
Last updated: 08 June 2020

Details about the ESRC Research Methods Development Grants (2020) call, including the call specification and Je-S guidance notes for applicants, can be found on the ESRC website. Please refer to those documents in the first instance for all queries.

Please note that this document may be updated to reflect those questions most frequently raised with the ESRC. It is highly recommended that potential applicants review the online version of this document on the ESRC website (rather than a saved or cached version) before contacting the ESRC for advice.

Note to applicants
This call has received a very high level of interest, as indicated by the receipt of approximately 300 Intention to Submit forms. Please ensure when completing your full applications that your proposal meets the core requirements of the call.

How much can I apply for? *new*
Researchers can apply for up to £200,000 (100% fEC) of which ESRC will pay 80%; this funding limit applies to both the main strand and the ADR-UK strategic steer.

What are the core requirements of the call?
Proposals should present a programme of work that will advance a methodological challenge in the social sciences clearly setting out how the outputs and outcomes of the proposed activities will contribute to this goal.

Proposals must aim to achieve at least one of the following:
- develop new methods;
- apply existing methods in a novel way; or
- develop our understanding of a methodological challenge and scope the new research activity required to address it.

Proposals must also include a collaboration from outside of academia or with researcher(s) working in a disciplinary area outside of the social sciences. Proposals must identify these collaborators and include them as either co-investigators or projects partners.

What partnerships are expected to be included in proposals?
Funding is expected to foster meaningful and lasting interdisciplinary collaborations that reach beyond the social sciences and broker or sustain cross-sector partnerships. Proposals must include a collaboration from outside of academia or with researcher(s) working in a disciplinary area outside of the social sciences. Applicants can seek a new collaboration or develop and advance an existing partnership(s). All proposals must justify why funding is needed to enable the collaboration.

Proposals collaborating with partners outside academia must demonstrate how the project partner will engage and contribute to the proposed project and how the methodological challenge is relevant to the work of the organization.

Applicants proposing to work with a non-academic partner are expected to demonstrate that they have explored co-funding for the project from the organisation they are collaborating with on the project. This can be a financial or in-kind contribution and should reflect the maturity of the relationship. Expectations will be higher for those with stronger links.

Collaborators must be identified in the proposal and included either as a co-investigator or project partner. Please see the associated guidance on the Inclusion of UK business, third sector or government body co-investigators on ESRC proposals (PDF, 93KB). For more information on international co-investigators and project partners please see the ESRC International Co-Investigators Policy Guidance on the inclusion of international co-investigators in ESRC proposals (PDF, 101.5KB).

Coronavirus and its impact on this call

What changes have been made to the call?
To mitigate the impact of the Coronavirus on the research community, we have adjusted the call deadline and commissioning timetable as follows:

- Call announced – 17 February 2020
- Deadline for Intention to Submit form – 16:00 on 26 March 2020
- Closing date for proposals – 16:00 on 11 June 2020
- Panel assessment – September 2020
- Decision to applicants – October 2020
- Projects start – 1 January 2021 – 1 March 2021

How do I take into account possible delays to conducting research due to the impact of Coronavirus?
Please indicate within the Case for Support any associated risks to completing your project within the budget and timeframe you have laid out in your proposal and include your proposed contingency plans to mitigate against these risks. If you do not foresee any risks as a result of the Coronavirus to the completion of your proposal, you may also indicate this in your Case for Support.

ADR UK Strategic Steer
How much can I apply for? *new*
Researchers can apply for up to £200,000 (100% fEC) of which ESRC will pay 80%; this funding limit applies to both the main strand and the ADR-UK strategic steer.

What is ADR UK?
Administrative Data Research UK (ADR UK) aims to transform the way researchers access the UK’s wealth of public sector data. By joining up the abundance of administrative data already being created by government and public bodies across the UK and making it available for researchers, ADR UK is enabling vital research that has the potential to lead to better informed policy decisions and more effective public services, in areas from improving education and healthcare to tackling crime. ADR UK’s work plays an important role in bridging the gap between government and academia, enabling government policy to be informed by the best evidence available.

What criteria will you use to assess if my proposal can be considered under the ADR UK strategic steer?
ADR UK is working with ESRC to support proposals that use administrative data to address methodological challenges related to their core mission. In support of achieving their mission, ADR UK has four key strategic goals (see below FAQ). Applications relevant to the ADR UK steer should therefore demonstrate the advancement of one or more of ADR UK’s four strategic goals.

