



Funding opportunity

Centre in community participation and connectedness

Opportunity status:	Closed
Funders:	Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) , UK Research and Innovation, Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) , Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)
Funding type:	Grant
Total fund:	£9,700,000
Award range:	£5,000,000 - £9,700,000
Publication date:	3 February 2023
Opening date:	1 February 2023
Closing date:	17 May 2023 4:00pm UK time

Is this page useful?

Apply for funding to establish a centre in community participation and connectedness.

This centre will be a world-leading centre of excellence carrying out interdisciplinary, cutting-edge and impactful research.

You must be based at a UK research organisation eligible for UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) funding.

The full economic cost (FEC) of your project can be between £5 million and £9.7 million. UKRI will fund 80% of the FEC.

Funding is available for up to 5 years.

Who can apply

The principal investigator for this funding opportunity must be based at an organisation eligible for UKRI funding for the duration of the grant.

Eligible organisations are:

- UK higher education institutions (HEI)
- research council institutes
- UKRI-approved independent research organisations
- public sector research establishments
- NHS bodies with research capacity.

[Check if your institution is eligible for funding.](#)

This funding opportunity is being administered by ESRC on behalf of UKRI.

Standard ESRC eligibility rules for co-investigators apply.

It is likely that successful applications will be led by experienced researchers who are internationally recognised, with proven ability to deliver a large-scale project successfully and lead an investment of this nature.

The amount of time committed to the grant by the principal investigator and co-investigators must be costed into the proposal, but very small fractions of co-investigator time should be avoided.

Our standard research funding rules apply for staff engaged in more than 1 grant (see the [ESRC research funding guide](#)).

Co-investigators and collaborators

International co-investigators can be included in proposals.

Academic researchers (at PhD or equivalent status) must be from established overseas research organisations of comparable standing to UKRI-eligible UK research organisations to be listed as international co-investigators under this funding opportunity.

Applicants should note [ESRC's policy on the inclusion of international co-investigators](#) on proposals.

International collaboration is not limited to co-investigators but may also involve partnerships to:

- develop international datasets
- promote knowledge exchange and international impact
- enhance research conceptual development on an international scale

We welcome inter-institutional applications and strongly encourage collaboration to fulfil the aims of the centre.

Partnerships are encouraged with non-HEI organisations and across third sector, business and the public sector, either as project partners or as co-investigators.

We will fund all justified costs associated with international co-investigators and co-investigators from UK business, civil society or government bodies at 100% FEC. However, these combined costs must not exceed 30% of the full 100% FEC cost of the grant.

Demand management

Applications to the centre in community participation and connectedness competition will not be counted in the demand management measures in place for ESRC's open centres funding opportunity.

Please note that proposals for this centre cannot also be submitted through ESRC's open centres funding opportunity. Applicants submitting the same or a similar proposal to this funding opportunity and the open competition will be withdrawn from the open funding opportunity.

What we're looking for

About the centre

We are looking to fund a centre that is focused on supporting and strengthening connectedness and participation in place-based communities across the UK.

The centre will bring together the right people, disciplines, institutions, and infrastructure to provide the evidence needed for this challenge within a 5-year timeframe.

When participation is low, communities can struggle to mobilise social capital and coordinate to identify and address challenges. Strengthening connectedness within and between communities can play an important role in reducing the social and economic marginalisation of individuals, groups, and areas.

There is still much to understand about how disparity in opportunities and outcomes, attachment to place, and external pressures intersect at the community level, and what this can mean for community connectedness and levels of participation. There also remains a lack of evidence on the impact of interventions designed to strengthen community:

- resilience
- engagement
- social capital

Evidence is needed at a local, regional, and national level to ensure that decision makers understand the causal relationships between place-based disparities and community connectedness and can draw upon clear strategies that support community efforts to address these disparities.

We expect this evidence and research centre to bring together research disciplines that span UKRI's remit, for example, but not limited to:

- engineering
- architecture
- design
- data science
- psychology
- anthropology
- the environmental and health sciences

The aim is to deliver cutting-edge interdisciplinary research that supports decision makers in understanding, developing and testing approaches that strengthen:

- social connectedness
- community and civic participation
- pride in place
- interpersonal and institutional trust
- community resilience

This interdisciplinary centre will advance understanding of the factors and conditions that affect levels of community connectedness and cohesion within and across areas and extrapolate learning about the transferability of these lessons.

The successful applicants will have to demonstrate that their ambitions for the centre go beyond describing barriers and enablers to delivering impactful solutions within the lifetime of the award.

The centre will need to demonstrate a strong commitment to working with community partners – collaborating with communities in specific locations to understand how contextual factors and the actions of local, regional, and national institutions and actors combine and relate to levels of community connectedness and participation.

