

## UKRI Innovation and Research Caucus

### Call specification

#### Summary

On behalf of UKRI, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) invites proposals for an Innovation and Research Caucus. UKRI will contribute at least £6 million for a period of 38 months. Initial key stakeholders (**the ‘funders’**) will be ESRC, Innovate UK and UKRI Strategy, but is expected to be scaled to include working with other parts of UKRI during the funded period.

We invite applications for a Director(s) to lead a network of experts in innovation and research support from across the social sciences, other disciplines and sectors that will **work with the funders to provide high quality research evidence and actionable insights in order to support UKRI research and innovation policy and intervention development.** We welcome novel and creative approaches from applicants in achieving our ambition.

The Caucus will:

- act as a trusted expert that supports UKRI in the development of evidence-led research and innovation policies, strategies and decision-making
- create an inter-disciplinary network of business innovation and research funding policy experts
- champion the role of social sciences in building UK innovation and research and increase capacity and capability to use evidence
- work closely with key UKRI stakeholders to co-develop an agile governance approach and a set of flexible and responsive work packages

Proposals must be submitted via UKRI’s Joint electronic Submissions (Je-S) system by **16:00 on 27 September 2022.** This is a two-stage process. UKRI will contribute £100k (80% fEC) for **one** successful applicant to undertake a 3-month co-design and scoping phase with UKRI to co-develop a responsive programme of activity and an agile governance structure for the programme delivery stage. Subject to submitting a satisfactory report which includes a flexible programme of work with an appropriate and agile governance at the end of the scoping period, UKRI will contribute at least an additional £5.9 million for programme delivery over a further 35 months.

UKRI will hold a webinar on **Thursday 28 July, 13:00 – 14:00.** This will be recorded for those unable to attend the session.

Applications will be reviewed by both academic specialists and those with expertise in innovation and research funding policy, and knowledge exchange. Nominated Directors on shortlisted applications will be invited to an interview on the week commencing **28**

**November 2022.** The interview panel will make their final recommendation based on the quality of the written application and the interview.

We welcome applications from co-PIs, where the Caucus Director role is shared. Directors should have experience in delivering world-class business innovation research and wider R&I policy research. This expertise may be shared between Co-Directors. Experience in supporting and advising the business innovation and research funding policy communities to develop evidence-based policy, strategy and interventions will also be required. Please see the Je-S guidance for further information on how to enter co-PIs on to the system. Proposals must be led by an academic(s) who is based at an [eligible UK research organisation](#). Applicants are welcome to partner with other institutions and organisations. Please see the [ESRC Research Funding Guide](#) for further information on eligible institutions, and including business, third sector and government body co-investigators.

**Successful projects must start the scoping period on 9 January 2023.**

## Background and scope

Innovation and research lie at the heart of the UK's recovery and return to full economic growth and prosperity, powering the drive towards improved productivity, business scale-up and new jobs. Yet they are inherently uncertain processes. For example, research projects are testing the unknown and so cannot be guaranteed to succeed, and the capacity to take a brilliant idea to full and successful commercialisation is often never realised. Equally, even fully commercialised innovations face the twin challenges of adoption and diffusion before their societal gains can be fully realised. Social science has a vital role to play in every stage of the innovation and research lifecycle, providing powerful insights into what works, where and why.

As laid out in our new [strategy](#), UKRI aims to base funding and support for innovation and research on a robust and actionable evidence base. This includes identifying the optimal conditions for innovation and its successful adoption and diffusion across different firms, sectors, and regions, driving development in policy and practice to achieve UK-wide growth and prosperity. It should also improve understanding of the wider R&I system, enabling evidence-based delivery of the UKRI strategy. The Caucus will be supporting UKRI to do this. It is expected that the Caucus will also work closely with other key UKRI investments in this area, such as [The Productivity Institute](#), the [Programme on Innovation and Diffusion](#), and other actors in this space.

UKRI needs access to a new and the existing evidence base as well as to skilled individuals who can help us understand and action those insights. To help enable and support UKRI to be a global leader in understanding and creating the evidence in R&I funding system we are seeking to fund an ambitious new investment in an Innovation and Research Caucus.

