AHRC Large Grants: Questions & Answers

General

Q: What should we consider in deciding whether to apply for this programme versus AHRC Standard Grants route?

A: Scale is the key differentiator, both in terms of the funding available and research impact. The standard research grants route allows applications for up to £1.5m, whereas Large Grants applications must be between £2 and £3m.

You should also consider that team convening is an essential and core aspect of this funding opportunity. This approach is not required for the standard research grants route, although team convening can provide a strong framework for the required 'collaborative research' element of applications.

Q: If a project is unsuccessful at outline stage is it possible to resubmit a refocused project to the AHRC Standard Grant route?

A: As per AHRC's resubmission policy, when an application has been unsuccessful in the assessment process, the applicants cannot resubmit the same or substantively similar application to any scheme or opportunity offered by AHRC or other UKRI bodies. This applies to both outline and full stage applications. Please see the AHRC research funding guide for details on what differentiates a new proposal from a resubmission.

Q: Can I submit a previously unsuccessful idea to this funding opportunity, albeit with a very different framing and scale?

A: AHRC's standard resubmission policy applies to this funding opportunity. However, if you are considering an idea with a very different framing and scale, this may count as a new proposal. Please see the AHRC research funding guide for details on what differentiates a new proposal from a resubmission.

Q: Are there likely to be future rounds of this scheme?

A: AHRC does plan to offer future rounds of this scheme. At present, we cannot offer details on timelines or amounts of funding available for any future rounds.

Q: How many awards do you expect to make?

A: Up to five.

Q: Are the projects funded through the Missions Pilot published?

A: Yes – you can find out more about the three projects on the AHRC blog here: Mission Awards pilot a team convening approach.

Q: Do you have feedback from the previous round on why grants weren't successful or what made the difference between a standard grant and a large/mission grant?

A: Expert assessors from the Missions pilot observed that less competitive applications often struggled to balance a genuine commitment to co-creation with maintaining a clear and impact-driven vision. Another common weakness was limited inclusion and recognition of diverse types of expertise, such as professional service enabling staff, technicians and industry partners.

When evaluating suitability between Large Grants and AHRC's standard research grants route, applicant teams should primarily think about whether their ambition proportionate to the scale of funding available. They should also note that team convening is a required approach for this funding opportunity, whereas this framework is not required for our standard research grants opportunity.

Q: What lessons did AHRC learn from the Missions call and how have they influenced the design of this Large Grants call?

A: AHRC has extensively reviewed evidence from the Missions call, both from internal experiences and the Thrive project's high-quality data collection throughout the Pilot process. Some of the key lessons we have taken forward from the previous call are:

- The piloting of team convening was highly successful and saw research teams working together in new, innovative ways. This has remained at the centre of the design considerations for this call.
- We have increased the amount of time between call launch and deadline for submission at outline stage to reflect the work that goes in to convening a team.
- We have simplified the outline stage questions and designed the assessment criteria to offer a more effective route to articulating the complex and varied nature of research teams using team convening at this scale.
- In response to feedback on the Pilot, we have widened the eligibility criteria to facilitate participation of Project Co-Leads from business, third sector and government. In the funding opportunity, we also flag the new UKRI-wide addition to the 'Specialist' role type which facilitates public contributors and people with lived experience. It is not a requirement to use these roles – instead, they are available for those teams and projects which would be enriched by these types of participation.

Q: Does this opportunity favour senior academics? Do you recommend that early career academics apply as Project Lead?

A: It is important to remember that 'Project Lead' is a purely administrative role for this funding opportunity, and does not denote a specific status within the applicant team. As such, career stage of nominated Project Leads will not factor into funding decisions.

If an early career researcher is deemed the most suitable individual to nominate as Project Lead (i.e. they are based at the research organisation which would receive funding from AHRC and they have the capacity to act as our primary administrative point of contact) then of course that is permitted. We wholeheartedly welcome inclusion of people at different career stages across the applicant team, including through Project Co-Lead roles.

Q: I would like to be part of a Large Grants bid, but don't have a team. Can you help me find a team to join?

A: We are not able to host matchmaking for this funding opportunity. We strongly encourage individuals interested in forming part of a Large Grants applicant team to begin networking and building partnerships as soon as possible. The two-stage process for this funding opportunity allows applicants at the outline stage to focus on team convening and idea generation, and then if invited to full stage, teams will be able to much more fully develop their plan for research.

Q: How many outline applications may we submit given the note on demand management 'if needed'?