What is ADR UK’s core mission? What are its four strategic goals?
Detailed information about ADR UK’s mission can be found on their website. More specifically, in support of achieving their mission, ADR UK has four strategic key goals that they seek to achieve as follows:

1. **Commitment and sustainability for administrative data research**: build acceptance in government of the imperative to release data and lay foundations for a sustainable research resource by focussing on addressing societal challenges through administrative data research
2. **Measurable public good**: demonstrate impact arising from administrative data research that addresses major societal challenges
3. **Seamless researcher service**: deliver transparent, coordinated, secure and timely access to UK administrative data and support services for the wider research community
4. **A highly useful long-term research resource**: increase flow and availability of high-quality research-ready UK administrative data, designed to enable research to address societal challenges and be preserved for the long term

Underlying these four strategic goals are 15 objectives that ADR UK and its partners are working collaboratively to deliver. These are also described on their website.

What is the end date for projects applying to the ADR UK strategic steer?
Grants funded through the ADR UK strategic steer must end by 31 March 2022. Due to budgetary constraints, this is a fixed end date and cannot be adjusted despite the call deadline extension and postponement of the commissioning timetable.

How should I decide if my proposal is relevant to the ADR UK strategic steer?
If the objectives of your proposal use administrative data to address a methodological challenge that supports one or more of ADR UK’s four strategic
goals, then we encourage you to submit your application to the ADR UK strategic steer.

**How do I indicate that I would like my proposal to be considered under the ADR UK strategic steer?**
If you wish to submit a proposal to the ADR UK steer then you must clearly identify this in the Case for Support within your application. This will require justification of why your application fits within this steer and which of ADR UK’s strategic goal(s) your proposal will address. You should then continue to submit your application as detailed in the call documents.
If you submit your application without identifying your interest in applying for the ADR UK strategic steer then your application will be considered as part of the main call.

**Can my proposal include administrative data and not fit the ADR UK mission?**
Yes. Proposals that include administrative data but fall outside of the scope of the ADR UK strategic steer will be considered as part of the main call.

**Can my proposal fit the ADR UK strategic steer but still be submitted into the main call?**
If your proposal meets the criteria for the ADR UK strategic steer, then we would encourage you to apply through this route.

**How many grants do you expect to fund through the ADR UK strategic steer?**
ADR UK expects to fund approximately 3-4 development grants through the steer and recognises projects may vary across budget and duration though all must be proportionate with the objectives of the grant.

**Are applicants permitted to partner with ADR UK as part of their bid?**
It is permissible within the call to collaborate with ADR UK partners, who are named on the ADR UK website under ‘Our Partnership’. Interested applicants should contact partners directly. Please note, as the administrative centre of ADR UK, the Strategic Hub will not be partnering on any bids. ADR UK partnership is *not* essential.

Following the culmination of the call, we will update all ADR UK partners about successful projects awarded funding through the ESRC Methods Development Grant 2020: ADR UK Strategic Steer, and if there is any interest from our partners in hearing more, ADR UK will be happy to facilitate introductions at that stage.

**Will an ADR UK partnership satisfy the requirement in the call for interdisciplinary or cross-sector collaboration?**
Working with one of the ADR UK partners would not satisfy the requirement in the call for interdisciplinary or cross-sector collaboration; applicants would still need to demonstrate why funding is needed to enable the collaboration, and proposals collaborating with partners outside academia must demonstrate how the project partner will engage and contribute to the proposed project.

**If your project is successfully funded through the ADR UK Strategic Steer, does that automatically give you access to administrative data?**
No. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that any dataset required for proposed work is available and accessible for use. However, there is already a variety of data available within ADR UK’s various partner data centres. Please see the ‘Our Data’ section of the ADR UK website, which approved researchers can apply to use for projects in the public interest.

General information

Can third sector, business and government body co-investigators be included?
ESRC welcomes inter-institutional proposals and strongly encourages partnerships with non-HEI organisations. Please refer to the business, third sector and government co-investigators policy for further information. Please note: the combined costs of international, business, third sector or government body co-investigators must not exceed 30% of the full 100% fEC cost of the grant. Where applicable, the 30% rule refers to the total costs of all Co-Is on the grant who fall under these categories, regardless of the number included or combination of types.

Can applications include associated studentships?
No. Associated studentships are not permitted on this call.

What is the difference between a seminar series and strategic network?
Seminar groups meet regularly to exchange information and ideas with the aim of advancing research within their fields. Strategic networks have the central aim of generating and developing innovative, interdisciplinary and user collaborations focused on potential new priority areas. Networks are built through a wider range of activities than seminars.