Applicants should demonstrate the wider applicability of, and capacity to scale, their community-level work.

The centre must also undertake broader activity such as the collection and use of data to build a comprehensive evidence base that has national-level relevance.

Objectives

The centre's objectives will be to:

- understand the factors and conditions that affect levels of community connectedness and cohesion within and across areas. A particular focus should be placed on examining how some communities have achieved high levels of social capital and connectedness, and what we can learn about the transferability of these lessons
- develop new interdisciplinary approaches to measuring connectedness and participation that allow local and national decision makers to understand the impact of different policies and practices

- work with a coalition of partners – including governments, community groups, people with lived experience, and the business community – to co-produce a programme of work that tests different approaches to strengthening social connectedness, community and civic participation, pride in place, and interpersonal and institutional trust. Wherever possible this should enable the identification of causal mechanisms
- work with, and be responsive to, the needs of UK-based decision makers, with a specific focus on supporting the evidence needs of local and national decision makers and enabling the scaling of effective practices
- remain responsive to national and global events relevant to community connectedness and resilience that emerge during the lifetime of the centre
- engage with relevant UKRI investments, including maximising the use of existing data resources and identifying opportunities to collaborate and coordinate with other investments working in related areas

Topic areas

We invite applications that focus on a range of different topic areas relevant to community connectedness and participation. Examples of potential topics could include:

Metrics and measurement

Developing new approaches to measuring community participation and connectedness that would allow for the impact of interventions to be evaluated. For example, the use of machine learning for social network analysis.

Architecture and the built environment

Advancing understanding of people’s psychological and behavioural responses to their built environment and the impact on community behaviours. For example, public order, local consultation.

Culture, heritage, environment, and community

Understanding how cultural, heritage, environmental assets (for example, museums, waterways, and parks) and other public or private spaces affect, and can be used to strengthen, community connectedness and participation.

Engagement and ethics

Developing community engagement methodologies that account for the ethical issues that arise in testing the effectiveness of approaches to strengthening community connectedness and participation. For example, from public trust to the representativeness of community-level organisations, groups, and networks.

Harnessing insights from data

Using existing local, regional, or national administrative data to address the centre’s aims. This could also include drawing upon existing UKRI data collections and infrastructure as appropriate, for example:

- Cohort and Longitudinal Studies Enhancement Resources (CLOSER)

- Understanding Society: The UK Household Longitudinal Study
- European Social Survey
- World Values Survey
- International Social Survey
- Administrative Data Research UK
- the UK Data Service

Outcomes

The centre will advance understanding of how communities can achieve high levels of connectedness, social capital and participation and extrapolate learning about the transferability of these lessons.

Key outcomes should include:

- enabling the identification and scaling of support infrastructure, activities, and policies that strengthen participation and connectedness within and across communities, in collaboration with communities, policy makers, businesses. This work will take account of multiple layers of potential intervention, from the macro to local levels
- the development of new interdisciplinary approaches to measuring connectedness and participation that allow decision makers and communities to understand the impact of new infrastructure, activities, and policies
- the creation of new data resources and tools made available to a new generation of researchers, decision makers, communities and practitioners to understand and enhance social capital and connectedness
- local and national decisionmakers using evidence generated and shared by the centre to inform their approach to supporting community connectedness
- a network of communities brought together by the centre to co-develop and deliver a cohesive work programme, which will take an inclusive approach to further connections and engagement
- enhanced cross-sector capacity to understand and tackle barriers to community connectedness by co-developing work programmes with communities and key stakeholders, including local, regional, and national policy makers
- new interdisciplinary and cross-sector networks and partnerships that build the capacity of the research and innovation system to develop an inclusive understanding of the topic and bring together the skills and experience needed to advance communality and community participation research in the UK

Applicants will develop and add to this agenda and can propose a title for this UKRI centre in line with the focus described here. Successful applicants will need to seek approval for a new title for this centre from the UKRI Creating Opportunities, Improving Outcomes Programme Board.

We expect to fund a single centre through this funding opportunity.

Research challenges

You must demonstrate that your centre will deliver:

Research

High-quality, interdisciplinary, internationally recognised research findings to address unanswered questions about a defined challenge to our society, economy or both.

In this case, the centre will need to articulate how the proposed programme of work will increase understanding of, and develop and test approaches that strengthen, community connectedness and participation.

Impact

Significant economic and societal impact, demonstrating that the centre is responding to their specified challenge.

Impact should be a major consideration throughout the scoping of a proposal, and during and beyond the lifetime of a centre. Research users should be engaged from the initial planning phases through to the end of an award.