There is not an institutional cap on applications. However, an individual can only be part of one team, and therefore one application, for this funding opportunity.

The section in the opportunity guidance on demand management is standard UKRI text that will be included in all funding opportunities going forward. For this funding opportunity, we have designed the application and assessment process to vastly reduce the likelihood of needing to implement further demand management measures:

- Each individual applicant can only be a member of one applicant team and therefore can only participate in a maximum of one application to this funding opportunity.
- Having an outline stage reduces the burden of work for most applicants, as you will not be asked for a full application unless you have a strong chance of being successful in bidding for funding.
- Distributed peer review self-scales, as the more applications we receiver, the larger our pool of assessors.
- Portfolio balancing will look at the spread of research organisations to ensure that the applications invited to full stage are representative of our funding landscape.

Q: Is there a maximum size of team, or any expectation that they should come from more than one research institution?

A: No, there is no maximum size of team, and we do not require that team members should come from more than one research institution.

Q: Can we submit an application that is also being submitted to another funder?

A: Yes, although in the event that both applications are successful, you will not be able to receive duplicative funding and would be required to decide between accepting the AHRC Large Grants offer of funding or the other funder's offer.

Your team

Q: Does the applicant team need to have existing funding from AHRC or UKRI through smaller grants, such as through the Curiosity or Catalyst funding opportunities?

A: No. There is no requirement to have held previous AHRC or UKRI funding.

Q: Does eligibility for project co-leads extend beyond higher education and research institutes? Having co-leads beyond academia is important in co-production and co-creation research projects.

A: Yes. We have extended project co-lead eligibility to include individuals from UK business, third sector or government bodies in alignment with ESRC's existing policy. If you are looking to include someone in your team who is not eligible for this role through the policy, you may wish to instead consider the 'Specialist' role as defined in Roles in funding applications: eligibility, responsibilities and costings guidance. This role now includes public contributors such as people with lived experience.

Q: Can we include international collaboration in our team?

A: Researchers based at international organisations can be included in applications when in alignment with UKRI's project co-lead (international) policy. You must ensure that your international collaborators are eligible for funding through this policy. Bear in mind that at full stage, you will be asked for costings. To prepare for this from outline stage, you should ensure that any proposed project co-lead (international) involvement is financially feasible within the policy cap of 30% of the project's Full Economic Cost.

Q: Can there be project co-leads from business, third sector and government bodies from overseas or just in the UK?

A: Project co-leads from business, third sector and government bodies must be based in the UK. If you are looking to include business, third sector or government expertise from overseas, then they cannot be project co-leads. However, you could consider whether their involvement can be facilitated through a subcontractor role.

Q: Is there a minimum or maximum of how much time each project co-lead should spend on the project?

A: There is no minimum or maximum requirement. We expect the time commitment of each team member to be proportionate and relative to the contribution they would make to the project. Each individual's contribution should also be meaningful and appropriate within the framework of your overall project.

Q: Does the project lead need to have a PhD, or is experience in managing a large project enough?

A: No, the nominated project lead does not need to have a PhD. This role can be nominated from a range of roles across the core team, and the individual selected does not need to be an academic. Experience in managing a large project would be sufficient reason to make the selection. They must be affiliated with the lead research organisation for the application and have the capacity to act as AHRC's primary point of contact for the application.

Q: Is the administrative lead expected to request more time than other co-leads to compensate for the administrative burden on their institution?

A: The time requested for the nominated project lead should include calculation of the administrative work they are committing to. However, this will not necessarily be more time than the other project co-leads, as it depends on their individual contributions across the project. This administrative work may additionally be shared out across the team; the nominated project lead will simply be AHRC's initial point of contact on the Funding Service, and can coordinate responsibilities with the rest of the team as they feel is more appropriate.

Q: At the outline stage (and even the final stage) how many of our core team should we have in place in addition to the project co-leads? Can we recruit for roles after the grant has been issued in order to broaden the pool of potential participants?

A: This is at the discretion of the applicant team. You are encouraged to think imaginatively about your team's composition and meaningfully integrate appropriate expertise from across the research ecosystem. Assessors will be looking for evidence that your team has convened the capability to deliver against the specific needs and nature of your proposed research. If your team decides that the best way to do this is through open recruitment for certain roles, then you should explain this in your application.

Q: Can our team include experts from other UKRI council's disciplinary funding remits?
A: Yes, where their involvement will enrich the project's capacity to deliver transformative research.

Q: How many people constitute a team?

