



Circle U.
European University Alliance

Sandpits 2026

Call for applications

Version 1

15 January 2026



Co-funded by
the European Union

circle-u.eu

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

THE CIRCLE U. SANDPITS 2026

Sandpits are a fantastic opportunity for Circle U. researchers who are experts in their field, to develop research projects and scientific thinking through collaboration with peers from other disciplines. In 2026, Sandpits will focus on developing inter- and transdisciplinary projects with Sustainability as an overarching theme.

UCLouvain is delighted to host this scientific workshop, which focuses on **interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research**. This event is an opportunity to bring together researchers from the partner universities of the **Circle U. University Alliance**. The activity is divided into **two sessions**:

- 1 The first session will be held face-to-face in Louvain-la-Neuve (Belgium) from 27 to 29 May 2026.**
- 2 The second session will take place online on 30 June 2026.**

Experienced researchers from Circle U. partner universities are welcome to attend:

University in Oslo (Norway), Aarhus University (Denmark), King's College London (UK), UCLouvain (Belgium), Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (Germany), Université Paris Cité (France), University of Vienna (Austria), Università di Pisa (Italy) and University of Belgrade (Serbia).

SANDPITS DESCRIPTION

Sandpits give experts from different fields a space dedicated to the development of innovative ideas and inter- and transdisciplinary research projects. The primary aim of this format is to encourage creativity and collaborative thinking with the goal to **establishing collaborative interdisciplinary research projects**. It also provides an excellent opportunity to develop the participant's research skills through interdisciplinary collaboration and expand one's academic and professional networks.

The event brings together researchers from diverse backgrounds to explore key issues. The profiles and backgrounds of the participants are very varied. Participants range from **senior researchers and post-doctoral fellows to doctoral candidates**. In addition to academic profiles, **external stakeholders**¹ with a significant experience in **inter- and transdisciplinary research** are also included. We expect the event to bring together between **20 and 25 participants**.

Sandpits are led by an external **facilitator**. The facilitator uses tools and activities to stimulate collaboration and project development. To be able to **encourage discussion and collaboration** and to develop projects in a context that brings together people with different cultures, fields of research and experience, a person **specialised in Sandpit facilitation is essential** to the organisation. Based on their experience of the 2025 edition, **Martin Nera and Oxana Rogozina, from Mind & Market**² will oversee facilitation. The company has a wealth of experience in **project development in the academic sector**.

The aim of the **first in-person session from 27 to 29 May 2026** is to **build interdisciplinary research projects**. Researchers identify areas of overlap between each researcher's fields and define interdisciplinary topics. During these three days, participants take part in **various workshops with experts** to develop and

¹ The list of invited external stakeholders is not yet available. These guests are experts selected based on the support they can provide to participating researchers in developing their projects. We therefore invite Circle U. Academic Chairs, UCLouvain technology platforms and key actors working in NGOs or companies in sustainability areas.

² <https://www.mindandmarket.com/en/>

strengthen their projects. At the end of the session, the researchers produce a **preliminary draft** of their research project.

The **second online session**, which takes place on 30 June, is **devoted to project pitching**. Participating researchers present their interdisciplinary research projects to an audience of experts who provided support during the first session. These **experts give feedback on the projects**, enabling researchers to rework them over the summer.

After this second session, participants have the opportunity **to apply for Circle U. Seed Funding**. Participants will also receive administrative support by the **Research Support Task Force** to identify and apply for other potential funding opportunities.

THEMATIC FOCUS

For the 2026 edition, the central theme will be **sustainability**. This choice reflects the growing urgency of addressing environmental, social, and economic challenges that affect all aspects of life in Europe and beyond. Sustainability is not only a scientific priority; it is a societal imperative. European societies are facing unprecedented transformations driven by climate change, resource scarcity, and the need for equitable development. These issues **demand innovative solutions that transcend disciplinary boundaries**.