The Caucus will support UKRI to remove barriers and create the best conditions for a thriving innovation ecosystem. This includes supporting us to understand key innovation drivers, such as finance and business models, labour markets and skills, consumer behaviour, regulation, and broader macro-economic conditions, as well as effective approaches to the adoption and diffusion of innovation throughout society.

For a thriving innovation ecosystem, we also need a thriving research sector, and an understanding of the wide and interconnected R&I system. The Caucus will support UKRI to

use research to improve policy making, building our understanding of what works in supporting the system efficiently and effectively. This could include supporting us to understand the importance of connectivity and porosity between the research base and business innovation, foresee the changing nature of research and requirements in infrastructure and labour, and building an understanding of the international context, UK comparative advantage, and collaborative opportunity.

Within innovation and across the R&I system, the work will likely include evidence syntheses, synthetic and comparative analysis, expert consultation, novel research, convening expert groups, building new networks across the community, articulating common agendas and questions, and the production of accessible and actionable guidance for decision makers. Crucially, it will also mean providing the thought leadership to support UKRI to adapt its strategies and processes in ways which allow us to optimise innovation and our research base across the UK. This will ensure that the Caucus will become a valued investment by the community and sectors as a go to place for evidence.

The Caucus Director(s) will work for an initial period of three months to engage with key stakeholders in UKRI and develop a detailed proposal for a flexible programme of work with an appropriate and agile governance structure. This period will be in addition to the 35-month duration of the full grant.

## Aims of the Caucus

The Caucus is designed to support the funders to meet their aims of catalysing and supporting the UK's research, business and innovation communities in order to help make the UK a global leader in innovation and research. As set out in our [strategy](#), this will be achieved not only through direct funding, but also by ensuring business investment is driving UK economic growth, and research and innovation addresses national and global challenges. To do this, UKRI needs to ensure robust evidence drives the development of innovation and research policies, strategies and decision-making.

The Caucus will lead a network of experts in innovation and research support from across the social sciences, other disciplines and sectors that will **work with the funders to provide high quality research evidence and actionable insights in order to support UKRI research and innovation policy and intervention development.**

This ambitious investment aims to:

- work with the funders to develop a flexible programme of activities
- supply quick and responsive expert advice and guidance to support the development of UKRI strategies and interventions
- draw on and utilise social science expertise and leadership and enhance the evidence base for research and innovation support
- create an inter-disciplinary and multi sector network of business innovation and research funding policy experts
- produce outputs with clear actionable insights to support decision-making and become a valued investment by the community and sectors as a go to place for evidence
- engage diverse audiences throughout, from problem-identification to supporting the development and adoption of strategies, processes and interventions

- attract, collaborate with, and appeal to, diverse audiences working in innovation and research, including funders, policy makers and businesses
- support the development of researchers and project staff at all stages of their career
- develop an agile internal governance structure to ensure the Caucus can provide quick and responsive input to the funders.

It is expected approximately 80% of the grant should be allocated to responsive activities to help UKRI address the aims above. A significant proportion of this can be assigned as flexible or devolved funding. We welcome novel and creative approaches from applicants in achieving our ambition.

## Call details

This is a single call, divided into two stages. You should detail your resourcing and activity plans for both stages on application. UKRI will provide £100k (80% FEC) for stage one (co-design), and a minimum of £5.9 million at stage two (programme delivery). The successful applicant will be able to alter both costings and work plans for stage two during the co-design stage.

Stage one is a 3-month scoping period to co-develop a flexible programme of activity and an agile governance structure with the funders. On submission of a successful report which includes a flexible programme of work with an appropriate and agile governance to UKRI at the end of this period, we will provide at least an additional £5.9 million for the delivery of a programme of activity over 35 months.

