SECURITY & DEFENCE PLUS SEED GRANTS 2026: STAGE 1 GUIDELINES

About Security & Defence PLuS

The PLuS Alliance is a longstanding partnership combining the strengths of three leading research universities on three continents – Arizona State University (ASU), King's College London (KCL) and the University of New South Wales (UNSW) – to solve global challenges.

Security & Defence PLuS (S&D+) is the flagship program of the PLuS Alliance. S&D+ advances research, education, and statecraft in the spirit of AUKUS, an agreement announced in 2021 between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States to strengthen diplomatic, security, and defence cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region.

Objectives

Stage 1 Seed Grants are designed to initiate and structure high-potential research partnerships within the S&D+ Research and Partnerships stream, co-led between researchers from at least two of the three PLuS Alliance universities (ASU, KCL, and UNSW).

Seed grants aim to accelerate pathways to use, adoption, and investment of research through supporting:

- Partnership formation and trust-building
- Joint problem definition and co-design
- Early validation of relevance, feasibility, and transition pathways
- Preparation for larger-scale S&D+ Stage 2 or external funding opportunities

Expected Outcomes

Funded seed grants are expected to lead to the following outcomes:

- A functioning bi- or tri-lateral collaboration involving researchers from at least two PLuS institutions;
- Active engagement of at least one defence-relevant external partner (industry, government, or end-user organisation);
- At least one substantive in-person or hybrid meeting/workshop, enabling:
  - shared understanding of the problem space
  - clarification of partner needs and constraints
  - agreement on next-step opportunities
- A jointly articulated problem statement or opportunity definition, informed by partner input and a co-designed concept for a potential solution, research direction, or capability pathway (could be in the form of a White Paper – see below for details);
- Submission of a pitch to The Conversation or equivalent in each partner country that highlights the project, with reference to S&D+ seed funding.

White Paper

For the purposes of this seed grant round, white papers are defined as an overview document outlining how the research collaboration offers a solution to a security and defence need. The white paper is written with the goal of submitting to defence agencies and/or government officials to showcase expertise and influence decision-making. The requirements of white papers can vary depending on the specific agency it is submitted to, but typically follows a structured format including an introduction, background information, problem statement, analysis, proposed solutions or recommendations, and a conclusion.

Themes

The seed grants aim to fund collaborations aligned to security and defence. Funded areas are not limited to AUKUS stated priorities. Areas of interest for funding include, but are not limited to:

- Space
- Artificial Intelligence
- Cyber-Security
- Nuclear Propulsion and Safeguards
- Materials Science
- Hypersonics
- Undersea Robotics Autonomous Systems (AURAS)
- Decision Support Systems
- Critical Supply Chains
- Deterrence
- Ethics in International Systems
- Social licence for Defence & Security

- International Alliances and Security Cooperation
- Disinformation and Narrative Strategy
- Irregular Warfare
- Climate Security
- Human Security
- Mission Engineering
- Disruptive and Emerging Technologies
- Air Domain Awareness
- Underwater Awareness
- GPS-denied Environments
- Competitive State Craft
- Women, Peace and Security

Eligibility

- Projects must be co-led between a minimum of two PLuS institutions, (ASU, KCL, and UNSW). Applications co-led between all three PLuS institutions are preferred/will be prioritised;
- Project teams must include at least one external defence stakeholder partner;
- Co-leads must be salaried staff members at their PLuS institution (adjuncts are not eligible to be a co-lead);
- Co-leads must be citizens or permanent residents of their PLuS institution's country (due to restrictions in the Defence Trade Controls Amendment Bill 2023 and many defence funding opportunities);
- Investigators can be a co-lead on only ONE proposal; and
- Project co-leads must be reasonably available for S&D+ communications opportunities as needed (e.g. short video interview or feature content).

Selection Criteria

Criterion
Project details: security and defence need, partner engagement and co-design quality (50%)
• Extent to which the proposal articulates a clear, research-led problem or opportunity of relevance to security and defence, informed by real-world needs.
• Strength of the proposed collaboration, including evidence of meaningful engagement and co-design between researchers and defence-relevant partners.
Translation pathway, real-world feasibility and sustainability (35%)
• Clarity and credibility of the proposed pathway for advancing the research beyond Stage 1 project, including external funding and/or commercial endpoints.
• Ability to attract or align partner resources or funding to support ongoing collaboration beyond the life of the grant.
Team capability & complementarity (10%)
• Suitability, expertise, and complementarity of the project team across participating institutions and partners.
Budget appropriateness (5%)
• Extent to which the requested budget is appropriate, well-justified, and aligned with the proposed Stage 1 outcomes.

Funding

≤$US15,000 total for trilateral projects.
≤$US10,000 total for bilateral projects.

