ESRC Funding Opportunity
Transforming data collections infrastructure for social science
Webinar Q&A
28 February 2024

Project duration and funding:

1. **Why is the completion date 30th June 2025 and how would this interact with someone working part-time? Is there any wiggle room for the end date?**

   The end date is defined largely due to ESRC's financial constraints on what funding we have available to spend when. There is little wiggle room for the end date. However, a project team can include full-time and part-time staff.

2. **How will funding be allocated between Theme A and Theme B? Will the majority of funding be allocated to either theme? What funding amount could feasibly be requested for a project under each theme?**

   ESRC will take a portfolio approach to ensure projects are funded under both themes. There is no defined split in the total budget between the two themes. Funding is available up to £350,000 at full economic cost (fEC) for a project for either of the themes (ESRC will fund 80% of the costs except for what is eligible as Exceptions to be funded at 100% fEC) and an applicant can define and justify the amount they require to successfully deliver the proposed project.

Definitions:

3. **What is the definition of data infrastructure? In Theme A, the final product sounds like the "data" itself whereas in Theme B the final product is more like the methods of data collection.**

   Data infrastructure which this funding opportunity aims to support is data collections. As per the 'Scope' section of the funding finder, foundational social science data collections infrastructure can be defined as gathering and provision of data which can support a range of research questions over time, as distinct from data collected for and focused on a specific question. The data collections infrastructure which this funding opportunity aims to support should primarily focus on gathering for research purposes data which would not otherwise exist.

   Theme A of this funding opportunity is for scoping work for a larger project to establish transformational data collections infrastructure. Proposals can include some gathering of data, however, the primary focus must be on scoping and gaining learning to inform recommendations for ESRC (as specified in the funding finder) rather than these being a by-product of a data collection exercise. Theme B is for facilitating development of innovative data collection methods that offer alternatives to mainstream survey approaches. This could also include some gathering of data but the primary focus must be on the development of alternative approaches or methods.

4. **What is the difference between data services and data collections infrastructure?**

For working purposes, ESRC identifies the following, while acknowledging that not all infrastructures conform neatly to one category:

1. Infrastructure gathering data specifically for use in research;
2. Infrastructure repurposing existing data created for other purposes for use in research, such as administrative and smart data (in the remits of Administrative Data Research UK (ADRUK) and Smart Data Research UK (SDRUK) respectively); and
3. Infrastructure for all other parts of the research data lifecycle such as discovery, access, linkage.

Both category 1 and 2 provide collections of data as outputs that can be analysed in research. Category 3 is typically considered as data services infrastructure.

The current funding opportunity aims to support **category 1**, i.e., the development of collections of data based predominantly on gathering data for research that would not otherwise exist.

5. **It seems to envisage a somewhat narrow concept of what social science data are, focusing very much on survey data or similar. In linguistics the data are largely detailed transcripts of spoken interaction. Would that be within scope?**

Applications which have an ESRC remit are eligible including linguistics, whilst the proposed project must be within the scope of this funding opportunity focusing on collection for research purposes of data that would not otherwise exist. ESRC also encourages multi- and inter-disciplinary applications.

Scope:

6. **Are projects focusing on smart data or administrative data eligible?**

The focus of this funding opportunity is gathering of data that would not otherwise exist to provide data collections for research, not the repurposing of existing data created for other purposes to make it suitable for use in research. Theme B is focussed on gathering of data by means that go beyond mainstream survey approaches. Innovative use of routine administrative or health data, or smart data, in combination with new data gathering in order to supplement the data gathered, could be in scope provided the primary focus is on the gathering of data that would not otherwise exist. For example, proposals focused using smart and or administrative data as a sampling frame for data collection would not be in scope; however innovative deployment of devices to collect data for research purposes would be in scope.

7. **Is data collection or research eligible for funding under Theme A?**

Applications proposing collection of data that would not exist otherwise (i.e., data collections infrastructure) are in scope of this funding opportunity, although a standard research project will not be funded through this opportunity for neither Theme A or B (please see the funding finder for 'what we will fund' and 'what we will not fund').