A: There will be no one-size-fits-all team format. You should convene your team according to the needs and nature of your research idea: some ideas will need more people to realise, others fewer. On average, we would expect most projects to have somewhere between three and 10 project co-leads, including the nominated project lead.

Q: Is there any expectation or benefit for teams to be cross-institutional?

A: There is no obligation for teams to be cross-institutional. This is at the discretion of the applicant team. You are encouraged to think imaginatively about your team's composition and meaningfully integrate appropriate expertise from across the research ecosystem. Assessors will be looking for evidence that your team has convened the capability to deliver against the specific needs and nature of your proposed research, so you should evidence how you have taken an appropriate route to achieve this in your application. This may or may not include cross-institutional collaboration.

Q: Is it possible to include post-doctoral researchers in the core team, including as a project co-lead?

A: Yes. If including an individual as a co-lead, they will need to meet the eligibility criteria for project co-leads as outlined in UKRI's guidance on Individual eligibility. If the individual is not eligible for a project co-lead role, they may instead be better included as a research and innovation associate.

Q: How do you expect to judge team co-design at outline stage?

A: Effective co-design is tailored to its specific context, so we have not set a standardised approach for this. Assessors will be asked to consider how you have evidenced that your team has convened the capability to deliver against the specific needs and nature of your proposed research.

Q: Is the assumption that all named researchers will be co-leads?
A: No, this is not a blanket rule. We encourage applicant teams to review the list of roles eligible within this funding opportunity, and to select the most appropriate one for each individual. For some teams, all named researchers might be co-leads; for others, it might be more appropriate to use the breadth of roles available in full. We will offer flexibility between

stages: if your team is invited to make a full stage application and you realise that you have not selected the most accurate role for an individual, you will be permitted to change their role at this stage.

Q: Will Project Partners be able to also be Subcontractors on the grant to deliver specific activities that require resourcing?

A: As articulated in the AHRC Research Funding Guide, project partners can have dual roles and also act as subcontractors. However, this must be fully justified and will be subject to peer review. Project partner related costs are expected to be minor. Where the project needs work to be undertaken that is more significant and includes costs other than travel and subsistence, the organisation or individual may need to be included as both a project partner and a subcontractor.

Q: Do you have any advice for the capability to deliver section in line with the team convening principles? What does 'good' look like?

A: A good application will show real attention to the diversity of expertise needed to bring the research idea to fruition. You should convene your team according to the needs and nature of your research idea. As this will be unique to each application, there will be no one-size-fits-all team format.

Scope

Q: What areas in "Arts & Humanities" are in scope?

A: This funding opportunity celebrates the full diversity of the arts and humanities. Applications are welcome from across AHRC's subject remit. See the AHRC Research Funding Guide for our remit coverage.

Q: Can a Large Grants application primarily focus on addressing an arts and humanities research challenge?

A: Yes. This is a curiosity-driven mode of funding, so applicant teams are welcome to put forward ideas addressing any challenge where they perceive arts and humanities methodologies and approaches could make a substantive positive change. Your team should be able to articulate why their chosen research challenge is important, why arts and humanities methods and approaches are essential to addressing it, and what substantive positive change could result from this work.

Q: What level of interdisciplinarity (beyond AHRC's remit) is permitted? How can we be certain whether our interdisciplinary project is within scope for this funding opportunity?

A: Applicants may integrate research from outside AHRC's subject remit where approaches, methods and knowledge from other disciplines can enrich the project's capacity to deliver transformative research. The majority of the project's disciplinary focus must fall within AHRC's subject remit. You may find it useful to check your team's expertise, methods, approaches and questions against the AHRC disciplines. If you are not sure whether your research falls within the remit of AHRC, you can use the Remit Form to submit a pre-application enquiry. Note that we aim to respond to remit enquiries within two weeks. You should submit your enquiry as early as possible.

Q: How do you distinguish between duplication and building productively on prior programmes?

A: We have said that applications which are duplicative of our other major investments will not be competitive within the context of this funding opportunity. At outline stage, we expect applicant teams to clearly demonstrate the novelty of their proposed research. Depending on the team and project concept, this might include explaining how this research would build productively on existing or previous AHRC programmes of investment.

Q: What does 'sustainability of benefits beyond the funding period' entail? Is our team expected to commit to work on the project beyond the funded period?