This call is open to academics based at [eligible research organisations](#) to support research and innovation-led growth by:

- **convening and leading a network (or networks)** of experts in business innovation and research funding policy able to provide expert insight and research as required to add value to innovation and research activity across UKRI. It is expected network membership will grow and evolve over the funded period and will be multidisciplinary and multi sectoral. Please note, non-academic network members are encouraged, but refer to the [ESRC Research Funding Guide](#) for more information on eligible costs.
- acting as a **key contact point** who can speak with authority on economic and social sciences perspectives on innovation and research funding policy and practice to the funders, key stakeholders and user communities
- **working closely with funders and key UKRI stakeholders** throughout the funded period, acting as a trusted expert and supporting UKRI to hone research questions and fully understand the innovation and research funding and policy ecosystems
- providing **research insights** on the theory, policy and practice of innovation and research support and funding
- undertaking **systematic assessments of relevant evidence** on the effectiveness of innovation and research funding and support, and translating it into clear and actionable guidance for UKRI to put into practice
- **building an evidence base** of knowledge and impact across the Caucus. This includes identifying research and capability gaps and providing responsive research allied with actionable insights.

- **managing a devolved fund** to support those within and beyond the network to provide expert insight and research on evidence and capability gaps as required
- **sharing findings** in a format that can be understood, interpreted, and acted upon, not only by UKRI, but also by the wider business, research and policy-making communities. Creative approaches to communication and engagement are encouraged
- **acting as a champion** for the social, behavioural and economic sciences and their role in understanding and harnessing innovation and research, enabling greater engagement between innovation and research funding policy scholars and key UKRI stakeholders
- providing **critical input into the development of new research and innovation policies and approaches** at UKRI, as well as supporting the improvement of existing mechanisms of support
- **increasing capacity for engaging with innovation and research funding policy** through network building, and the development of early career researchers and knowledge exchange professionals and ensuring the activities of the Caucus address and support diversity and inclusion.

Expected **areas of focus** include, but are not limited to:

- **understanding the innovation and research ecosystem** and how UKRI funding impacts this, including developing frameworks to evidence these impacts
- **responsible innovation** and how UKRI can support innovation which meets UK and global societal goals
- **the role of UK research in growing and sustaining innovation** in the UK and beyond, including via the commercialisation of UK research
- **place-based innovation** and the role of the local in innovation, with particular reference to how UKRI can support and catalyse local development via place-based innovation
- insights and evidence to support the implementation of **Innovate UK's [Plan for Action](#) and the [UK Innovation Strategy](#).**
- **insights and evidence** to help UKRI better understand what works in strategy and intervention decisions, enabling effective implementation of the **[UKRI strategy](#)**. This could include a focus on what works for enabling interdisciplinarity, understanding system sustainability, and addressing national and global challenges
- **international R&I comparators**, including the benefits and opportunities for international R&I collaboration, competition, and areas of UK comparative advantage
- **drivers and interactions between R&I system-level properties**, such as resilience, connectivity, diversity, and engagement

The Director(s) are expected to add value across the Caucus activities, for example by identifying opportunities for shared learning across projects and co-ordinating the activity of research groups. Where applications include Co-Directors, applicants are expected to evidence how the Co-Directors will work together to cover the expectations above and provide unified leadership across the Caucus activities.

Applicants should aim to meet the following criteria:

- **clear objectives:** demonstrate good knowledge of the aims of the Caucus and the context they are working within. Show an understanding of the current relationship between the funders, evidence users and evidence producers and of the drivers that influence users' decision-making. This should include clear outcomes to work towards. Please note, while applicants are required to illustrate how they will manage an extended network of experts, and are encouraged to include potential network members in their application, it is expected network membership will grow and evolve over the funded period
- **robust governance:** co-design an effective agile governance structure with the funders during the three-month co-design period to manage the broader Caucus activities
- **engaging users:** evidence of collaborating with different stakeholders to meet their needs, and increasing their capability, motivation, and opportunity to use evidence. Key areas of work to enable evidence uptake may include:
  - engaging intended users about their evidence needs, including supporting problem identification, question development and developing actionable insights
  - collaborating with users to create new evidence, potentially including through placements and secondments between the Caucus and UKRI
  - communicating and interpreting evidence and creating actionable insights for diverse groups of end users, including funders, policy makers and businesses
  - increasing capabilities to use evidence
  - embedding evidence in working culture and practices
  - ensuring robust evidence is sourced from diverse communities
  - identifying evidence gaps, and supporting users to address these
- **rigorous curation and creation of evidence:** illustrating a robust and transparent methodology to selecting and generating high-quality evidence for Caucus partners and the wider research funding policy, business and innovation communities, including:
  - defining what the Caucus considers to be 'evidence' and deciding what evidence the Caucus will curate
  - mapping and synthesising existing evidence
  - filling gaps with primary research
  - building sector-wide capacity to create robust evidence and actionable insights
- **a focus on impact:** demonstrate an ability to co-design activities, create actionable insights for different users and a commitment to learn from your activities, including successes and failures, so that you can increase your effectiveness in achieving the Caucus aims
- **a commitment to skills development:** including the development of researchers and project staff at all stages of their career
- **Research Organisation support** as appropriate and transparent decision-making processes should be put in place for the award of any activity based, grant or devolved funding. Support from the host Research Organisation will be essential in ensuring the budget is appropriately administered – as such we will require a letter of support from a **named senior contact** supporting the application. This must detail the willingness of the institution to administer the devolved budget in a clear and transparent manner which meet ESRC expectations.