Capability

The resources needed to become a centre of excellence that adds value to the wider community. This will include developing the people, producing the data and creating the infrastructure needed to respond to their specified challenge, as well as making use of existing datasets and infrastructure.

Career and skills development

You should clearly articulate your plans for career development.

UKRI is a signatory to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, and the Technician Commitment, through these UKRI commits to support the professional and career development of researchers and technicians through its funding opportunities. You are encouraged to consider both leadership development and capacity building in your plans.

Leadership development skills should be considered at all career stages to equip researchers in the centre with the leadership skills needed to be able to design, lead and deliver large and complex or interdisciplinary projects and teams.

Research leadership should go beyond project management to include a capacity to enthuse, ignite and sustain an intellectual vision that is inclusive, flexible and open to challenge. The report [fit for the future: research leadership matters](#) gives insight into the skills related to research leadership at different career stages and some preliminary suggestions for how those skills might be supported across the career life-course.

You should also demonstrate how you plan to build capacity among decision makers to use evidence as well as building skills in academia, policy and industry engagement among research staff and technicians at all career levels, from PHD students to early and mid-career academics to established professors.

Up to 3 associated studentships may also be included in this application, for those Doctoral Training Partnerships eligible to receive studentships from 2024.

Data

Centres should maximise the use of relevant existing data resources in the first instance, as well as (where appropriate) producing data that responds to their proposed challenge and is of value to the wider community.

Data collection and management should be in accordance with our [research data policy](#).

UKRI funds a range of data infrastructures that are available and free to use for all bona fide researchers (subject to appropriate data sharing considerations).

Management and structure

You should consider the structure of your proposed centre to ensure it can successfully deliver the objectives of the funding opportunity, whether through a consortium approach or single institution.

The successful centre will be required to partner, collaborate and engage with a wide range of stakeholders and disciplines to agree priorities and deliver key activities.

Partnerships with non-higher education institutions organisations across government, industry and civil society, as well as internationally are encouraged where appropriate.

You must include a brief management plan in your case for support, demonstrating:

- how you will provide leadership across the collaborators involved in the application
- how the management of the centre and its activities will be carried out, including details of project management and administration resource

You should also include details of any advisory group that will be appointed to oversee the development of the centre.

ESRC will work with the appointed centre on their governance arrangements to ensure suitable representation from government departments and representation from the UKRI creating opportunities, improving outcomes theme (see the 'additional information' section).

You are also expected to indicate your plans for monitoring progress against your logic model, and any plans for self-evaluation throughout the lifetime of the award.

The successful centre will be allocated an ESRC investment manager who will work with their centre to agree a monitoring and evaluation plan in the starting phase of the award. This will include submitting quarterly updates on progress to UKRI's creating opportunities, improving outcomes programme board and regular reporting and meetings between ESRC and the centre, for the centre to update ESRC on activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts as well as spend and any key challenges or concerns.

Institutional support

We will be looking for evidence of long-term strategic and financial institutional commitment to the proposed centre, above the required 20% (as UKRI funds at 80% FEC). This should be through the provision of grant-associated parallel activities. Examples include but are not limited to:

- studentships
- summer schools
- refurbishment of facilities for the centre
- provision of equipment
- administration
- new lectureships

Outline proposals must include an institutional letter of support from the pro-vice chancellor of research (or equivalent role) from the lead organisation that confirms the research organisation's commitment to the centre application.

If the application is from an existing UKRI investment then this should be noted in the letter of support.

Research ethics

You must ensure that the proposed research will be carried out to a high ethical standard.

You must clearly state how any potential ethical, safeguarding and health and safety issues have been considered and will be addressed, ensuring that all necessary ethical approval is in place and all risks are minimised before the award commences.

All proposals must comply with the [ESRC framework for research ethics](#).

Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)

Promoting EDI is an integral part of UKRI's vision to deliver new knowledge and an enriched, healthier, more sustainable and resilient society and culture, and to contribute to a more prosperous economy.

You are expected to demonstrate throughout your proposal how you will consider EDI during the centre's lifetime.

Environmental sustainability

UKRI recognises that we must embed environmental sustainability in everything we do.

You are expected to consider the environmental impact of the centre's activities and to put in place actions that encourage sustainability and mitigate any risk of environmental harm.

How to apply

Outline proposals must be submitted to the Joint Electronic Submission (Je-S) system by 17 May 2023 at 4:00pm UK time.

Electronic acknowledgements will be sent to the principal investigator and submitting organisation.

All proposals must be submitted in English or Welsh, costed in pounds sterling using the Je-S system.

Proposals can only be accepted by electronic submission through the Je-S system.

