

# **Smart Data Research UK - Data Services Opportunity**

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Scope**

**1. How does SDR UK relate to ADR UK and HDR UK?**

SDR UK addresses a significant gap within the research data infrastructure landscape. Our remit covers data generated by digital devices, sensors and services, much of which is held by private companies. We work closely with programmes across UKRI and beyond. Some of the areas we will work together on include:

- data discoverability
- skills
- communities of practice that support interdisciplinary, cross domain research.

**2. Our proposal focuses on acquiring, stewarding and enabling access to multiple data sources and types including data harnessed through academic research and lab-based study alongside "smart data". Is this within scope of the call?**

A fundamental role of the data services will be to provide research ready data sets to researchers which meet their needs. We expect data products may include a range of data types. However, as we set out in our call, we expect for the primary focus of our data services to be on realising its value proposition focusing on one or more smart data types and thematic areas.

**3. Our proposal focuses on supporting research communities outside of the social sciences, is this within the scope of the opportunity?**

Yes - the SDR UK data services will support a wide range of research communities, and the primary academic community does not need to be within the social sciences.

**4. Does our leadership team need to include social science representation? Do we need to add social science expertise to our proposal to show that we are covering ESRC's portfolio?**

Data services should be led by multidisciplinary teams that have the skills, knowledge and experience required to deliver a smart data service. There is no requirement for social science expertise in the data services, but you need to demonstrate you have the right team in place to deliver your data service.

The programme is being led on behalf of UKRI by the strategic hub which based in ESRC. Social science expertise is often critical in understanding the social and economic processes which create smart data

**5. Can we provide datasets that are derived using smart data, but do not necessarily provide access to raw smart data?**

Yes. We are interested in acquiring, stewarding and enabling access to smart data that meets the needs of researchers. This may include derived data products and/or access to raw data feeds. It is for the data services to determine what outputs meet the needs of their communities, and provide evidence of these needs.

- 6. Do you require data licenses for all data sets to be provided through the service? In some cases, a lot of smart data services is data is repurposed, not through clear data licensing.**  
SDR UK will acquire, steward and enable access to smart data in a legal, ethical and secure manner. The data services need to clearly demonstrate that they are operating in a legal and ethical manner which meets data licence terms.
- 7. Where would electoral roll / consumer registers fit within your definition of “smart data”?**  
Electoral roll data would most likely sit outside of the primary scope of SDR UK as it is created by a public sector administrative process. We expect the focus of our data services to be on realising a value proposition focusing on one or more smart data types and thematic areas. However, to make smart data useful, we expect that it will often make sense to sit it alongside other data types.
- 8. What is SDR UK’s interest in digital inclusion?**  
We are interested in understanding how we might:
- Understand and address biases within smart data that result from its coverage, where digitally excluded people are often less represented
  - understand hard to reach groups
  - develop new methodological innovations and practices to engage hard to reach groups.

## Timeframes

- 9. When will the new services be implemented, how long before we start to see new data, and how long before we see the results of research using that data?**  
The data services are being commissioned over the summer 2024 with new services coming online in the Autumn. It obviously depends on what data services are commissioned but we are looking for data services that can demonstrate delivery targets within this funding period.
- 10. Can you say more about the expectations for data acquisition? Recognizing that some new data service services may have longer to ramp up than others.**  
We recognize there will be differences in the time taken by data services of differing maturities to become established. Clearly, we have a set of key deliverables that we need to deliver as a programme. We will take a portfolio approach in terms of assessing how that mix of proposals is initially funded. Therefore, we welcome proposals for new services providing they can demonstrate they have the necessary expertise, experience and track record to deliver a sustainable data service and offer mitigation strategies for the risks associated with starting up.

## Applications and the team

- 11. Would you support a consortia-based approach in collaboration with a private industry?**  
Yes, providing the lead organisation is a recognised research organisation and the project partners contribution is clearly set out in a letter of support.

**12. Can you clarify whether the value proposition should be based on a primary category of data and one of the core themes, or whether it can be one or the other?**

Each service should develop a strong and clear value proposition that sets out (a) the primary category of smart data they will acquire and steward, and (b) the core research theme(s) their service will support aligned to the SDR UK pillars. A data service can cover more than one primary category of data, but we are not expecting a data service to cover all categories of data or themes. We want applicants to concentrate on the area where they can make the strongest case.

**13. Would it be acceptable to have an early career researcher as one of the co-directors??**

We encourage and support the development of leadership skills across the data infrastructure landscape and welcome early-stage co-directors with the appropriate support and mentoring around them. We would encourage applicants to be clear in the proposal about why co-directors would work well together, how work would be distributed and how they would form an effective working partnership.

