Towards a National Collection: Opening UK Heritage to the World Discovery Projects Call FAQ

These FAQs should be read in addition to the Call Document which can also be found at https://www.nationalcollection.org.uk/funding-calls.

Version Control

The changes made to this call document are recorded here. Please ensure you have the latest version of the Call Guidance.

Version	Date	Changes
2	26.8.2020	Added questions following the Introductory and Support webinars in August 2020 Changed answer to "Would a project focusing on a small or niche collection be eligible under this call?" (p.4)
3	24.02.2021	Revised to include guidance for Full Stage proposals. Added questions and answers from Workshop for shortlisted candidates on 17th February 2021.

Contents

Further amendments to the Discovery Projects Call

You can also read these in the context of the [amended Call document](#).

Introduction

Following a budget review, partly in response to the addition of the Urgency Call, the total funding envelope for the Discovery Projects has been reduced from £15m to £14.5m. The indicative limit for each project has been reduced to £2.9m (where £2.9m is 80% fEC). The aim to fund up to five projects remains unchanged.

Funding

As described above, the total funding envelope has been reduced from £15m to £14.5m. The indicative limit for each project has been reduced to £2.9m (where £2.9m is 80% fEC).

Application Process and Format & Annex A – Attachment Guidance

The maximum page limit for the Case for Support has been revised and is now 7 sides of A4.

The Data Management Plan has been replaced with the Technical and Data Management Plan, with a maximum page limit of 4 sides of A4.

Unnamed Co-Investigators

The *Towards a National Collection* Steering Committee had allowed, at the outline stage, for applicants who face difficulties in identifying all of their Co-Investigators the naming only of an IRO/RI/HEI who will provide a Co-Investigator. This option can no longer be exercised, and all Co-Investigators must be named at full proposal stage.

Research Institutes

Research Institutes are now eligible to lead proposals and are required to partner with a minimum of either one HEI or one IRO.

Theme and content of call

Would creative work/practices on existing collections – e.g. animating collections – fall within the scope of the call?

Yes, creative and innovative approaches to working with collections are strongly encouraged as part of the call. All projects would need to deliver impact in each of the three key impact areas outlined in the call document – dissolving barriers between collections; enhancing research capability; and public engagement. If creative or innovative work with collections helped to deliver impact in these areas, it would be eligible under the call.

Is there scope for Public Engagement and Research-Driven, Practice-led Public Outputs?
Yes, the call is open to such outputs. However, any resources allocated for such outputs should be proportional to those allocated to developing new ways to join together digital collections.

Would the digitisation of collections as a public engagement activity fall within the scope of the call – i.e. providing communities with the tools, support, education to develop their own digitisation techniques?

Yes, such activities could fall within the scope of the call as a public engagement activity and would be eligible providing the proposed project also met the requirements of the call to deliver impact in dissolving barriers between collections and enhancing research capability.

How much digitisation/documentation of existing collections can be included as a part of a proposal?
A small proportion of a project's budget can be allocated to digitisation of collections provided that work is critical for achieving the aims and objectives of the project as a whole and this can be justified within the scope of the call document.

Can work with creative practitioners be included?
Yes. Provided the work is within the scope of the call and all costs are fully justified in the final proposal.

Is developing new tools, technologies and research methodologies as part of the project eligible?

Yes, this could include the development of new tools and technologies as well as improving existing ones. This programme aims at dissolving barriers between collections including addressing technological and methodological issues that stand in the way of an integrated virtual 'national collection'.

Relationship to Foundation Projects

Will there be an expectation that the Discovery Projects build directly on the work done by the Foundation Projects?

A direct link between Foundation Projects and Discovery Projects is not expected in all proposals but applicants should consider the areas under investigation in the Foundation Projects and seek to benefit from that early work, where relevant and useful to their project. Interim Reports of the Foundation Projects are available https://www.nationalcollection.org.uk/Interim

What is the relationship between the Foundation projects and the Discovery projects?