The proposal has 2 elements:

- an online form requesting key information
- a series of mandatory attachments, including:
 - the case for support
 - justification of resources
 - institutional letter of support
 - list of key publications
 - CVs for all named individuals

All attachments should be completed offline and uploaded as attachments in Je-S. We recommend uploading attachments as PDF documents.

Generic guidance on the completion of the structured boxes and sections of the form is available from the Je-S help screens, which can be found at the top righthand corner of each Je-S screen.

You must ensure that you have read and complied with:

- the funding opportunity-specific guidance set out in the [Je-S guidance \(PDF, 230KB\)](#)
- the assessment criteria set out in this funding opportunity specification

Where funding opportunity-specific guidance provided in these documents differs from generic Je-S help, the funding opportunity-specific guidance should always be followed. Care and attention must be given to completing the proposal correctly and complying with all technical requirements. Proposals that are not completed correctly may be rejected by the ESRC office.

The final submission process is the responsibility of the host institution, and ESRC cannot accept responsibility for any delays which may occur. It is recommended that applicants submit in good time before the funding opportunity deadline.

We strongly advise applicants to confirm with their relevant administrator that the proposal has been submitted successfully to ESRC.

How we will assess your application

Assessment process

The assessment of applications will be a 2-stage process:

- outline proposal stage
- full proposal stage

Outline proposals will be assessed and shortlisted by an interdisciplinary assessment panel. Shortlisted applicants will subsequently be invited to submit applications to the full proposal stage.

Full proposals will be subject to external peer review and assessed by an interdisciplinary commissioning panel. Shortlisted proposals will be invited to interview. Representatives from the funders will participate in the interview panel. Representatives from government departments, as a key user group of the evidence generated by the centre, may also be invited to participate in the assessment panel.

Assessment criteria: outline stage

Scientific excellence with impact is the primary criterion and is an essential requirement of all proposals.

All outline proposals will be scored according to ESRC's [scoring scale for panel introducers](#) (page 3).

Proposals which demonstrate that they meet the following criteria are most likely to likely to be invited to apply for the full stage:

- an innovative, interdisciplinary programme of work which paves the way for the centre to become world-leading in its area of research and have a transformational impact on community participation and connectedness
- strong plans for impact generation throughout the lifetime of the centre, with evidence of user engagement, backed up by a clear logic model
- alignment of research programme to the aims and objectives of the funding opportunity
- clearly articulated plans for people development at all career levels
- demonstration of how the centre will add value to the wider research community.
- a robust management structure with a nominated director or directors and clear arrangements for coordination and management of the strategic direction of the centre
- strong institutional commitment with financial support and practical contributions to hosting and sustaining a centre
- evidence that issues relating to equality, diversity, inclusion, risk, ethics and environmental sustainability have been considered throughout the proposal

Contact details

Get help with developing your proposal

For help and advice on costings and writing your proposal please contact your research office in the first instance, allowing sufficient time for your organisation's submission process.

Ask about this funding opportunity

ESRC centres team

Email: esrc.centres@esrc.ukri.org

Additional info

UKRI strategy

This centre is jointly funded by central funding from UKRI and ESRC.

By working collectively and leveraging new and existing investment and activity, we are harnessing the full power of the UK's research and innovation system to tackle large-scale, complex challenges.

This award falls under the umbrella of the UKRI creating opportunities, improving outcomes strategic theme, 1 of 5 UKRI strategic themes identified through our 5-year strategy transforming tomorrow together 2022 to 2027.

Through this theme, UKRI aims to increase understanding of the causes and effects of place-based disparities and identify empowering new solutions that promote prosperity and improve outcomes for people and communities across the UK.

Investments made under the creating opportunities improving outcome's theme are intended to support research and innovation activity across the full breadth of UKRI's remit and are overseen by a cross-UKRI programme board.

The Funding Service

The full proposal stage of this funding opportunity is likely to run on [our new funding platform, the UKRI Funding Service](#), rather than via Je-S.

[Set up an account on the Funding Service](#).

If successful at the outline stage, you will be invited to submit a full application, and will receive guidance at that point.

The Funding Service has a digital form-based format with sections addressing application questions which are the assessment criteria for the funding opportunity.

Supporting documents

[Je-S guidance \(PDF, 230KB\)](#)

[Equality impact assessment \(PDF, 345KB\)](#)

[Logic model guidance \(PDF, 101KB\)](#)

Timeline

- 1 February 2023**
Outline opening date
- 17 May 2023 4:00pm**
Outline closing date
- July 2023**
Full stage opening date
- November 2023**
Full stage closing date
- April 2024**
Interviews
- October 2024**
Awards commence

Guidance on good research

[Good research resource hub](#)

Is this page useful?

<https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/centre-in-community-participation-and-connectedness>

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