Eligible items for S&D+ funding:

- Return economy airfares;
- Reimbursement of living and hosting costs of visiting team members from each institution;
- Costs of workshops/meetings related to developing the white paper and other expected outcomes;
- Other reasonable project costs directly relating to delivery of the project.

Grant Duration

The grant duration is six months from the grant commencement date (see timeline below).

Timeline

Dates and times are in the Australian Eastern Standard Time (AEST) zone.

Date	Milestone
Monday 2 February 2026	Grant applications open
Monday 16 March 2026	Application deadline – 5 PM (AEST)
April 2026	Outcomes announced
Monday 4 May 2026	Grants commence
Monday 2 November 2026	Grants end and recipients report against expected outcomes. Final reports due within two weeks of the grant closing.

Application Review

Applications will be assessed by a cross-institutional panel with security and defence expertise.

Reporting

Successful recipients will be required to submit a **Final Report** within two weeks of the project end date detailing progress, outcomes and final financial expenditures against the original budget. A report template will be provided.

All funding must be fully expended within the awarded period. Any unspent funds will be returned.

S&D+ personnel will be available to provide advice on securing external funding for the next steps of your collaboration if required.

Submission

Project teams are required to work together to prepare and submit a single application. The application form and attachments must be submitted as a single PDF and named using the co-lead's surnames i.e. Surname1_Surname2_Surname3_S&D+ Seed Grant 2026.pdf.

Submit applications to securitydefence@plusalliance.org

Queries and Further Information

Please email:
- General inquiries/info on S&D+: securitydefence@plusalliance.org
- UNSW: Alison Butt and Lily Halliday (international.RSO@unsw.edu.au)
- ASU: Thorin Wright (thorin.wright@asu.edu) and Roslynn Runia (roslynn.runia@asu.edu)
- KCL: Alessio Patalano (patalano@ws.kcl.ac.uk)

SECURITY & DEFENCE PLUS SEED GRANTS 2026: STAGE 1 APPLICATION FORM

Please complete the application form in consultation with the Security & Defence PLuS (S&D+) Seed Grants 2026 - Stage 1 Guidelines.

Project Title:

Project Team Co-Leads:

Grant must be co-led between a minimum of two PLuS Alliance partner institutions.

Co-Lead	ASU	KCL	UNSW
Title *e.g. Dr, Prof*			
First Name			
Last Name			
Email			
Faculty			
Department			

We confirm that co-leads are:

☐ salaried staff members at their PLuS institutions;

☐ citizens or permanent residents of their PLuS institution's country.

Other named team members including external partners:

Name *(last name, first name)*	Institution	Faculty/Department/expertise

Add more rows as required

In-person meetings:

Add the location of where the proposed in-person meeting(s) between co-leads will take place and list the names of participants involved. All co-leads are expected to participate in the in-person meeting(s).

Meeting Location	Proposed dates	Participants Involved

Proposal

Before commencing this section, consult the **Selection Criteria** and ensure your proposal fully addresses each area.

1. **Project details: security and defence need, partner engagement and co-design quality (50%)**
Two pages maximum.

2. **Translation, feasibility and sustainability (35%).**
One page maximum.

3. **Team capability & complementarity (10%)**
One page maximum.

For each co-lead, please include a short CV (two pages maximum) that includes:

- Career summary and expertise relevant to the proposed project and to security & defence;
- Publication summary and top 10 publications within the last 10 years;
- Grants awarded in the last three years.

4. **Budget (5%)**
Provide a summary of your requested budget using the table below. Please adhere to the maximum budget of $US15K for trilateral projects or $US10K for bilateral projects.

Description	Application budget ($US)		
	ASU	KCL	UNSW
Economy Class Airfares			
Living expenses			
Workshop/Meeting Costs			
Other			
TOTALS			
GRAND TOTAL			

Budget Justification
Half page maximum

Provide a clear breakdown and justification for each budget line item included in the seed funding request. Outline any additional funds you will use to support this project stating the amount and source of funds and what the funds will be used for. Matched funding/resourcing from government and defence stakeholder partners will be viewed favourably.

Signature Page

Each co-lead must sign the below, and arrange Head of Department/School signature prior to application submission.

I certify that:

- For co-Leads: All information provided in this application is true and complete. All parties identified in the proposal have agreed to its submission.
- For Heads of Department/School:
    - o   I confirm the co-lead for my institution is a salaried staff member; and
    - o   I approve submission of this application.

	Co-Lead	Head of Department/School
ASU	Signature: Name: Date:	Signature: Name: Date:
KCL	Signature: Name: Date:	Signature: Name: Date:
UNSW	Signature: Name: Date:	Signature: Name: Date: