

## Report on the allocation of bursary donations for PCST 2025

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**Objective:** To distribute donations for bursaries to attend the PCST 2025 Conference fairly and equitably to those deemed to be in the greatest need of financial support.

**Outcome:** 34 people have been supported to attend the PCST 2025 Conference, representing the following geographical regions: Africa/Americas (12); Asia, Australasia, World (10); Europe (12) (Figure 1). Of these, 8 applicants were supported specifically by donations from the Kavli Foundation and the Wellcome Trust, representing delegates in particular need of financial support travelling from Low to Middle Income Countries.



**Figure 1:** PCST 2025 Bursary Awardees, represented by region and Low- and Middle-Income Countries.

### Background

The International Public Communication of Science and Technology (PCST) Network “seeks to promote new ideas, methods, intellectual and practical questions, and perspectives on the communication of science and technology”.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> About the PCST Network, <https://www.pcst.network/about/overview>.

One of the key activities for achieving this vision is the bi-annual PCST Conference. In 2025 the PCST Conference will be held in the UK (Aberdeen, Scotland) for the first time.

The Local Organising Committee for the Aberdeen conference are grateful for donations from the Kavli Foundation, The Wellcome Trust and contributions from the PCST Community from the 2023 conference hosted in Rotterdam and through the 'pay it forward' scheme to support these bursaries.<sup>2</sup> The total amount available to support bursary applicants was in the region of £50,000.

### Application Submission

We anticipated there would be more demand for bursaries than we could accommodate, therefore the Local Organising Committee put in place measures to assess the applications. This process is outline below with a view to offering transparency to PCST members, but also to share learning from this process with future conference organisers.

Bursary applications were proposed as part of the process for submitting abstracts to present work at the conference. Abstracts to the conference were peer reviewed. Bursary applicants were advised that only those with an accepted abstract would be eligible for a bursary. There were no other restrictions on applying for a bursary. Recipients of bursaries for previous PCST Conferences could apply, as could members of the PCST Scientific Committee.

Prospective applicants were asked to only apply for a bursary if they did not have funding to attend the conference, e.g., if they were working as a freelancer or for an organisation with no funding to attend conferences.

Applicants were advised that eligible bursary applications would be reviewed by a committee, that they would be allocated across the three PCST geographical regions,<sup>3</sup> and that if we had more eligible applications than could be supported that we would make allocations using a lottery system. The random allocation of eligible applications was adopted because this was deemed to be the fairest way of distributing the bursary donations once the threshold of eligibility had been

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<sup>2</sup> The Kavli Foundation, <https://www.kavlifoundation.org>; The Wellcome Trust, <https://wellcome.org>; PCST 2023, <https://www.pcst.network/conferences/past-conferences/pcst-2023>; PCST 2025 Conference 'Pay it forward', <https://www.store.abdn.ac.uk/conferences-and-events/conferences-symposia-seminars/research-innovation-cpd/pcst-2025-pay-it-forward>.

<sup>3</sup> Africa/Americas; Asia, Australasia, and the rest of the World; and Europe.

met. Applicants were also advised that the decision of the bursary assessment panel would be final with no route to appeal decisions.

### Application questions

Applicants were asked to respond to the following questions in their bursary application:

1. Benefit to you: Please provide a statement of no more than 300 words outlining your interest in the PCST network and the benefits to you of attending the PCST 2025 Conference.
2. What barriers are affecting you being able to attend this conference? This should be no more than 300 words in length.
3. What assistance do you need to attend the conference? Please estimate your costs in the following categories: travel (including visa costs); subsistence, conference fee, accommodation, other.
4. If applicable, what other funding do you have to support your attendance? This might be you're your organisation, yourself, or other sources.

The responses to Questions 1 and 2 were provided to the assessors for the assessment process.

The responses to Questions 3 and 4 were not provided to the assessors. These answers were retained by the organising team and used to allocate donations during the random selection process.

### Application Review

In total, 122 applications for a bursary were submitted. Of these, 79 were deemed to qualify for further assessment by virtue of the applicant having an accepted contribution at the conference.

Qualifying applications (n=79) were allocated, in the order in which they were submitted to the PCST site, to four groups. In effect, this was a random allocation.

Two reviewers were randomly assigned per group. Each assessor reviewed between 25–30 applications, using the rubric listed in Table 1. (The Chair of the Bursary Panel reviewed all 79 qualifying applications.) This equates to eight reviewers in total, all members of PCST, representing the three geographical

regions as defined in the constitution: Asia, Australasia and the rest of the World; Africa and the Americas; and Europe.<sup>4</sup>

**Table 1:** The assessment rubric.

Barriers to attending	Evidence Clear=2; Partial=1; Unclear=0	Notes
Working in science communication in a low-economic <a href="#">country</a>		
Self-employed or running a small science communication company		
Is the applicant an early career science communicator (up to five years in the field)?		
Is the applicant a student, i.e., registered for a recognised qualification related to science communication?		
Applicant with caring or parental responsibilities		
Applicant with disabilities and/or other forms of ongoing ill-health		
Does the applicant identify as a member of a minoritized group?		
Other (to be defined)		

### From qualifying to eligible applications

79 applications were deemed to qualify for further assessment by virtue of the applicant having an accepted contribution at the conference, of which: 29 were from Africa/Americas; 28 from Asia, Australasia and the rest of the World, and 22 from Europe.

Applicants from a low or middle income country were deemed to be eligible for a bursary. This involved 53 applicants, of which 28 were assessed as being in the greatest need of financial support.

Applicants scoring two points against any of the other criteria (Table 1), but not coming from a low or middle income country were deemed to be eligible for a bursary. This involved 26 applicants.

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<sup>4</sup> The Local Organising Committee wishes to express their thanks to these reviewers.

Applicants scoring four or more points against any of the other criteria (Table 1) were deemed to be in particular need of a bursary. This involved 34 applicants.

### Random selection

Eligible applications were drawn at random by the Chair of the Bursary Panel from four pots (Figure 2). Members of the Local Organising Committee, Program Committee and the assessors were invited to witness this draw, held as a virtual meeting.



**Figure 2:** The selection process; applicants were drawn at random from four pots. 'Exemplary' applications, those deemed to be in the greatest need were drawn first.

The first draw was for LMIC/particular need applications (Pot 1, n=28), drawing on donations from the Kavli Foundation and the Wellcome Trust. Drawn applications were cross-referenced against the applicant's request for financial support until these donations were exhausted.

Eight awards were made to applicants from the following geographical regions: Africa/Americas (5); Asia, Australasia, World (2); Europe (1). Two reserve applicants were identified. Two of the reserve applicants received support after two of the initial awardees withdrew.

The next draw involved applications in particular need held in three pots representing the PCST regions (Pot 2, n=16; Pot 3, n=14; Pot 4, n=4; Total, n=34). Applicants were drawn from each pot in turn, cross-referenced against successful applications drawn from Pot 1 and the applicant's request for financial support, until these donations were exhausted. Roughly equal amounts of money were allocated to each pot.

26 bursary awards were made to applicants from: Africa/Americas (8); Asia, Australasia, World (7); Europe (11)<sup>5</sup>. Seven reserve applicants were identified. A reserve applicant received support after one of the initial awardees withdrew.

<sup>5</sup> The number of awardees per region is different because of the support requested by individual applicants. The 2025 conference is being held in Europe. The number of successful awardees is higher this region because travel costs are lower. If this scheme is adopted for future PCST conferences, the number of successful awardees should increase for the region where the conference is being hosted (relative to other regions).