

ESRC FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

**Future data services: pilots to enhance data services for
the future**

Webinar Q&A
23 January 2024

Q: In Theme 1 where the call talks about removing duplication in data access, does this only relate to existing services or could it include access to new data assets?

A: It doesn't have to be an existing service and can include access to new data assets.

Q: Is Theme 2 (*Data discovery using machine learning or other AI technologies*) just about applying machine learning to data discovery, or also other aspects of data curation? Particularly applying machine learning to data ingest.

A: Other aspects can be included too; the focus is on using new technologies to improve existing techniques or create new techniques.

Q: Can you clarify who is included as 'data professionals' in theme 3?

A: By 'data professionals' in this instance we are referring to people working in data services in technical roles and/or who provide support to the research community to use data.

Q: For theme 3, is the focus on training and capacity building for data service staff, rather than for researchers that would use services (such as TREs)?

A: Yes, this theme is focused on service staff, not researchers.

Q: Can data sets be international?

A: Yes.

Q: How will PPI involvement be considered for these applications?

A: Public & patient involvement (PPI) isn't a requirement of this funding opportunity, so applications will go through the standard assessment process, which could include review of PPI if that's appropriate to the project.

Q: The call specifies "You may be involved in no more than two applications submitted to this funding opportunity. Only one of these can be as project lead." Is this per organisation or per individual?

A: This is per individual. One research organisation can have as many applications as they like, but an individual can only be involved in up to two applications and only one can be as project lead.

Q: Are we able to buy in datasets not freely available?

A: Yes, providing you include justification for the costs and how it would benefit the project.

Q: Can the lead applicant involve external subcontractors in the project delivery?

A: Yes, please see <https://www.ukri.org/publications/including-co-investigators-from-business-third-sector-or-government-bodies/> for details.

Q: Are you looking for discrete proposals for each theme or would you accept a blended proposal across themes?

A: We welcome discrete proposals and blended proposals.

Q: What is the total funding cap for all projects?

A: The total fund for this opportunity is £2.6 million at 80% full economic cost (FEC). The FEC of your project can be between £150,000 and £1,000,000. We will fund 80% of the FEC. These funds are fixed so we will not consider projects that are outside these funding limits.

Q: How shall we add partner organisation to our applications that are happy to join but not as part of any of the core team roles that are listed - can we just mention them as partners?

A: Yes, there is a section in the application for Project Partners

Q: Can a current PhD student be Project Lead if they expect to pass their viva before the project starts?

A: We are happy to receive applications from Project Leads who do not currently have a PhD, however, they must be able to demonstrate experience of managing a research project and must fulfil the criteria

in the “Applicant and team capability to deliver” section. They must also have a guaranteed position at an eligible [Research Organisation](#).

Q: Will a project without overt ESRC focus be acceptable?

A: Due to the [Digital Research Infrastructure](#) element of this opportunity, applications don’t have to be solely ESRC focused, but should demonstrate a broad application across the UKRI disciplines.

Q: How radical (compared to existing ESRC data infrastructure) can the proposals be?

A: As radical as you like; we welcome transformative proposals and see this as a positive approach to running pilot projects.

Q: Can we include some interviewing of users to assess needs?

A: Yes, this is welcome if it benefits the project.

Q: In so far as projects create pilot systems providing actual access, are ANY commitments about future sustainability required, or can they be pure proof of concept?

A: Pilots can be pure proof of concept, but should consider sustainability and will be assessed on “*plans for sustainability and legacy beyond the end of UKRI funding; these could include cost recovery models, securing additional funding, development or expansion after the initial period of funding*” in the “Approach” section.

Q: Is this opportunity suitable for piloting extensions to add additional data sets to an existing service?

A: Projects can include piloting new services, but can also include piloting extensions to existing services. The grant can't fund additional data sets to be added to existing services, but can include enhancing existing services.

Q: Please could you provide a clearer definition of federating?

A: ESRC and other funders invest in data services to support researchers’ access to different types of data. Federation of these data services, through technological, policy or other innovations, have the potential to improve the journeys that researchers experience when they access data from multiple data services for their work; while also reducing bureaucracy and duplication of effort.

Q: Could you comment on role for existing investments; suppose an investment has interest from several 3rd parties who would like to work with them on federating access - difficult for them to allocate collaborative resource when they don't know which if any might be successful. Will there be any scope for existing investment to say "yes, we're happy to collaborate, but will need some budget"?

A: If an applicant proposes bringing in third parties that is acceptable, but please provide a good overview of how to manage third parties to ensure achieving deliverables. If you have concerns about the need for additional funds to manage this, please speak to your research council investment manager in the first instance.

Q: This is a comment or observation and not a question: The document mentions EDI, mentioning commitment to achieving equality of opportunity for all funding applicants, including support to those with caring responsibilities, which is very welcome and important. However, given the very short timeline for applications (covering for example school holidays) this may disadvantage those working part-time or with caring responsibilities. I would like to encourage such circumstances to be considered in the future.

A: Thank you for your comment, we appreciate the amount of time it takes to complete applications and understand your concern. In this case we have made as many adaptations to the timeline as possible within our limits, but we will be as flexible as we're able to be and happy to have further discussions with applicants who are affected by this. Please feel free to email fds@esrc.ukri.org if you would like to discuss this further. We will endeavour to give longer timelines wherever possible in future opportunities.