By focusing on sustainability, **Sandpits aim to foster collaborations that combine diverse expertise**—from natural sciences and engineering to social sciences, humanities, and health research. This theme encourages participants to explore how their research can contribute to building resilient communities, reducing environmental impact, and promoting inclusive growth. It also aligns the **strategic objectives of the Circle U. Alliance**, which seeks to advance research and education for healthier, fairer, and more sustainable societies.

Choosing a common theme provides a **shared starting point for discussions**, enabling participants to quickly identify intersections between their fields and co-create impactful projects. Sustainability offers a broad yet meaningful framework that invites creativity and ensures that the outcomes of these collaborations address real-world challenges with global relevance.

ELIGIBILITY AND CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

Applications for Sandpits are open to researchers **who are employed/enrolled in universities of the Circle U. Alliance** and have a demonstrated **interest in inter- and transdisciplinary** research. We therefore expect the selected participants to have a certain amount of experience. The event is aimed at **senior researchers, post-doctoral fellows and doctoral candidates** at the end of their thesis. As a strong representation of senior researchers is needed to develop projects, a **selection will be made** with the aim of achieving balance between researchers at different stages of their careers.

To provide participants with optimal conditions (networking, immersion) for reflection and to encourage them to connect with each other, **the first in-person session is residential**. This means that participants stay at the seminar venue³. **UCLouvain takes care of the bookings**. The terms and conditions for financing the stay are defined by the researcher's sending university.

Participation is subject to certain funding conditions : **participants can access funding through the Erasmus+ program** or other available resources. To find out exactly what these conditions are, **each applicant is invited to contact his/her mobility officer in his/her home university**:

³ Ibis Style hotel – Louvain-la-Neuve: <https://all.accor.com/hotel/2200/index.en.shtml>

UNIVERSITY	MOBILITY OFFICER	MOBILITY CONTACT	LINK ON THE WEBSITE
University in Oslo	UIO Erasmus+	<a href="mailto:erasmus-
uio@admin.uio.no">erasmus- uio@admin.uio.no	
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berlin.de">jennifer.dornbrach@hu- berlin.de	
Université Paris Cité	Circle U. team	circleu.iro@u-paris.fr	https://u-paris.fr/aides-a-la-mobilite-internationale/
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University of Belgrade	Nikola Savic	nikola.savic@rect.bg.ac.rs	

Comments:

- *Please note that **attendance from King's students and staff to the in-person component is self-funded**, including associated participation, travel and accommodation costs. For any questions contact, the Circle U. team at KCL.
- Before applying, we recommend **confirming with your mobility officer** to ensure a smooth funding process.
- In some cases, **Erasmus+ funding is not awarded automatically**, advanced payment covering costs for your travel and stay may be required. Reimbursement will be made afterwards upon presentation of proof of payment.
- **UCLouvain participants don't have to contact the mobility officer** for travel issues because they already are on the campus. However, they stay at the seminar venue like the other participants. Their participation is covered by UCLouvain.
- UCLouvain will cover the cost of meals **for the duration of the workshop**.

APPLICATION PROCEDURE

For the application to be eligible, it must include:

- **CV**
- **Cover letter (highlighting the interest for inter- and transdisciplinary research)**
- **Signed letter of commitment stating that the candidate undertakes to participate in both sessions (face-to-face and online)**
- **You may add any documents describing your experience or an interdisciplinary research project in which you have participated**

Participants will be selected by a Selection Committee made up of members from each of the Circle U. universities including both administrative and academic staff. The Selection Committee also includes the facilitator. Selection criteria will include motivation, scientific experience and interest in inter- and transdisciplinary research.

DATE	EVENT
15 January 2026	Call for applications publication
15 March 2026	Closing of the applications
30 March 2026	Announcement of the results
27-28-29 May 2026	Sandpits – Session 1 (face-to-face in Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium)
30 June	Sandpis – Session 2 (online)

- For any further information, please contact Apolline Moncheaux (UCLouvain):
apolline.moncheaux@uclouvain.be.