

Turning Global Ideas into Action at UH

The University of Houston's Global Faculty Development Fund (GFDF) helps faculty move promising global ideas into meaningful action. The fund supports innovative global initiatives that can strengthen UH's internationalization efforts and generate impact beyond the activity itself. For faculty, that may mean using an internal award to support a specific initiative while also building longer-term momentum for teaching, research, partnership development, and broader global engagement at UH.

For Dr. Saleha Khumawala, Musa and Khaleda Dakri Endowed Chair in Economic Inclusion at the C. T. Bauer College of Business, the GFDF helped create the space to deepen international engagement around the SURESM - Stimulating Urban Renewal through Entrepreneurship program she developed. SURE is an innovative experiential learning model that creates a unique ecosystem by partnering UH students with local entrepreneurs, and executive business leaders to foster human-centric skills and economic mobility. As she puts it, the award helped "move conversations forward with partner institutions."



Asked what advice she would give faculty who are still developing a global idea, Dr. Khumawala begins with relationships. "The first thing that I would suggest," she says, "is that basically network in your academic discipline and build that strong network." She explains that conferences and disciplinary communities helped her build relationships

with other faculty in her field, and that those relationships later opened doors for international collaboration. “Network and collaboration is the key,” she says. At UH, faculty can also work with the Institute for Global Engagement to identify existing institutional partnerships and explore where there may already be a foundation for connection and collaboration.

At the same time, she is clear that networking alone is not enough. “People want to see proof,” she says. “Have you done it? If it’s a research idea, not just an idea, do you have a draft of a paper? Have you presented that at conferences?” Her point is that faculty should be able to show a clear direction, a defined purpose, and evidence that an idea is developed enough to build from. Strong GFDF proposals do more than support a single trip or activity; they show how the work will continue to benefit UH afterward through program development, stronger partnerships, new mobility or research opportunities, or multiplier activities such as sharing takeaways in departments, colleges, or workshops.

Dr. Khumawala also emphasizes the value of existing institutional connections. Reflecting on her Jordan visit, she says that prior agreements made it much easier to move from interest to implementation: “Because we already have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), it is very easy to move forward. The next thing is just implement it.” For faculty considering a GFDF proposal, her example is a reminder that the fund can be especially effective when paired with existing UH relationships, a clearly defined purpose, and a plan for what comes next.



She also encourages faculty not to wait until a project feels finished before seeking feedback. “You have a research idea, make it more concrete,” she says. “Present it even if it’s rough.” Workshops, conferences, and conversations with colleagues can help refine an idea, attract collaborators, and build momentum.

Dr. Khumawala’s example is only one way the GFDF can be used. The fund can also support initiatives such as developing a new faculty-led learning abroad experience, designing a Virtual Exchange or COIL collaboration, strengthening an existing international partnership in student mobility or research exchange, hosting an internationally renowned guest speaker, or advancing other global activities that meaningfully contribute to UH’s globalization efforts. For some faculty, progress made through a GFDF-supported initiative may also help lay the groundwork for larger future opportunities, including awards such as the Fulbright U.S. Scholar Program.

For faculty considering how to move a global idea forward, the GFDF offers a practical opportunity to do so in ways that are strategic, sustained, and beneficial to UH. Faculty interested in exploring a proposal are encouraged to connect with the Institute for Global Engagement to discuss how their idea may align with existing partnerships, broader UH internationalization goals, and meaningful post-initiative impact.