A: Sustainability of benefits does not mean that your team is expected to commit to unfunded work beyond the period of the grant. It means that you should consider legacy planning to ensure that your outputs continue to be accessible to your targeted beneficiaries after the grant has ended, and that they are positioned to advance knowledge, improve lives or drive growth. For example, if you have web-based outputs designed for the benefit of a public audience, how will you ensure that these can be accessed after the project has ended, and how will you ensure that your target audience knows that these outputs are available and useful for them?

Q: Are the specific outputs that the AHRC would favour? For example, is there more emphasis on impact or traditional outputs?

A: There is no emphasis or favouring of output types. Instead, assessment will focus on how appropriate your proposed outputs are to your research questions and how likely they are to deliver tangible and impactful change within your chosen area of research. All applications are expected to provide benefit through advancing knowledge. Depending on the nature of your proposed research, it may also be suitable to plan for benefits across society, culture and the economy.

Q: Our project focuses on another country or world region. How does AHRC assess impact that benefits both the UK and this other country or region?

A: The quality of planned impact will be assessed through peer review (DPR at Outline and traditional review at full stage). As this is a curiosity driven research funding opportunity, AHRC has not set an expectation around how impact should be geographically distributed; this would be a matter for the applicant team to decide on and justify in their application.

Q: To what extent are you seeking a fit with delivering government Missions?

A: Applications do not have to fit with delivery of the government Missions, as this is a curiosity-driven funding opportunity. As a standalone factor, fit with government Missions will neither advantage nor disadvantage an application.

Q: To what extent does the definition of "impact" for this scheme overlap with impact as defined and assessed in REF?

A: The Research Excellence Framework defines impact as ‘an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia’. All of these examples would be considered as impact within the context of this funding opportunity. In addition, this funding opportunity will support impact on research, such as advancement of academic knowledge.

Q: Would the inclusion of citizen science and deep community engagement be welcomed in applications?

A: Yes, so long as other expectations set in the scope are met – most importantly, that the majority of the project sits within AHRC’s disciplinary remit.

Application to outcome journey

Q: What feedback will our application receive?

A: Distributed Peer Review is the feedback mechanism for the outline stage of the Large Grants funding opportunity. You will receive up to 8 reviews (including scores) that will help your team to understand why your application either was or was not prioritised for invitation to full stage. This feedback could also be useful for developing your ideas or preparing future applications.

Your outcome email will confirm whether your team is invited to submit a full stage application, or if your application has not been selected to take forward. You will receive a single score with your outcome, based on the average of your distributed peer review scores, and a reminder of UKRI’s definition for this scoring range. There will not be additional feedback as part of the outline stage outcomes process.

Q: How detailed should the description of work packages and planned outcomes be at the outline stage?

A: As this is an outline stage, we have purposefully implemented lower word limits and set assessment criteria that does not require comprehensive detail. We are looking for an outline of your proposed project, not a full stage application. However, you do need to provide enough information for your peer reviewers to understand what you are proposing. Applicant teams should focus on providing convincing answers to the questions asked under each section, reflecting on the assessment criteria and guidance provided for each section.

Q: How long will the full stage submission window be open from January 2027?

A: We are planning for the full stage submission window to be open for twelve weeks, closing in late March 2027.

Q: Will we be told which tier our application has been assigned to?

A: No. Your outcome will entail your overall score based on the average of your distributed peer review scores, a reminder of UKRI’s definition for this scoring range, and whether your team has been invited to submit a full stage application or not.

Q: In the second stage, will applications be judged equally, or will they be weighted by the tier and score they are assigned from the first round?
A: Applications will be judged equally at full stage, without any weighting from the outline stage. No reviews, comments or scores from the outline stage will be made available to the expert reviewers invited to assess the full stage applications.

Distributed Peer Review

Q: I am taking October half term as annual leave. Does this mean I cannot participate as a reviewer in the DPR process?

A: Taking annual leave in October, regardless of whether this intersects with half term, does not preclude you from taking part in the DPR process. We ask any nominated reviewers to be confident that their planned leave would not prevent them from acting as reviewers throughout the month. You will have three weeks from receiving your allocated reviews to complete and submit them. If you are confident that the time you are taking out of office will not prevent you from reviewing up to six applications within this period, we are very happy for you to participate as a reviewer in the DPR process.

Q: Are there restrictions on which members of my team can be nominated to take part of the distributed peer review process?

A: The only restriction on which members of the team can participate in DPR applies to all potential reviewers: the team must only nominate individuals with the capacity, knowledge and confidence to provide constructive, comprehensive, quality reviews. We welcome teams to nominate team members from non-academic training or employment contexts, different career stages and international employment contexts, so long as the expectations above are met.