## Funding is available for the following:

Stage 1 (co-design): UKRI contribution of £100k (80% fEC) over 3 months

- up to two **Directors** who can act as the lead(s) for the Caucus. This should include regular interactions with the funders as trusted partners, in order to co-design a robust governance approach and a programme of activities to be delivered in stage 2. During the scoping phase, it is expected the Director(s) would dedicate significant time to the co-design of the programme
- a **programme manager** who can coordinate Caucus activities and act as an administrative point of contact for stakeholders and network members. At the co-design stage, the programme manager would be expected to specifically support the co-development of a robust and agile governance structure with the funders
- **estates and indirect costs** for those involved in the co-design process
- funding for **travel and subsistence** as part of the scoping work, including travel to London and Swindon to meet the funders and UKRI partners

Stage 2 (programme delivery): UKRI contribution of at least £5.9 million over 35 months. Applicants are encouraged to consider:

- up to two **Directors** who can act as the lead(s) for the Caucus, regularly interacting with the funders and UKRI stakeholders as trusted partners, acting as champions for evidence-based approaches to innovation and research funding, convening and leading networks of innovation and research experts, and identifying gaps in network expertise and working to address them. Where relevant, Co-Directors may direct separate activity strands, but will be required to demonstrate how they will work together to provide a unified leadership structure for the Caucus
- a **programme manager** who can coordinate Caucus activities and act as an administrative point of contact for stakeholders and network members. Key Caucus activities will include communication with stakeholders and network members, tracking progress against deliverables (including any devolved funding and impacts), and co-ordinating multiple strands of activities
- **communications and engagement support** to help ensure appropriate outputs are created to help deliver outcomes, and supporting the ambitious aims of creating interdisciplinary networks of business innovation and research funding policy experts
- **research assistance**, which may be pooled across small projects, or used to support core activities such as evidence synthesis, the provision of briefings, and the production of guidance for non-academic audiences
- **estates and indirect costs** relating to staff employed by the Caucus
- funding for **travel, subsistence and venue hire** for events held by the Caucus as well as for meetings with key stakeholders and network members
- the cost of any **external communication**, including website development and engaging with network members
- **activity-based funding** to be awarded by the Caucus for responsive projects. It is expected approximately 80% of the grant should be allocated to responsive Caucus activities, of which a significant proportion can be assigned as grants or devolved funding

Please note, UKRI will fund travel and subsistence costs for network members when on Caucus business, but will not pay salary, estates or indirect costs, unless that network

member is working on a specific agreed Caucus project, including those funded via the activity-based pot.

The grant will be expected to include a significant proportion of programme funding, which the Caucus can access to support responsive, including some 'rapid turnaround', activities, agreed with the funders. Funding may also be used for internships into UKRI, including for PhD and early-career researchers, in order to increase capacity for engaging with research and innovation policy, and to help embed evidence-led decision-making into UKRI practices.

Due and appropriate consideration should be given to the career development of all Caucus staff in line with broader objectives of developing skills among early career researchers and knowledge exchange professionals. We encourage a model in which all Caucus members, the funders and UKRI stakeholders play an active role in the intellectual direction of the network.

