

Research Grants (Open Call) Call Specification

Summary

The ESRC Research Grants (open call) invites proposals from eligible individuals and research teams for standard research projects, large-scale surveys and other infrastructure projects and for methodological developments. The call offers researchers considerable flexibility to focus on any subject area or topic providing that it falls within ESRC's remit. Proposals can draw from the wider sciences, but the social sciences must represent more than 50 per cent of the research focus and effort.

We particularly encourage ambitious and novel research proposals addressing new concepts and techniques and those with the potential for significant scientific or societal and economic impact. We are also keen to encourage fresh ideas from new researchers and appropriate proposals are welcomed from those with limited research experience.

Our funding decisions are based on a number of criteria including quality, timeliness, potential impact and value for money.

The call is for applications ranging from £350,000 to £1 million (100 per cent full economic cost (fEC)) for a period of up to five years.

You can submit proposals to the call at any time – there are no fixed closing dates.

Scope

Proposals to the Research Grants (open call) can be for basic, applied or strategic research. The call allows proposals for standard research projects, methodological development, or for large-scale surveys or other infrastructures (e.g. linguistic corpora or the classification, cataloguing and compilation of information which would be of benefit to social science researchers and a possible wider audience.) It is important that infrastructure proposals clearly demonstrate their utility to a broad community of researchers, and wider audiences as appropriate.

It is also possible to submit a proposal for two or more linked projects, provided that the relationship between them is properly explained and justified.

For a full list of acceptable ESRC research areas, or if you are unsure whether your research is suitable for ESRC funding, please see <https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/is-my-research-suitable-for-esrc-funding/> for further information.

If further assistance is required please fill in our Remit Query form which is available at <https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/is-my-research-suitable-for-esrc-funding/remit-query-form/> or contact esrcremit@esrc.ukri.org. Your enquiry will be passed to a relevant member of staff, who will contact you directly.

Call details

Funding

The call is for proposals ranging from £350,000 to £1 million (100 per cent full Economic Cost (fEC)) for a period of up to five years. Detailed information on eligible costs can be found in the ESRC's Research Funding Guide (<https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-funding-guide/>). Proposals will need to show 100 per cent of full Economic Cost of the proposed research. The ESRC will meet 80 per cent of the full economic costs on proposals submitted.

Investigators

Research proposals may be submitted jointly by more than one applicant. In such cases, one person must be regarded as the principal investigator taking the lead responsibility for the conduct of the research and the observance of the terms and conditions. Correspondence regarding the research proposal and grant will be addressed to the principal investigator only (and in the case of any offer letter, to their research office). All co-investigators must make a significant contribution to the conduct of the research.

International co-investigators

ESRC attaches major importance to the position of UK social science in the international and global arena. We positively encourage active collaboration between UK researchers and those in other countries, where this will help to ensure that UK research is at the international leading edge. Co-investigators based in overseas research organisations can therefore be included in research grant proposals. Further information on the inclusion of international co-investigators is available at <https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/inclusion-of-international-co-investigators-on-proposals/>.

Business, third sector or government body co-investigators

Business, third sector or government body co-investigators based in the UK can also be included on research grant proposals. Further information on the inclusion of co-investigators is available at <https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/inclusion-of-uk-business-third-sector-or-government-body-co-investigators-on-proposals/>.

Knowledge exchange and collaboration

We are committed to knowledge exchange and encouraging collaboration between researchers and the private, public and civil society sectors. Collaborative working benefits both the researchers and the individuals/organisations involved. Through collaboration, partners learn about each other's expertise, share knowledge and gain an appreciation of different professional cultures. Collaborative activity can therefore lead to a better understanding of the ways that academic research can add value and offer insights to key issues of concern for policy and practice.

Knowledge exchange should not be treated as an 'add-on' at the end of a research project, but considered before the start and built into a project.

Impact

In line with the UKRI position on Excellence with Impact (<https://www.ukri.org/innovation/excellence-with-impact/>), we expect that our researchers will have considered the potential scientific, societal and economic impacts of their research. ESRC applicants should actively consider how these impacts can be maximised and developed within their proposal. Applicant's plans to maximise and develop the potential impacts of their research will form part of the peer review and assessment process.

Opportunities for making an impact may arise, and should be taken, at any stage during the research lifecycle: the planning and research design stage; the period of funding; and all activities that relate to the project up to – and including – the time when funding has ended. The research lifecycle therefore includes knowledge exchange and impact realisation activities – including reporting and publication, and the archiving, future use, sharing, and linking of data. It is important that researchers have in place a robust strategy for maximising the likelihood of impact opportunities and their own capacity for taking advantage of these.

It is important to set out how you intend to identify and actively engage relevant users of the research and stakeholders (within and beyond the academic community including, for instance, the public sector, private sector, civil society or the wider public in general) and include evidence of any existing engagement with relevant end users. You should articulate a clear understanding of the context and needs of these users and consider ways for the proposed research to meet or impact upon these needs. The proposal should also outline how the legacy of proposed activity will be managed to engage beneficiaries and increase the likelihood of its impact in providing lasting value to participants, stakeholders and the wider social science community.