It is not a requirement that Discovery Project proposals build on the work of one or more of the Foundation Projects. However, the teams leading the Foundation Projects can be contacted where an applicant sees potential relevance between what they are proposing and the research already underway. Contact details are available in the Interim Reports. https://www.nationalcollection.org.uk/Interim.

Partnerships

Can a proposal include funding for coordinating research activity with international partners?
Yes, such costs can be included provided they are fully justified. International Co-Is (and their costs) can also be included as per standard AHRC eligibility rules. However, projects should be primarily focused on UK-based rather than international collections.

Which organisations are eligible to be 'Collaborating Organisations'?

Any organisation can be a 'Collaborating Organisation', provided they are not eligible to directly receive AHRC funding. Those that are eligible to apply for AHRC funding cannot be 'Collaborating Organisations' and should instead be included as Co-Is or 'Project Partners'. This includes university museums, galleries, libraries and archives working with a Higher Education Institution that they are not formally affiliated with.

What is the difference between a 'Project Partner' and a 'Collaborating Organisation'?

A Project Partner is an organisation that is making a significant and specific contribution (either in cash or in kind) to the project, for example, expertise, staff time, use of facilities etc. A small proportion of their costs can be included in the proposal (please see p.8 of the call guidance document for further details). A 'Collaborating Organisation' is an organisation where all or a substantial amount of their involvement is being charged to the project.

IROs can apply to be a 'Project Partner' but are not eligible as a 'Collaborating Organisation'.

Is it possible for project partners to be based outside of the UK? Would it be possible to have a Collaborating Organisation or a software provider which is based outside the UK?

Yes, both international project partners and collaborating organisations are eligible, but this needs to be justified within your proposal, as international partners/collaborating organisations should be involved in the projects with the goal of assisting the realisation of the full, combined potential of UK collections.

Is there a threshold for the amount of costs that could be included in the grant before a 'Project Partner' becomes a 'Collaborating Organisation'?

There is no set amount or proportion of costs that can be covered by a grant before a 'Project Partner' is instead classed as a 'Collaborating Organisation'. As individual proposals and grants can vary significantly there are no set guidelines. If you are unsure about which category a partner should be included in, please get in touch with us at national.collection@ahrc.ukri.org and we can advise accordingly.

What is the advice around multi-HEI partnerships? Are applicants encouraged to seek partnership with other HEIs?

Multi-HEI partnerships are not a requirement, however, they are welcome where they bring together the required knowledge and experience, particularly where that contributes to the diversity of the individuals and institutions involved in projects.

What costs can be charged by the 'Collaborating Organisation'?

Collaborating organisations can charge any directly incurred costs, i.e. staff time and any other costs/resources directly attributable to a project e.g. cost of running workshop. They are not eligible for overheads.

The AHRC does not fund costs that are reasonably expected to be covered by an established organisation (such as estate costs, basic IT, equipment, printing costs, etc.). Under the scope of the call, Co-Is from collaborating organisations cannot be included, therefore we encourage applicants to provide additional context in the Case for Support and Justification of Resources on what the contribution of the collaborating organisation is and who will be working on the project.

Is there a limit to the proportion of any grant that can be spent on Collaborating Organisations?

No. The proposal must be led by an organisation that is eligible to directly receive AHRC funding, but there is no limit to the proportion of costs that can be allocated either to other research organisations on the bid, or any 'Collaborating Organisation'. It is the responsibility of individual applications to justify the proposed structure of their research.

Is there a limit on the number of Co-Is/Collaborating Organisations/Project Partners that can be involved on any single proposal?

No. All costs must be fully justified but there is no limit on the number of partners or organisations that can be involved in any one project.

Can we include industry (commercial) partners who have pertinent expertise?

Yes, these can be included, as long as they either meet the criteria for project partners in making an in kind or cash contribution or are included as Collaborating Organisations.

I am a researcher on a fixed-term/rolling contract at a HEI/IRO – am I eligible to be an investigator on one of the Discovery Projects?

