research questions, methods, literature review, the SDG(s) to be addressed and how they will be addressed in the project.

- Expected outcomes and measures (e.g., localized targets and indicators, theory of change) to demonstrate contribution to the SDGs. (max. 500 words)

- Evidence of partnerships. Evidence can include, but is not limited to: governance frameworks, agreements (MOUs, intellectual property, conflict resolution, etc.), strategic plans, letters of participation and or support, and other relevant documentation from applicant institutions.

- Full CV of the Principal Investigator (PI).

- Institutional letter of support from the applicant HEI. Letter of support must be written in official letterhead and signed by appropriate officials. The letter should explain any plans for involvement by the applicant HEI in supporting the initiative, if funded; and cash and/or in-kind contributions from participating institutions.

- Budget and budget justification (maximum 1000 words) that includes the sources of all funds to be used in the project to achieve its objectives. All expenses must be justified in terms of the needs of the project, including costs for hiring research assistants and/or community liasons, conducting research and community consultations, organizing and integrating team activities, and communicating results to audiences, stakeholders and the public.

The application package must be submitted to IOHE [sdg@oui-iohe.org] by date and time to be defined after review of the letters of intent.

Evaluation and adjudication

The grant will be adjudicated according to quality of the project, potential for significant results, alignment with the nature of the call, and the appropriateness and justification of the requested budget, including additional funding already obtained or to be secured from partner organizations.

Aplication Timeline

The application process will take place in two stages:

1. Letter of Intent (Stage 1) should be submitted online by December 5 at 23:59 hours, Eastern Daylight Time (UTC - 4 hrs): https://forms.gle/GueetCXh6iEu4rAi8

2. Decisions will be communicated early in January, 2022.

3. Shortlisted applicants will then be invited to submit a full application (Stage 2) by February 25th, 2022.

4. Successful projects will be announced on March 25th, 2022.

5. Projects must launch in April 2022.

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