

ESRC Research Methods Training Centre 2019-2024 Call specification

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Summary

ESRC is commissioning a Research Methods Training Centre (RMTTC). The centre will have a focused remit on methods training and capacity building. It will be an integral piece of our research infrastructure and will be expected to develop, deliver, and coordinate training activity across the social sciences. More specifically, it will be responsible for:

- Co-ordinating ESRC’s investment in research methods training
- putting in place a strategically informed and diverse programme of research methods training
- identifying, implementing and sharing good practice.

Applicants can apply for up to £3 million (100% fEC) for a period of five years. Costs should be calculated on a full economic costs (fEC) basis.

Due to the nature of this investment, we have expanded what costs can be claimed as Exceptions. Costs associated with academic staff will be funded in the usual way with ESRC contributing 80% of these costs and the remaining balance being guaranteed by the Research Organisation. **All other costs are eligible to be claimed under Exceptions.** Please note that indirect and estate costs cannot be claimed for staff costs listed under Exceptions.

Unless otherwise stated all proposals will be subject to ESRC's funding rules as outlined in our Research Funding Guide: <https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-funding-guide/>.

It is expected that the centre will commence on 1 October 2019.

All applicants must submit an Expression of Interest (EoI) form via the Joint Electronic Submission System (Je-S) (<https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk/>) **no later than 16:00 on 29 November 2018.**

Full proposals must be submitted via Je-S by **16:00 on 10 January 2019**. Applicants must be registered with Je-S and based at a research organisation eligible for UK Research and Innovation funding to submit a proposal.

When preparing their proposal, applicants should refer to the guidance in this call specification, the accompanying detailed guidance for submitting your proposal through Je-S and ESRC's Research Funding Guide: <https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-funding-guide/>.

Background and scope

ESRC has funded the National Centre for Research Methods (<https://www.ncrm.ac.uk/>) since 2004. The Centre supports methodological innovation and training in the social sciences and the current NCRM grant is funded until December 2019. In addition, ESRC has funded methodological innovation and training through its strategic calls, such as the Applied Quantitative Methods Network (AQMeN) and the Centre for Microdata Methods and Practice (CEMMAP). It is also embedded within our infrastructure investments such as CLOSER and the UK Data Service.

Looking to the future, in addition to our core funds UKRI will provide strategic funding to support world-leading interdisciplinary, challenge-led, collaborative research for example through the Strategic Priorities Fund and Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund. As an integral part of UKRI, a proactive social science community can take advantage of the new opportunities this new funding environment presents.

Within this context, ESRC is committed to continuing its support for methodological innovation and capacity building. Initially, we will commission the RMTC which will focus specifically on developing and putting in place high-quality training and capacity-building. The RMTC will work closely with future investments in this area to ensure the effective delivery of their complimentary programmes of work.

Call details

This is an opportunity to build on the strong foundations established over the last 15 years, by implementing an ambitious and innovative programme of research methods training and capacity building. In doing so, the centre will shape and grow this important research methods resource.

Recognising NCRM's important role to date, this specification presents the key components the centre must deliver in order to maintain the training and capacity building support social scientists have come to expect. However, we are open to how the centre's responsibilities will be delivered and welcome novel ideas and approaches. Where examples are stated these are only indicative and alternative proposals can be made. The budget available is intended to be used flexibly to deliver the tools, mechanisms, initiatives and incentives required to operationalise our requirements.

The RMTTC needs to be outward-looking across the academic, private, public and civil society sectors, maintaining a vibrant and highly skilled social science research community with the capability to address complex, interdisciplinary research questions as part of collaborative and diverse teams. Training in the relevant skills will be coherent and integrated with support through a single, user-friendly online portal.

Aims and objectives

The principal aim of the centre is to increase research methods capability in the social sciences through training and capacity building activities in the application of core and advanced research techniques, including quantitative and qualitative techniques and mixed methods approaches. The Centre will be responsible for the co-ordination of methods training funded by ESRC across its portfolio, acting as the first point of contact for social scientists seeking further information and training on research methods. Through the use of an online portal, the centre will be a 'one stop shop', providing access to high-quality resources and training. The RMTTC will also ensure a range of training provision and events is put in place, delivered both virtually and face-to-face, and informed by an analysis of the training landscape.

The RMTTC will be at the forefront of training, implementing appropriate technology and pedagogical approaches to maximise the reach, quality and impact of the resources and training.