**14. Can applicants or individuals be named on more than one data service?**

Applicants can be a co-lead on more than one proposal or grant.

**15. Who would own any IP produced? Would it be UKRI/ESRC?**

Unless otherwise agreed (e.g. as part of grant conditions / or set out in the grant offer letter), all intellectual property shall belong to the party that generates them. Where the grant is associated with more than one research organisation and/or other project partners, the basis of collaboration between the organisations including ownership of intellectual property and rights to exploitation, must be set out in a formal collaboration agreement in a way that is proportionate to and appropriately reflects the exact nature of the collaboration.

Research organisations are responsible for ensuring that all parties engaged in the research make every reasonable effort to ensure that the intellectual assets obtained in the course of the research, whether protected by intellectual property rights or not, are used to the benefit of society and the economy.

In individual cases, UKRI/ESRC reserves the right to retain ownership of intellectual assets, including intellectual property (or assign it to a third party under an exploitation agreement) and to arrange for it to be exploited for the national benefit and that of the research organisation involved.

If you need more information, you can find UKRI's grant terms and conditions here:

[UKRI-04042023-UKRI\\_fEC-Grant-Terms-And-Conditions-April-2023.pdf](#).

**16. Could you clarify the 0.7 FTE requirement: is this for the lead (one/two people) or the group of co-leads?**

The **combined project lead and co-lead leadership** time charged to the grant for delivery of the service, **excluding time dedicated to proof-of-concept research**, should be a minimum of 0.7 full time effort (FTE). This should be set out clearly by applicants in the management plan.

**17. Can Local Authorities apply for this opportunity?**

To be the lead applicant on a proposal for this opportunity you must be from a recognised research organisation. However, we accept co-leads from a variety of backgrounds, including business, international or policy. Please refer to our funding guidance for further information.

**18. Can the data services offer data for territories other than the UK?**

Successful data services could offer data sourced from non-UK territories. Relevance to UK research is more important than the original source. However, applicants must also ensure they take account of the rules concerning the flow of international data.

**19. Are there any restrictions on the number of applications a university can lead on?**

There are no restrictions on research organisations on the number of proposals they can submit though we would expect the proposals to be subject to internal review and triaging as standard.

**20. Would it be possible for a single institution to be awarded grants to deliver two distinct services?**

Yes.

**21. The opportunity states that "very small fractions of project lead/co-lead time should be avoided". Can you please clarify what is the threshold for a "very small fraction of time"? For example, will 0.1 FTE be considered a very small fraction?**

It depends on several different factors including for example: the size of the investment; its complexity; ambition; the team; and individual responsibilities. However, anything less than 0.3FTE project lead time might be flagged to the panel to consider whether there was enough time committed towards the leadership of the investment. The data services are large, complex and ambitious investments which require vision, leadership and management.

**22. There are significant privacy issues with the data within our scope that need to be addressed and these won't be sorted before we submit our proposal, is this OK?**

We expect there are various aspects the data services will need to address both at their outset and through their ongoing development (including privacy). The panel and the hub will need to be assured that risks to delivery can be appropriately managed and mitigated, that fundamental privacy rights will always be protected, and that safeguarding public trust is prioritised.

**23. Is it possible that the panel won't use "building relationships with data owners" as a criteria for some bids, where other benefits are substantial?**

Activity 1 of Objective 1 states that data services to acquire data by building long term partnerships with data owners or other means. Proposals that aren't directly focused on building partnerships with data owners will need to explain their approach to delivering objective 1 through other means.

**24. Are there any sections of the application that might be considered "less important" but are not so?**

Don't forget the big service element here. In setting out the value proposition for your data service you should present:

- clear evidence of current and ongoing demand for the data service on the part of researchers
- clear use cases for how the data service will meet the needs of users and enable real world impacts

Data services will need to develop and curate data products that meet the needs of users. They will need to provide user support, collaborate to build a user-friendly federation of services, work together and wider landscape to support the development of research skills across the community.

## **Delivery Model and Federation**

**25. What's the role of the Hub?**

Please read the briefing which sets out what you can expect from the wider programme, including the role of the hub and the data services.

**26. How will the data services be federated, integrated or standardised?**

The goal isn't to integrate everything. Different data services work with different kinds of data and serve different research use cases. However, the hub will work with the services to identify priorities for standardisation that smooth the user experience or unlock cross-domain analysis. The hub will convene the data services to work together on this task, in line with Objective 2 of the call. Services will be required to set aside resources for this, and together we will define a programme of work in alignment with the wider data infrastructure landscape.