Q: Will there be any training for the Distributed Peer Review element and, if so, when will this be offered?

A: Yes, we will organise a training session for nominated reviewers. This will be a virtual session scheduled after the funding opportunity has closed, in order for us to have a complete list of nominated reviewers to invite. The session will be recorded for those who cannot attend live. In the interim, prospective reviewers can find out more about the DPR process and what is expected of them by reading through ‘Distributed Peer Review Guidance for AHRC Large Grants’, which is a document accessible via the Funding Finder page for this opportunity.

Q: How will DPR assessment be moderated?

A: The UK Metascience Unit will flag to AHRC where individual reviews or patterns of scoring suggest potential for concern. AHRC will appoint moderators from within UKRI to examine these flagged reviews. If robust justification has not been provided for scoring, the review or reviews in question will be excluded from the assessment process and not be factored into scoring averages.

Q: Will the Distributed Peer Review approach also be adopted for full stage submissions?

A: No, it will not. This is because we will have a smaller cohort of applicants (approximately 15 teams) and the funding opportunity is heterogenous in disciplinary scope. That means we cannot guarantee that the applicant pool would have sufficient diversity of expertise to assess each other.

Q: Does DPR introduce an element of conflict of interest?

A: All expert assessment processes contain risk around introducing conflicts of interest, as funders are reliant on assessors to declare any conflicts beyond the ‘hard’ conflicts of being named in an application or being associated with the same organisation. This means that we have to operate on trust and good faith in all expert assessment processes, and DPR is no exception.

We also have plenty of evidence to demonstrate that applicants can act as objective assessors in well-regulated assessment process. In some other parts of UKRI, it is standard practise to invite applicants to act as expert reviewers and panel introducers for other applications submitted to the same funding opportunity.

Further to this, we are using a suite of protections to safeguard this assessment process. You can find out more about this in the document ‘Distributed Peer Review Guidance for AHRC Large Grants’, which is accessible via the Funding Finder page for this opportunity.

Q: Will these applications only be evaluated through DPR, or will there also be reviewers from outside the applicant pool?

A: DPR is the primary assessment mechanism for this funding opportunity. If there is insufficient expertise to assess your application across the pool of other applicants, expert reviewers who are not applicants may also be invited to review your application.

Q: How does DPR ensure the availability of necessary specialist knowledge and experience?

A: We are asking applicants to use a set of defined classifications to describe their project and the expertise of their nominated reviewers. We will then use an allocation algorithm to match reviewers with applications with complementary specialisms. As each application will receive a much higher volume of feedback than through a standard peer review process, we would expect to see variation in how closely matched each reviewer’s expertise is to the application at hand.

Additionally, since this is an outline stage, the level of detail provided in applications should be fully accessible to reviewers with a range of specialist knowledge and experience. Reviewers’ awareness of the objectives and assessment criteria for this funding opportunity will be more important than a direct line of expertise in the specified research area.

Q: As the team convening approach is fairly new to the academic community, how will AHRC ensure reviewers are fully versed in the difference between this model and more traditional approaches?

A: As we are using Distributed Peer Review, we expect reviewers to have a good level of familiarity with the team convening principles through co-developing their own team’s application. We will also include refresher guidance on this in any training materials shared with nominated reviewers.

Q: Will AHRC review the feedback given and will there be repercussions if a reviewer is discriminatory or unnecessarily harsh?

A: We will perform our standard usability checks on all reviews. Additionally, UKRI's DPR process includes a moderation step. AHRC will engage moderators to advise on any reviews where it may be necessary to exclude them from the assessment process. If an applicant does attempt to 'game' the overall scoring system (for example, by giving consistently negative reviews and low scores without clear justification), the application they are involved with may not proceed.

Q: What are the consequences for providing poor quality reviews?

A: If moderators find that one reviewer's set of reviews are of consistently poor quality (for example, there is an attempt to 'game' the system by providing consistently negative reviews and low scores with no justification), the application in which the reviewer is involved may be rejected from consideration through this funding opportunity.

Q: If our application is rejected at outline stage, does the team still retain obligations for DPR?

A: This depends on whether your application is ineligible or not competitive. If the application is rejected as ineligible after initial checks are completed by AHRC, your team will not be asked to participate in DPR. We aim to notify applicants of any such decisions within four weeks of the closing date of this funding opportunity. Because DPR is the assessment mechanism for this outline stage, DPR responsibilities will be fulfilled before the broader competition is assessed and an unsuccessful outcome is decided upon.