Proposals should demonstrate an understanding of ESRC's expectations of the centre and clearly set out how applicants will deliver each of the core responsibilities of the RMTTC. These requirements should be brought together under a set of clear aims and objectives, underpinned by an appropriate management and governance structure. Proposals should set out how different audiences will be targeted and justify any prioritisation strategies.

The centre will need to be flexible and able to respond with the agility to the developing needs of the social science community and changes to a research landscape that is increasingly collaborative (across and outside academia, regionally and internationally); interdisciplinary; and where new technology enables the uncovering of new knowledge and

create new data sources for interrogation. How applicants will be responsive to changes and adapt to shifting priorities should be described within proposals

The RMTC will have the following core responsibilities:

Co-ordination

The RMTC will lead the co-ordination of ESRC's investment in research methods training developing an engaged network of collaborators. The RMTC will work proactively to develop and maintain strong partnerships with other ESRC investments and research grants which have elements of methodological innovation and training. The RMTC will draw on these networks to identify the methodological research taking place and the new training needs that these methodological advances create. Sources of methodological advances include large research-focused investments, such as those funded through our centres and large grants competitions, as well as infrastructure investments concerned with longitudinal studies, data providers and big data. The centre is also required to engage with our Doctoral Training Network, Q-STEP and relevant grants funded through the standard grants competitions. The centre should map activity across ESRC's portfolio and identify where closer integration of existing training provision or new collaborative activities can add value.

Through wide-ranging engagement with current ESRC-funded initiatives, other funders, and stakeholders in business, government and the civil society sectors, the RMTC will provide a clear picture of the research methods training and capacity building landscape and the strategic gaps in the current range of initiatives. The landscape will be reviewed regularly with the subsequent gap analysis informing the training schedule developed by the centre.

The RMTC is expected to reach out to research teams developing and applying new methodological tools and/or techniques to establish if new training is required and how this might be developed. Where relevant, the RMTC will clearly communicate to researchers the benefits of collaborating with the centre on these activities and offer appropriate incentives. To support the centre, we have now made it an expectation of our new research centres and large grants to provide training on any new methodological tools and techniques they develop, working with the RMTC to ensure it is embedded within the centre's broader programme of training.

The RMTC will develop and maintain a training portal on behalf of ESRC, offering a single point for users to access training resources and signposting users to other useful provision. It will be underpinned by an accessible user interface and will be the mechanism through which researchers can access training materials from the new grant and past NCRM grants, including those archived in RESTORE (<http://www.restore.ac.uk>). The portal will also include information on other methods training activities being run within the social sciences and proposals that look to take advantage of technological innovations to enable a participatory culture for users, drawing on the principles of web 2.0, are welcome. Creating the portal must be a priority of the centre and is expected to be created in the first six months of the grant.

Applicants should set out their approach to online resource management, including how the portal and online resources will be maintained and developed in such a way that they remain relevant learning aids into the future.

Training

The RMTC will put in place a strategically-informed and diverse programme of research methods training. It will provide a balance of basic and advanced levels, depending on need. Training should be delivered through the most appropriate mode and is likely to comprise of a combination of face-to-face and virtual training. This may include online resources, videos and one-day/residential 'hands-on' specialist training.

We welcome proposals that respond to this challenge in a novel way. For example, applicants may wish to use part of the budget to undertake a small programme of research on the teaching and learning of research methods; or implement a series of 'train the trainer' events to support those teaching research methods training, particularly where there is a known strategic need (e.g. quantitative skills, the use of new and emerging technologies). A further example might be to co-produce training with researchers working outside of academia. Proposals should include a clear rationale setting out how proposed initiatives will support the broader activities of the centre.

The training will be high quality and provided by leading experts in quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods techniques from the UK and overseas. The participants may include those from academic, central and local government, civil society and business communities. Training should be accessible across the UK and the geographic locations of workshops and courses should be considered in order to maximise access across all regions.

One team will not have the breadth of knowledge to deliver all of the required training. Applicants should demonstrate how collaborative working will deliver the programme of training. This will be demonstrated through the delivery model proposed with applicants detailing how they will draw on existing links and networks they have and/or identifying where new partnerships will be needed, specifying particular groups where known.

Applicants should provide information on how the centre will broker these collaborations, and identify how they will use the funding available to incentivise a broader network of researchers to contribute to the delivery of training offered by the centre.

Applicants should set out the principles underpinning their approach to delivering training in their Case for Support.