These aspects of the role are not exhaustive and applicants to the call are encouraged to present their vision of how they think they can add value.

It is expected that the Director(s) will also work with and draw upon existing UKRI investments.

### **Funding**

This call is for interdisciplinary collaborative grants of at least £6 million (UKRI contribution). This is a single call with two-stages. At the initial co-design stage, UKRI will contribute £100k (80% fEC) for three months to co-develop a full programme of activity and a robust and agile governance structure with UKRI partners. On submission of a successful report which includes a flexible programme of work with an appropriate and agile governance at the end of the scoping period, UKRI will provide at least £6 million to deliver a full programme of support over 35 months. Please note, this figure may change following the three-month scoping and co-design stage.

**Stage 1 (co-design) must start on 9 January 2023 and be completed by 31 March 2023.** Stage 2 (programme delivery) will not start before **1 May 2023** and must be completed by **31 March 2026**.

Applicants should carefully consider the full range of costs needed for the support of the Caucus and their activities including research. In particular, those associated with non-academic staffing and delivering outputs must be sufficient to ensure the Caucus can effectively provide actionable insights and engage and communicate with key stakeholders.

### **Impact**

This is an impact-led call, and it is expected this will be central to all applications. For more information on impact expectations and advice on maximising your impact, see the UKRI [Excellence with Impact](#) resources, and the [ESRC Impact Toolkit](#).

### **Eligibility**

Principal Investigators (PIs) must be based at a UK Research Organisation eligible for UKRI funding for the duration of the award. For further details, including the eligibility of Co-



Investigators (Co-Is) from business, third sector and government organisations, as well as international Co-Is, see the eligibility requirements in the [Research Funding Guide](#). Please note, Co-Directors are welcomed on this call. However, Je-S currently requires one nominated as a PI. Please add one Director as a PIs here and the other as a co-investigator. Please note which Co-I will be acting as a Co-Director in the Staff Duties section and the Case for Support. ESRC will then treat that person as a Co-Director throughout the application process.

### **Capacity-building**

We will be looking for evidence of a strong commitment to the development of researchers and project staff at all stages of their career. Capacity-building must be an integral part of the programme.

Proposals will be expected to include a strong development programme shaped to suit the career stage of researchers and professional support staff. This should include, but is not limited to, early career staff, and you are encouraged to consider how you can support the continuing career development of all members of the team regardless of their career stage. Examples of building capacity include, but is not limited to:

- Support and mentoring for all members of the team
- Building networks within and beyond academia (including with UKRI stakeholders)
- Supporting placements from or to UKRI

### **Assessment of proposals**

Proposals must be submitted via UKRI's Joint electronic Submissions (Je-S) system by **16:00 on 27 September 2022**. Proposals will then be assessed by peer review and shortlisted applicants will be invited to attend an interview. Final recommendations for progression to the co-design stage will be made by the Panel on the basis of the written proposal, peer reviews and interview. Assessors will include academic and non-academic experts. Progression from the co-design stage to the programme delivery stage will be via a scoping report assessed by a sub-section of the Panel. This report will consist of an updated Case for Support and Justification of Resources. Changes to costings and work plans based on the co-design period are welcomed at this stage. See full commissioning timetable for more details.

#### **Assessment criteria:**

Proposals will be assessed against the following criteria at the outline stage:

- **Fit to scope of the call**
- **Relevant experience and expertise** – how your prior experience and expertise (and those of your proposed network) meet the requirements of the call. Please reference any previous experience of co-producing work with policymakers (particularly research funders) as well as your experience of creating accessible advice and actionable insights, particularly for the research funding policy and business and innovation communities, that have had a measurable impact on the activities of those you work with
- **Appropriateness of proposed activities** – how you will work with the funders, the social science community, as well as any additional audiences or partners fully justified in the application. How you will ensure equality, diversity and inclusion is

embedded into Caucus activities, including ensuring diversity within the Caucus network

- **Vision for the Caucus and its network** – how the Caucus will meet the aims of the call, including the expertise that the Director(s) will need to recruit into the Caucus network, and an understanding of the context and priority areas of focus for the funders, as well as how the Caucus complements other investments and sources of evidence
- **Appropriateness of management structure** – considering how best to coordinate the network and encourage active participation, as well as the delineation of roles and responsibilities among the Director(s) and the programme manager and other members of the core team
- **Value for money**, including how any activity, research or devolved budget will be managed. This includes a letter of support from a **named senior contact** supporting the application which details the willingness of the Research Organisation to support the administration of the budget in a clear and transparent manner which meet ESRC expectations.