Impact

Do I need to submit a ‘Pathways to Impact’ attachment?
From 1 March 2020, applicants to all UKRI calls and schemes will no longer be required to provide a ‘Pathways to Impact’ attachment, nor to complete an ‘Impact Summary’ within grant applications. For further information on this change, please see the associated UKRI news item.

Please note, that from 17 February to 28 February 2020, the ‘Impact Summary’ section of the application, and the ‘Pathways to Impact’ attachment will still be visible on the Joint Electronic Submission (Je-S) system. After 28 February 2020, the ‘Impact Summary’ will vanish from Je-S; any text appearing in this section of the application will no longer be visible or retrievable. Please refrain from completing the ‘Impact Summary’ section to avoid unnecessary work.

The ‘Pathways to Impact’ attachment will still be visible in Je-S but applicants will be unable to submit their application unless this attachment has been removed. Please refrain from completing the ‘Pathways to Impact’ attachment to avoid unnecessary work. Apologies for any confusion this may cause, as we transition our systems to the new way of working. Further information is available on the Je-S login page.
Where do I discuss impact in my application?
Impact remains a key element of both the application and assessment process across all ESRC calls and schemes and will be assessed as part of the Case for Support.

In line with the UKRI position on Excellence with Impact, we expect that our researchers will have considered the potential scientific, societal and economic impacts of their research. In describing plans to maximise impact, applicants should consider what is achievable and expected for research of this nature.

The ESRC’s Impact Toolkit gives you detailed advice on how to achieve the maximum impact for your work. The toolkit includes information on developing an impact strategy, promoting knowledge exchange, public engagement and communicating effectively with your key stakeholders.

Application and assessment

How and when should I apply for this call?
All proposals should be submitted through the Joint Electronic Submission (Je-S) system no later than 16:00 on 11 June 2020.

Do I need to attach a list of my publications to my proposal?
The bibliography for references cited in the proposal should be attached under the ‘List of publications’ document: this should only include publications cited in the proposal. A list of the most relevant and recent publications by the research team members should be included in the applicant CVs.

Can you provide more detail regarding eligible costs that can be claimed?
We have allowed a two-page Justification of Resources (JoR) attachment to ensure applicants have enough space to fully detail, explain and justify costs claimed. The JoR is a free text document. In order for you to not miss any costings from the Je-S form or any justifications for the items requested, we recommend that you match the costs to the proposal headings in the Je-S form; see the Je-S help guidance on how to write a good JoR for more information. ESRC will check all costs claimed on the successful proposal before this is awarded; it is therefore critical that all costs claimed are fully justified in the Justification of Resources document. Where ESRC determines that full justification is not provided, these costs will be cut.

Support for items expected to be found in a RO department and covered by estates and indirect costs requested for the grant (for example non-specialist computers for unnamed researchers) should include justification both for why they are required for the project, and why they cannot be provided by the research organisation’s own resources (including funding from indirect costs from grants).

When completing Je-S sections such as Staff ‘Duties’ or ‘Other Support’ sections, the information is relevant to applicants. Could you please clarify if this is for investigators alone or investigators/named research staff?
Staff duties – This is a generic section for all Je-S applications to ESRC. Please provide a brief description of the duties and periods of involvement of each individual for which salary is being requested and summarise the responsibilities of all named applicants (PI and Co-Is).

Other support - Enter details of any support sought or received from any other (not ESRC) source for this or other research in the same field in the past three years. Complete all fields for support either received or pending a decision. The full economic costs (ie 100% costs) of such support should be identified. Please note contributions from project partners should not be entered here. They should be detailed in the project partners section.

Costings

What level of institutional support is required?
No additional institutional support above the standard 20% of fEC is required for this call.

Other questions

Is there a way I can see the questions on the Intention to Submit form without clicking through each section?
We have updated the form to remove the page breaks. All the questions (9 in total) will now appear on a single page on page 2 of the Intention to Submit survey.

I have a question not answered in any of the call documents – who should I contact?
The full specification and a range of supporting guidance documents for this call are available on the ESRC website. All queries about this call should be addressed in the first instance to: MethodsDevelopment@esrc.ukri.org

The Je-S Helpdesk may be contacted by email (JeSHelp@je-s.ukri.org) or telephone (+44 (0)1793 444164). Operating hours are Monday to Thursday 8.30am to 5pm and Fridays 8.30am to 4.30pm (UK time, excluding public and other holidays).