Identifying, implementing and sharing good practice

As a centre of expertise, the RMTC will be expected to identify and share good practice in both the use of social science research methods and the teaching of such methods. This will be achieved through a combination of stakeholder engagement and community outreach activities. These activities will need to be delivered in partnership with others.

This requirement has previously been achieved through the delivery of workshops, seminars and conferences as well as online materials. These activities have had a focus on the application of both novel and existing methodological techniques within the context of substantive research, often drawing upon existing ESRC-funded research as well as research funded through other sources, both within and beyond the UK. For example, the Research Methods Festival has showcased methodological innovations emerging from ESRC's research methods portfolio. The structure has combined key note presentations from academics developing innovative new methods alongside practical taster sessions and demonstrations.

As part of their proposal, applicants should outline how they will approach this responsibility and identify the programme of activities that will be undertaken to deliver it.

Our expectations of the centre

Continuity of online training provision

ESRC has funded NCRM since 2004 and during this period a rich database of training resources has been compiled (see the current NCRM website: <https://www.ncrm.ac.uk/>). The successful applicants will be expected to adopt these resources and continue to make them available through their portal, updating them where appropriate. Proposals should set out how this will be achieved and commit to working with ESRC and the current NCRM team on the development and implementation of a transition plan, if relevant.

Costs for the portal should be included in proposals. Separate funding, additional to the grant awarded through this call, will be provided to support the transfer of resources from the existing centre to the new team should it be required. Migration is expected to have happened within six months of the start of the grant.

Moving forward, it is expected that the database(s) developed will use software with high interoperability and that they will be designed in such a way that they can be transferred to another Research Organisation should the need arise, following future recommissioning rounds. Robust system design methodology should be used to ensure best practice is followed across the entire delivery system. For example, high quality documentation and guidance should be maintained to support this process.

To ensure these resources continue to be made available for use by social scientists all training outputs, tools and resources created by the RMTC for the duration of centre are expected to be made available under a CC-BY license.

Impact

The centre will need to be able to demonstrate the outcomes and impacts of its own work, putting in place a strategy to develop and communicate an impact narrative. Proposals should be pragmatic and realistic as well as address how the challenges of capturing the impact of infrastructure type investments such as the RMTC will be overcome.

Engagement with future Strategic ESRC methods investments

During the funding period of this centre, ESRC intends to make further strategic investment in its research methods portfolio. The RMTC will be expected to proactively engage with new investments and actively participate in governance arrangements put in place by ESRC to co-ordinate activity.

Co-funding

The centre will be expected to grow its user base during the course of the grant in a sustainable way. ESRC is not able to increase its contribution to support this growth in users and the centre will be expected to explore opportunities to attract some additional

external funding. By the end of the funding period, the centre should have developed a plan for how it will broaden its funding base and will have piloted some approaches to generate revenue. Applicants should be mindful of this when developing their delivery model for their proposal, in particular the ease with which it can evolve and adapt to such a challenge. Applicants should briefly outline how they will approach this task in their Case for Support.

Key performance indicators

Proposals should include a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) against which the success of the centre will be measured. Details should include how the centre will measure these. These should be submitted as an additional 'KPI attachment'.

Structure, management and leadership

The proposed structure and management of the centre must be clearly linked to the delivery of its aims and objectives. Proposals should provide a detailed description of arrangements and include the division of major management and leadership roles and responsibilities, as well as the time commitments of key individuals. A clear management structure should also be outlined. Any arrangements must demonstrate how the centre will be able to identify and meet the diverse needs of the social science community. In the case of a collaborative proposals, how responsibilities will be organised across institutions should be clearly set out.

Proposals can be submitted by a single research organisation or may involve a collaborative proposal from more than one research organisation. Collaborative proposals must include confirmation of support and institutional arrangements in the 'Structure, Management and Leadership' section of your Case for Support (see 'Je-S Guidance Notes for Applicants'). Applicants wishing to include non-academic co-investigators or projects partners can do so in the usual way (see the accompanying Je-S guidance and our Research Funding Guide).

Leadership team

Applicants must identify a leadership team. The Director should be a leader in research methods with relevant experience to develop and lead an initiative of this kind. They will be required to contribute a significant proportion of their time to the overall leadership and direction of the RMTC.

The successful delivery of the RMTC will be dependent on a strong team, including technical and administrative staff. Applicants should explain the roles and activities of all key staff. It is envisaged that these may include a centre manager; communications manager and business development manager.