Yes, as per standard AHRC rules you would be eligible to apply as a PI or a Co-I providing you had a formal agreement with your institution that if the proposal was successful in securing funding then you would be treated as an employee for the duration of the grant. Please see the AHRC Research Funding Guide for further details on contractual eligibility for investigators.

Would international Libraries, Museums, Galleries and Archives that are linked to a university but operate independently be eligible as Co-Investigators?

Yes, in theory. If they are a recognised research organisation, then they should be eligible to provide Co-Investigators. They can also participate in the role of Project Partners or Collaborating Organisations. Please get in touch with AHRC at national.collection@ahrc.ukri.org if you are unsure about the status of a particular institution.

Eligibility

Can museums that are also attached to universities apply for IRO status in their own right, or are they considered HEIs?

They are formally linked to HEIs and therefore are already eligible to receiving funding from the AHRC. They are not, therefore, eligible to be IROs. University museums may also participate as project partners provided that they are working with a Research Organisation other than or in addition to the Research Organisation with which they are formally linked.

Why do IROs not qualify to be Collaborating Organisations?

IROs are directly eligible to receive UKRI funding, by providing the PI or Co-Is. That is the only route for them to receive UKRI funding.

Can HEI-based researchers outside AHRC/cultural heritage research areas be listed PIs or Co-Is?

Yes, they can – as long as their involvement and suitability for the role is justified in the application.

Do PIs and Co-Is need to have doctoral qualifications?

No, but they must qualify to be a PI or a Co-I i.e. they must be actively engaged in research, have a track record of research activity relevant to the project and be of postdoctoral standing – i.e. be able to demonstrate that you have equivalent research experience/training. Please refer to the Eligibility section of the AHRC Funding Guide https://ahrc.ukri.org/documents/guides/research-funding-guide1/.

Costs

The full stage requires applicants to indicate the financial/in-kind contribution of partner organisations. How is this figure going to be used in the assessment process (i.e. is it going to be seen as a 'competitive advantage')?

Financial and in-kind contributions will be assessed as part of the value for money of the project. However, they are not a key element of the assessment process and should only be included when relevant.

What balance would you expect between academic and collaborating organisations in terms of costs/amounts of funding?
All costs need to be fully justified but the balance of where those costs are allocated is dependent on what is appropriate for that particular project, there are no set limits.

What proportion of costs would you expect to be allocated to technology vis a vis researcher time?
All costs need to be fully justified but the balance of where those costs are allocated is dependent on what is appropriate for that particular project, there are no set limits.

If your indicative budget is already at the limit, can you still extend it by 10%, as per AHRC guidance that completed application budgets can be +/-10% of the originally proposed amount?

The AHRC has revised the funding limit for each project to £2.9m (where £2.9m represents 80% fEC) and cannot fund anything in excess of this.. Some projects may need to reduce their project costs from those submitted at outline stage to remain under this limit.

Can Collaborating Organisations have their costs funded at 100%? We believe this has been done in the past for AHRC projects with significant GLAM/industry involvement.

We are only able to fund Collaborating Organisations' costs at 80% Full Economic Cost (fEC).

Applications must be costed on a Full Economic Cost (fEC) basis which seeks to make transparent the full costs of undertaking the research project. The Government has agreed that for most headings the Research Councils will pay for 80% of the full economic costs. The remaining 20% is expected to be provided by the Research Organisation. For HEIs this would normally be seen as being part of the dual support system for research with the 20% met through other public funding for research received through the Higher Education Funding Councils. The applicant Research Organisation will therefore need to be willing to meet 20% of any Collaborating Organisation costs charged to the grant.

In the context of Towards a National Collection, IROs and organisations not directly eligible for research council funding should also be aware that there are rules around the funding of research projects by Research Councils which the Research Organisations have to adhere to. There needs to be a clear and open discussion about how a Collaborating Organisation's role and therefore contribution will be costed into a proposal, and Collaborating Organisations should be aware that there will be limitations on what is possible within the rules around funding of research projects. At the end of any project, the research organisation must be able to provide invoices / records / a full account for all costs that have been incurred that they wish to charge to the grant, should these be requested.