8. **Can empirical data be collected to create a data collection, and then be used to check the feasibility for using the data for different research questions (in different disciplines)?**

The primary focus of the project must be the development of the approach or methods, rather than these being a by-product of a data collection exercise.

9. **Can the funding be used to develop tools and prototypes (for collecting / sharing / archiving /organising data etc) that might later be scaled?**

The development of tools and prototypes can be in scope as long as it focuses on gathering data that would otherwise not exist for research purposes. It is unlikely that the development of tools and prototypes for sharing, archiving, or organising existing data would be in scope of this funding opportunity, as applications primarily focus on the provision of data services are not in scope (please see Question 4 for the definition of data services).

10. **Would collecting and curating data held by organisations but are not currently used for research be in scope of this funding opportunity?**

This type of work is typically categorised as data services; for instance, manipulation of existing data resources in order to make them more accessible and usable for research would be considered as data services rather than data collections (please also see Question 4). This funding opportunity is focussed on collection of data that would not otherwise exist specifically for research purposes. However, ESRC will assess the eligibility of applications on a case-by-case basis.

11. **Would the creation of accessible digital versions of important information/data currently in non-digital forms be in scope?**

Digitisation of existing data is likely to lie in the data services remit (please also see Question 4) and therefore would likely to be out of scope for this funding opportunity, which is focussed on collection for research purposes of data that would not otherwise exist. However, ESRC will assess the remit of applications on a case-by-case basis.

12. **Regarding innovative data collection methods, are there specific technologies, approaches, or methodologies that ESRC are particularly interested in supporting through this funding opportunity?**

ESRC are not specifying any particular methodologies or technologies that would be supported in this funding opportunity. Applicants may propose the use of any methodology or technology they choose, provided the proposed project is within the scope of the funding opportunity.

13. **Is Theme B intended to address longitudinal or repeated data collection?**

Projects under Theme B do not necessarily need to address longitudinal or repeated data collection.

14. **In relation to Theme B and the Survey Futures programme, does the word "complementing" mean something that explicitly helps Survey Futures reach their aims? Or should it avoid crossover with what Survey Futures is doing? Can data linkage between surveys and other forms of data be funded?**

In this case, complementing means work that does not directly overlap with or replicate the work of Survey Futures. Innovative ways of combining survey data and data collected in other ways may be in scope provided the focus is primarily on the alternative data collection and the proposed work is complementary to and does not overlap with Survey Futures. It is not mandatory for projects funded under Theme B to directly link to Survey Futures.

15. **What are the main differences between the themes A and B?**

	Theme A	Theme B
Scope	Any proposal to undertake scoping for a potential large transformational future data collections infrastructure, focussed on data collected (by surveys or any other means) for research that would not otherwise exist.	Specifically about collection of data for research using means beyond mainstream surveys. It is expected to be complementary to (i.e., not overlap with) Survey Futures, which focuses on the mainstream survey research methods.
Focus	The primary focus is on data collections infrastructure, capable of supporting a range of research questions over time, by providing data that would not otherwise exist, collected specifically for research purposes; the primary focus should not be on administrative data or smart data, as these fall in the remit of Administrative Data UK (ADRUK) or Smart Data Research UK (SDRUK) respectively (please also see Question 6).	The main focus should be a proposal of innovative ways of collecting data for research; it should not be about how to improve the mainstream survey methods which is the focus of Survey Futures. As the focus is on collection of data that would not otherwise exist, applications mainly focusing on smart data or administrative data will be out of scope (please also see Question 6).
Scalability	Towards the end of the project, each award holder will be required to provide ESRC with recommendations for further development into a larger project to establish transformational data collections infrastructure. ESRC may select a project to develop into an application to the UKRI Infrastructure Fund.	Towards the end of the project, each award holder will be required to provide ESRC with recommendations on how the findings will help the development of data collections infrastructure by improving ways in which high quality data are collected for social science, including, but not limited to, how the learning could be applied more widely and/or on a larger scale.