

UKRI policy fellowships 2025: fellowship position

Fellowship title: Foundations What Works Centre for Children and Families domestic violence and evidence-based interventions fellowship

Fellowship type: What Works innovation fellowship

Host organisation: [Foundations](#)

Host team: Evidence team

Summary: to leverage social and behavioural sciences to identify and address barriers that hinder practitioners' participation in impact evaluations randomised controlled trials (RCTs), while also enhancing their overall experience with the process of evaluation

Policy topic: evidence-based public policy. Relates to the government mission "Breaking down barriers to opportunity" and the Violence Against Women and Girls agenda

Research Council: ESRC

Academic discipline(s): social science, social policy evaluation, behavioural science, applied research ethics or other related fields

Research career stage: open to all career stages with strong knowledge of, or direct practice experience in children and family services

Fellowship structure

Inception phase:

Estimated start date: February 2026. Exact date to be confirmed by the host depending on onboarding and security clearance requirements

Duration: three months

FTE: 0.4 FTE

Main placement phase:

Duration: 12 months

FTE: 0.6 to 1 FTE

Knowledge exchange phase:

Duration: three months

FTE: 0.4 FTE

Work arrangements

Location requirements: Foundations will invite the fellow to attend an in-person full day induction at the beginning of the inception phase. Given the importance of knowledge exchange, learning, and integration within the wider team, we encourage the fellow to work from our London office at least two days a week, particularly during the main placement. However, we recognise that this arrangement may not be feasible for exceptional candidates based elsewhere and are open to alternative arrangements. During the main placement and knowledge exchange phases this role is also likely to involve travel across the UK. The final research design will determine specific travel requirements but may include approximately six to nine in-person meetings with local stakeholders

Hybrid working: all Foundations staff living within two hours of London are expected to work from the office at least twice a week, while home-based workers are expected to come in at least once a month. These same principles would apply to the successful fellow. The fellow would be invited to join the weekly organisation-wide meeting on Mondays (hybrid) and fortnightly Evidence team meetings (hybrid). Attending team meetings would provide an opportunity for the fellow to embed themselves within the team, troubleshoot issues and provide progress updates on the fellowship. Further, the fellow will also meet regularly with their line manager at Foundations. Eligible Travel and Subsistence costs are supported in the main UKRI grant. Please see full call text and guidance for more details

Security clearance: not applicable

Fellowship description

Despite the prevalence and severity of domestic abuse in the UK, there remains a surprising lack of evidence-based interventions, particularly those evaluated through RCTs.

A [feasibility study](#) conducted by Foundations identified key barriers to using RCTs in evaluating interventions for victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse, including:

- Concerns over reputational risks from unfavourable findings
- Resistance to randomisation
- Inadequate preparation, such as insufficient planning
- Limited appreciation for evaluative thinking, even when formal evaluations are not conducted

To address these challenges, Foundations is looking to embed a policy fellow who will work across the organisation and with key external stakeholders to:

- Identify 'best bets', solutions with the highest likelihood of success given the available evidence and constraints
- Codesign and collaborate with key stakeholders to refine these solutions
- Pilot them on a small scale
- Evaluate their impact on practitioners' understanding of, and support for, evaluation in general and RCTs in particular

This fellowship presents a critical opportunity to support service providers in overcoming evaluation challenges, particularly those with limited experience in impact evaluation. Currently, there is limited research on:

- The most effective messaging for building the case for impact evaluation
- The best methods to communicate and enhance evaluation capacity (for example, training, videos, mentoring)
- The key stakeholders best positioned to drive evaluation efforts (for example, What Works Centres, evaluation partners, training practitioners)
- Realistic expectations for impact estimates in evaluations of similar services with comparable constraints

By generating new evidence and testing solutions, we aim to embed evaluative thinking in sectors working with Foundations, helping funders and practitioners better assess successful or promising initiatives.

This research will be strategic and forward-looking, aiming to generate insights for future evaluations and foster a culture of evidence-based decision-making within children and family services. Given the scarcity of successful impact evaluations in the domestic abuse sector, this work has the potential to make a significant contribution.

Foundations would be interested in publishing the outputs of the fellowship on our website to ensure findings reach a wide range of relevant audiences. We would also be supportive of the fellow publishing research in academic journals. If published, the findings could advance research in meta-evaluation and participant behaviours in RCTs, shaping future studies. Foundations will work with the fellow to codesign a research approach that aligns with both the organisation's goals and the fellow's research interests. We anticipate the approach will:

- Identify barriers to rigorous impact evaluations at the individual, service and system levels
- Draw on multiple research activities, including desk research, interviews, workshops and stakeholder engagement
- Develop strategies and recommendations to address these barriers and test their feasibility with stakeholders
- Produce practical resources for practitioners and organisations to support successful evaluation implementation
- Disseminate learnings within Foundations and externally to stakeholders and decision-makers

Foundations is strongly committed to Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Equity (EDIE). The fellow will ensure that EDIE considerations are embedded throughout the project. Any guidance and outputs must have a central focus on equity and inclusivity.

Benefits to the fellow include opportunities to:

- Build networks and engage with Foundations' key practice and policy stakeholders
- Influence policy evaluation approaches, including at the local practice level
- Contribute to strengthening evaluation capacity in the domestic abuse sector to build evidence on 'what works' to reduce domestic abuse

Person specification

Applications will be assessed by UKRI panel assessment against the following essential opportunity-specific requirements in addition to the generic eligibility and call criteria:

Essential criteria:

- A strong understanding of evaluation including impact evaluations (especially RCTs), implementation and process evaluations (IPEs) or value-for-money evaluations
- Experience conducting fieldwork with practice stakeholders in relevant sectors
- A strong understanding of agenda around What Works Centres and the broader agenda around evidence-based policy and practice in public services
- Excellent communication skills and the ability to translate complex information and research findings into meaningful narrative for a non-academic audience to drive decision-making and achieve impact

Applicants shortlisted from the panel assessment will be assessed at the host-led interview selection process against the following desirable opportunity-specific requirements:

Desirable criteria:

- Subject-matter knowledge related to any of Foundations' [five priority areas](#)
- Experience managing trials and engaging with practitioners to deliver evaluations
- Practice experience within children's services or strong knowledge of the sector
- Experience developing practical tools and solutions to support service delivery or evaluation activities such as data collection
- Experience building capacity and understanding of those who are less experienced with evaluation

Privacy notice

If applicants are shortlisted by the UKRI assessment panel UKRI will need to share the application and any personal information that it contains with the host for the host led interview selection process.

Your personal data will be handled in line with UK data protection legislation and managed securely. If you would like to know more, including how to exercise your Rights, please see the UKRI [privacy notice](#).

Foundation's privacy notice can be found here: [Foundations' privacy policy](#). Hosts will delete your data at the end of the selection process unless you are successful, in which case we will retain your data as an independent data controller.