Project Staff

Can Research Assistants (RAs) be embedded within collections?

Any Research Assistants would need to be employed by an eligible institution as per AHRC funding rules, but their work could take place at a different institution or collection if this was the best option for delivering the project

You can find more guidance on this under the Eligibility section in the AHRC Research Funding Guide https://ahrc.ukri.org/documents/guides/research-funding-guide1/

Will research positions be created through these projects, such as postdoctoral positions? Will new jobs that are created through the programme be advertised on the *Towards a National Collection* website?

Yes, we expect that most or all projects will result in postdoctoral positions. The Towards a National Collection communications co-ordinator will help to promote project-related recruitment.

Can proposals include studentships or placements?

The costs of studentships or placements are not eligible.

How large are you expecting project teams to be?

Due to the size and scale of the projects, it is unlikely that a team consisting of a PI and a single Co-I would be able to deliver them effectively. We would expect to see a team consisting of a number of people, with a range of different expertise, and with varying levels of involvement in the project.

Do we need to justify any changes to the project team in the completed application?

Yes, new Project Partners, Collaborating Organisations and Co-Investigators can be added to the project team for the full-stage applications. Please note, however, that costs should not vary more than +/- 10% from those indicated in your outline stage budget, as well as remain within the revised ceiling of £2.9m. All changes to the project team must be explained and justified. The supplementary guidance issued to shortlisted candidates contains examples for discussing particular issues.

Submitting an application

Do letters of support need to be refreshed for the full stage of the application?

Yes.. As per AHRC guidance, you need to make sure that the submitted letters of support aren't older than 6 months from the date of submission

https://ahrc.ukri.org/funding/research/researchfundingguide/. In any event, you are required to submit refreshed letters of support at full proposal stage.

What is required in the 'Case for Support' document for full stage applications?

The requirements for the Case-for-Support document at outline stage are set out in 'Annex A – Attachment Guidance' in the call document. The Case-for-Support document for the full-stage application will use the same headings, but we would expect the proposal to have been further developed by the submission of the full-stage application, and the Case-for-Support to have been significantly re-written in order to reflect the further developed complexity of the project. Please note the maximum length of the Case for Support for the full stage has been increased to 7 pages.

What are the requirements for letters of support?

Letters of support must be submitted by all collaborating organisations and/or project partners at the full stage of the call.

Please request that project partners and collaborating organisations keep letters of support to a single side. We understand that this can be a challenge for the project team to manage, and we are able to offer some leniency; however, letters of support which are substantially in excess of a single side risk being returned for amendment. Please note that, in this instance, the guidance in the Discovery Projects Call Document supersedes that in the AHRC Funding Guide.

Is the Technical and Data Management Plan unique to this project, or is it a standard AHRC document?

It is based on the standard AHRC Data Management Plan, but has been customised uniquely for the Discovery Projects call. Sections 6 to 8 of the Discovery Projects Technical and Data Management Plan are not in the standard version of the AHRC Data Management Plan.

If aspects of a project's technical programme do not fit well in any of the subsections of the Technical and Data Management plan, where should those elements be addressed in the application?

The summary section of the TDMP would potentially be a good place to include aspects that do not seem to fit well in any of the subsections. However, it is worth raising queries like this on an individual basis with the TaNC programme team; please contact Carlotta Paltrinieri to discuss. Carlotta.paltrinieri@hes.scot

Will the one-to-one advice that the Programme team provides on completing the Technical and Data Management Plan be shared with all applicants?

If issues arise in individual sessions with the TaNC programme team, and the guidance offered is deemed useful for all candidates, we will update the Discovery Project FAQs to include this, and the updated document will be circulated via email to all the applicants.

Can you provide an example of a completed Technical and Data Management Plan for guidance on completing this aspect of the application?