Interviews for shortlisted applicants are expected to be held on the week commencing **28 November 2022**.

## How to apply

Outline stage proposals will be accepted via UKRI's Joint Electronic Submissions (Je-S) system, which is available at <https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk/JeS2WebLoginSite/Login.aspx>. Je-S is an electronic submission system, which is used by UKRI to provide a common electronic system that supports research administration. More detailed information can be found at <https://jes.rcuk.ac.uk/>. **Applicants should note the registration requirements for making a Je-S submission.**

Only those proposals submitted through the Je-S system will be accepted for processing. The proposal submitted through Je-S will be taken to be the final version, and will be the version used for external peer assessment.

The Principal Investigator must be from a Research Organisation [eligible for UKRI funding](#). Please note, Je-S only allows one Principal Investigator per application. Should you wish to include Co-Directors, please list one as Co-Investigator and note their name in both the Staff Duties section and Case for Support. ESRC will then treat them as a co-PI during the call process.

**The call for proposals closes at 16:00 on 27 September 2022.**

Proposals should address the aims of the call as listed in the call details and should include:

- **Case for Support** (12 pages), including a full description of the project aims, methods and initial work packages (including proposed timings), as well as details of how the project will address the aims as listed in the call details. Please ensure you detail plans for co-design stage, as well as the full programme delivery stage. We expect work packages to alter during the co-design stage.
- **CVs** for PIs
- **Justification of Resources**, including full costs associated with stakeholder engagement, project administration and travel and subsistence for the co-design and

programme delivery stages. Please ensure you clarify which staff and resources will be committed during the co-design stage (note a maximum of £125k can be committed to this stage, of which ESRC will contribute £100k (80% fEC)).

- **Letters of Support**, including those from organisations involved in the project, including research, engagement, impact and knowledge exchange activities. A letter of support will also be required from a named senior contact at the host research organisation outlining that the devolved budget will be appropriately administered

All proposals will be subject to ESRC review to ensure compliance with the call specification and objectives, following peer review by academic and non-academic subject specialists and submission to a selection Panel (see timetable below).

The Je-S guidance for the call will provide details on the information that you will be required to submit as part of your proposal. All applicants are strongly advised to consult ESRC's research funding guide (<https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-forapplicants/research-funding-guide/>), which sets out the rules and regulations governing its funding. However, please note, that call-specific guidance supersedes standard guidance where there is a conflict.

## Webinar

We will be running a webinar to support applicants on:

- 28th July 2022 at 13:00 UK time

Please email: [InnovationCaucusUKRI@esrc.ukri.org](mailto:InnovationCaucusUKRI@esrc.ukri.org) for more information and to register for this event.

## Commissioning timetable

- Call opens – 12 July 2022
- Call webinar – 28 July 2022
- Call closes – 27 September 2022
- Shortlisting Panel meeting – w/c 31 October 2022
- Director Interviews – w/c 28 November 2022
- Applicants notified of final decisions – 16 December 2022
- Commencement of 3-month scoping period – 9 Jan 2023
- Scoping report due – 31 March 2023
- Latest grant start date – 1 May 2023
- Latest grant end date – 31 March 2026

## Contacts

If you have any questions or would like further information about the scheme, contact:

- Luke Shipman or Emma Bushell  
Email: [InnovationCaucusUKRI@esrc.ukri.org](mailto:InnovationCaucusUKRI@esrc.ukri.org)

Enquiries relating to technical aspects of the Je-S form should be addressed to:

- Je-S helpdesk  
Email: [jeshelp@rcuk.ac.uk](mailto:jeshelp@rcuk.ac.uk)