To be effective, all communication, engagement and impact activities must be planned in detail and properly resourced in the proposal.

Excellent research without obvious or immediate societal or economic impact will not be disadvantaged in the peer review and assessment process. If you consider that your research has no obvious or immediate societal or economic impact, you should explain your reasoning in the Case for Support.

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: <https://esrc.ukri.org/research/impact-toolkit/>.

COVID-19 Guidance for Applicants

Accounting for the unknown impacts of COVID-19

UKRI acknowledges that it is a challenge for applicants to determine the future impacts of COVID-19 while the pandemic continues to evolve. Applications should be based on the information available at the point of submission and, if applicable, the known application specific impacts of COVID-19 should be accounted for. Where known impacts have occurred, these should be highlighted in the application, including the assumptions/information at the point of submission. There is no need to include

contingency plans for the potential impacts of COVID-19. Requests for travel both domestically and internationally can be included in accordance to the relevant scheme guidelines, noting the above advice.

(Reviewers will receive instructions to assume that changes that arise from the COVID-19 pandemic, post-submission, will be resolved and complications related to COVID-19 should not affect their scores.

Where an application is successful, any changes in circumstances that affect the proposal will be managed as a post-award issue.)

Innovation

We are keen to support research which is ambitious (but clearly specified) and has the potential for high scientific impact and/or high user impact. We also recognise that such research may carry a higher than normal risk of failing to deliver the full range of expected research outputs.

Such research is likely to:

- use innovative or even untested methods within the context of the particular project
- attempt to develop or to test and apply new theory
- be carried out by researchers without a proven track record in the area of the proposed research, although they may have a strong track record in other areas
- be complex in terms of its management and delivery because of its size or the dispersal of the research team/fieldwork
- investigate a potentially controversial or sensitive topic
- involve multiple or unusual disciplinary combinations both within and beyond the social sciences
- involve accessing or creating data, or accessing research participants or other related research material that could be highly problematic
- challenge existing paradigms in respect of research ethics.

International collaboration

ESRC is committed to supporting research which is world class and informs prosperity, wellbeing and justice on an international scale. The Research Grants open call enables UK researchers to collaborate with the best scholars in their field across the globe through the International Co-investigators policy (see above).

The past 50 years have seen a marked increase in global interdependencies with many of the current challenges we face having a global reach. We are keen to support cross-national comparative work and research projects with an international focus.

Interdisciplinarity

We welcome interdisciplinary proposals and recognise that many of the most pressing research challenges are interdisciplinary in nature, both within the social sciences and between the social sciences and other areas of research. However, we also remain

committed to the support of excellent research within a single discipline. Applicants should refer to the UKRI guidance at <https://www.ukri.org/funding/how-to-apply/applications-across-research-council-remits/> for proposals which may span other Research Council remits. Project proposals that extend beyond the mission of a single Research Council should be submitted to the Council with the majority interest, but peer reviewers will be obtained from each of the relevant communities. The Research Councils will also co-fund those projects where a significant element of the costs reside within more than one Council's domain.

Research ethics

ESRC requires that the research we support is designed and conducted in such a way that it meets certain ethical principles and is subject to proper professional and institutional oversight in terms of research governance.

As an important source of public funds for social science research and as a body charged with encouraging, supporting, undertaking and advising on such research, the ESRC recognises that it has a special obligation towards the general public and academic community to ensure that the research which it funds is carried out to a high ethical standard.

We have agreed a **Framework for Research Ethics** that all submitted proposals have to comply with. Further details available about the Framework for Research Ethics and guidance on compliance (together with links to other web based resources on research ethics) may be found at <https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-ethics/>.

Open access

We are committed to ensuring that our research community makes the outputs from ESRC-funded research publicly available. ESRC-funded researchers are expected to comply with the UKRI policy on open access (RCUK Policy on Open Access at <https://www.ukri.org/funding/information-for-award-holders/open-access/open-access-policy/>). The payment of article processing charges (APCs) and other publication charges related to ESRC-funded research are supported through UKRI open access block grants which are provided to eligible research organisations.

Eligibility of research organisations (ROs)

All UK higher education institutions are eligible to receive funds for research, postgraduate training and associated activities. The higher education funding councils for England (Research England), Wales (HEFCW), Scotland (SHEFC) and Northern Ireland (DFE) determine whether an organisation meets the criteria to be a higher education institution.

Research institutes and independent research organisations (IROs) eligible to receive research funding, from any UKRI Research Council, can be found at <https://www.ukri.org/funding/how-to-apply/eligibility/>

Eligibility of applicants

Applicants are eligible for funding whether or not they are established members of a recognised research organisation (RO). Applicants for research grants who are not established members of a recognised RO must be accommodated by the RO and provided with appropriate facilities to carry out the research. (These requirements also apply to all individuals named as co-investigators.) For such applicants, the RO must provide a covering statement confirming that, in the event of a grant, it will provide accommodation and facilities for the applicant such as would be provided for established members of staff. They and other staff engaged in the research are normally expected to reside within reasonable travelling distance of the RO when not engaged in fieldwork.