After careful consideration, the AHRC has decided that due to the unique and diverse nature of the projects, we won't be able to provide exemplar answers at this point. However, Carlotta's presentation will be circulated, together with AHRC slides, and we would ask you to please contact Carlotta Paltrinieri if you have any questions around completing the TDMP.

What will happen to my application?

How will my application be assessed?
Full stage applications will undergo standard AHRC peer review process, during which each application will be assessed by two members of AHRC Peer Review College and a technical reviewer. Following the peer review process and submission of PI responses, the applications will be evaluated by a Moderation Panel, to take place in the w/c 19th July.

Will all of the shortlisted projects be invited to submit a PI response and go to the Moderation panel, or will some be cut at peer review stage?

All shortlisted projects will be considered at the Moderation panel.

Are the assessment criteria and the reviewing process the same as other AHRC grants?

The assessment process is set out in the Call guidance – what makes this call different from many is the two-stage assessment process. You can find more information on that in the Call document https://ahrc.ukri.org/documents/calls/discovery-projects-call-guidance/.

Will AHRC fund five Discovery Projects – or does it reserve the right to increase the number of projects and adjust the budgets accordingly?
The revised total funding envelope for this call is £14.5 million and we will only be able to fund projects up to that limit. The indicative limit for each project has been revised and is now £2.9m where £2.9m represents 80% of the project's full economic cost (fEC). Applicants may submit proposals for less than the indicative limit where this is appropriate to the research proposed. If we can fund more than five projects whilst remaining within the total funding envelope, then we would reserve the right to do so.

Other

What is the relationship between this scheme for funding the development of a virtual national collection and ongoing discussion about creating national digital infrastructure?
This is a conversation in development, and it is too early for us to share conclusions at this stage – however, there certainly is an understanding of a link between the two.

Is there a plan for sustainability included? Is sustainability a requirement for the Discovery Projects?

Sustainability is a priority for AHRC. All proposals should consider the legacy and potential sustainability of their research and other outputs, but as projects will only last three years, we are realistic about what can be promised.

UKRI has recently published a [Sustainability Strategy](#), which sets out how UKRI will protect and enhance the environment across our investments and operations, while ensuring that the research and innovation we support stays at the cutting edge. One of our aims is to embed environmental sustainability across all our investments by 2025. We will encourage applicants to consider sustainability in alignment with this.

For obvious reasons small museums and non-museum collecting partners are battered by COVID-19 related work pressures. Can the fund support distinct jobs in these organisations?

If these organisations are providing staff time to the delivery of projects, they should be included as Collaborating Organisations and the staff time can be costed as part of the budget. Routine running/operational costs of Collaborating Organisations cannot be included.

How can attendees of the workshop access the presentations?

Recordings of the presentations and PowerPoint slides of the TaNC Delivery Team will be disseminated amongst the shortlisted candidates via email.

Many in-kind contributions from partners will be in the form of data. Are there standard ways of assigning a monetary value to these?

Due to the nature of the call we expect that some in-kind contributions will be in the form of data. The only monetary value that should be assigned to this data is the staff costs involved in preparing and transferring or sharing it.

Are there plans for any long-term funding to sustain *Towards a National Collection* projects after the current funding runs out?

We are developing the arguments for long term funding to deliver on what is developed by the five projects at a programme level, but not necessarily to sustain individual projects themselves. While we are trying to leverage funding to build on the methodologies or approaches to linking collections that prove particularly successful, we would not expect to continue to provide funding to individual projects once the grants have finished. All proposals, however, should consider the legacy and potential sustainability of their research and other outputs.

Not all investigators on the various project teams, particularly those from IROs or other collections organisations, will have a significant record of traditional academic publication, as their research is not always directed into these avenues. What publications are they allowed to include on their publication's lists?

When listing publications in your application, you are encouraged to interpret this flexibly to reflect your work. A sensible and fair reflection might include policy documents and public-facing outputs, such as exhibitions and websites.