If the principal investigator or a co-investigator is retired, the expectation is that their involvement in a project would be covered by a contract with the RO. If there are costs associated with such time these should be regarded as a Directly Incurred Cost.

How to apply

How to submit a proposal

Applications can only be made through the Research Councils' Joint Electronic Submission System (Je-S) (see <https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/je-s-electronic-applications/> for detail).

To begin writing your proposal, please select the New Document menu and search for and select 'Research Grants (Open Call)' using the Call Search function.

Full details can be found via the Help option on the Je-S website (<https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk/Handbook/Index.htm>).

The same proposal should not be submitted for consideration by more than one Research Council. The submission of proposals to different ESRC funding calls which will result in parallel processing of the same or substantially similar proposals is also not allowed. Duplicate proposals may be submitted to other funding organisations (apart from the other research councils), subject to a clear declaration of the simultaneous submission in the relevant section of the ESRC proposal.

ESRC does not allow the resubmission of any previously unsuccessful proposals (including proposals previously submitted to another Research Council), unless they have been specifically invited to do so. For further information please refer to the ESRC resubmissions policy (<https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/resubmissions-policy/>). All proposals will be checked, and uninvited resubmissions will not be processed but treated as an unsuccessful proposal. They will be included as failed proposals in the data that we collect on RO grant performance as part of our demand management strategy (<https://esrc.ukri.org/about-us/performance-information/demand-management/>).

All submitted proposals must be substantially different to any previous proposal submission (i.e. a new proposal). See <https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/resubmissions-policy/what-constitutes-a-new-proposal/> for further information.

Research proposals cannot be accepted for the following:

- unspecified research work
- research already carried out
- writing up previous research
- literature surveys
- conference attendance, other than within an award
- travel for general study
- expeditions
- unsolicited requests to hold conferences, workshops or seminars outside of the Research Seminars competition
- preparation of books and publications
- primarily for the preparation and production of materials such as curriculum materials and software development.

ESRC's Research Funding Guide (<https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-funding-guide/>) gives more information on eligible costs.

Assessment criteria

Funding decisions for research proposals are based on four key assessment criteria:

- Originality, potential contribution to knowledge
- Research design and methods
- Value for money
- Outputs, dissemination and impact.

Assessment process

Once accepted, following basic office checks, proposals are sent to three reviewers primarily drawn from ESRC's Peer Review College. Sometimes more reviewers will be approached depending on the nature of the project. Where the College may not have the necessary coverage of knowledge and expertise for a particular proposal, case officers may approach reviewers outside the college. Non-academic research users will be approached for their comments as appropriate. Peer reviewers score proposals on a six-point scale as follows:

| Score | Description |
|-------|---|
| 6 | The proposal is outstanding in terms of its potential scientific merit. |
| 5 | The proposal is excellent in terms of its potential scientific merit. |
| 4 | The proposal is important as it has considerable potential merit. |
| 3 | The proposal has significant potential scientific merit but is not of a consistently high quality. |
| 2 | The proposal will add to understanding and is worthy of support, but is of lesser quality or urgency than more highly rated proposals. Such proposals are unlikely to have a significant influence on the development of the research area. |
| 1 | The proposal is flawed in its approach, or is repetitious of other work, or otherwise judged not worth pursuing; or which, though possibly having sound objectives, appears seriously defective in its methodology. |

Once a required minimum number of responses have been received, the responses will be reviewed by an ESRC officer. Proposals with an average score of below 4.5 from the academic reviewers will normally be rejected at this stage without referral to the Grant Assessment Panels (GAPs). Those proposals with an average score of 4.5 or above are then allocated to two members of the Grant Assessment Panels who, in the light of the specialist advice and views of reviewers, provide an independent assessment and score for the proposal prior to consideration by the full Grant Assessment Panels. The Panels meet three times a year, usually in March, July and November.

Each of the Grant Assessment Panels will agree a prioritisation list of proposals that it recommends for funding, and these lists will be considered by the Grants Delivery Group, which agrees the final funding decisions. The Grants Delivery Group is chaired by a member of ESRC Council, and its members are the Chairs of the Grant Assessment Panels. We aim to announce the majority of decisions within 26 weeks of receiving the proposal although we cannot guarantee this, since it is dependent on receiving sufficient good quality peer review comments within the necessary timescale. You will be informed by email of the outcome of your funding application. Results of applications will not be given over the telephone.

ESRC cannot guarantee that decisions will be taken at any one particular Grants Delivery Group meeting, and there are sometimes other factors that are outside the control of ESRC that may delay the final decision. If your application is an international proposal, where a secondary decision is required from other funder/s, or where the research covers other disciplines than those of ESRC which requires a decision from another Research Council, you can expect that time taken between submission and decision will be around nine months.

Further information and contacts

This call specification should be read together with ESRC's Research Funding Guide which sets out our funding rules in greater detail (<https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-funding-guide/>).

For specific queries relating to:

- Research Grants Scheme
Email: esrcenquiries@esrc.ukri.org
- Remit queries
Email: esrcremit@esrc.ukri.org
- Je-S Helpdesk
Email: JeSHelp@je-s.ukri.org
Telephone: 01793 444164