There are no formal restrictions on who may constitute the leadership team but it is likely that the successful application will be led by a team who:

- can articulate a clear vision for how the RMTC will engage with the full breadth of the social sciences, developing relationships with new partners where required
- can act as advocates for the use of robust methodology in the social sciences
- promote an understanding of research methods to a wide range of audiences

- have a demonstrable track record of managing complex projects, programmes and/or research infrastructures effectively, including some element of financial management and oversight
- have experience of working with a range of partners, building close relationships with key stakeholders and potential users
- provide vision and direction to advance and transform methodological training through both individual and collective efforts
- will work internationally to raise the profile of and build capacity amongst the UK social sciences in new methodological innovations taking place outside the UK.

Governance

The centre will be expected to have good governance and mechanisms in place to provide it with strategic oversight and advice. These structures should include an Advisory Committee with a strategic and scientific focus. It will comprise a breadth of stakeholders that will have a strong role in the development of the centre. Non-academic and international representation is expected in order for the centre to gain insight into activity taking place outside of UK academia, enabling cross-fertilisation of ideas and opportunities for the centre. There should also be clear mechanisms for capturing and responding to user feedback. Applicants should explain the roles and functions of the groups/boards they propose.

ESRC investment management

The centre will be required to report annually to the ESRC and participate in regular management meetings with ESRC. These meetings are expected to take place annually but may be more frequent during the early stages of the grant.

The centre Director will also represent the RMTC on a future group convened to bring together representatives from ESRC and its strategic methods investments, including the RMTC. The purpose of the group will be to facilitate strategic co-ordination and collaboration of ESRC's investment in this area. The group is likely to evolve over time but it is envisaged that it would need to meet every six months with the purpose of providing updates on activity and identifying areas for collaboration. Wherever possible, this will be scheduled to be held on the same day as the centre's management meeting.

Institutional support

We are expecting a strong institutional commitment to hosting the centre. This should be appropriate for the level of funding being requested.

Proposals must include a substantial one-page institutional letter of support from the Pro-Vice chancellor of research (or equivalent role) from the lead research organisation that confirms the RO's commitment to the application. Please use the guidance provided to help you in shaping this letter. Additional letters of support are also required from any additional research organisations participating in the grant and should outline the support they will offer to ensure the successful delivery of the centre.

Budgetary information

Applicants can apply for up to £3 million (100% fEC) for a period of five years. Costs should be calculated on a full economic costs (fEC) basis.

Due to the nature of this investment, we have expanded what costs can be claimed as Exceptions. Costs associated with academic staff will be funded in the usual way with ESRC contributing 80% of these costs and the remaining balance being guaranteed by the Research Organisation. **All other costs are eligible to be claimed under Exceptions.** Please note that indirect and estate costs cannot be claimed for staff costs listed under Exceptions.

All proposals will be subject to ESRC's funding rules as outlined in our Research Funding Guide: <https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-funding-guide/>

All salary costs, expenses and equipment costs must all be clearly and adequately justified and costing provided through the Joint Electronic Submission System (Je-S).

The overall total budget of the centre may be higher than the budget requested in the application. Additional funding leveraged by the centre, either through its participating Research Organisations, other funders or external co-funding partners, should be noted in the application but not included in the budget requested.

How to apply

Expressions of interest

All applicants must submit an expression of Interest (Eoi) by 16:00 on 29 November 2018 via Je-S. The Eols will be used to help plan the peer review process. Full proposals will only be accepted from applicants who have previously submitted an Expression of Interest.

Full proposals

Full proposals must be submitted via the Joint Electronic Submission System (Je-S) (<https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk/>) by **16:00 on 10 January 2019**. Applicants must be registered with Je-S to submit a proposal and should refer to the attached detailed guidance for making Je-S applications. If you are not currently Je-S registered and intend to apply, please ensure that you allow sufficient time for registration as no extensions to the deadline will be permitted. Hard-copy, faxed or email applications will not be accepted.

Applicants must be based at a Research Organisation eligible for research council funding; see the UKRI website for a list of eligible organisations: <https://www.ukri.org/funding/how-to-apply/eligibility/>

All applicants should consult the ESRC Research Funding Guide (<https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-funding-guide/>), which sets out the rules and regulations governing funding. The 'Guidance Notes for Applicants' document provides details on the information that applicants will require to submit as part of their proposal.

Proposals will be referred to a minimum of four external peer reviewers, including at least one from outside the UK. Applicants will be asked to nominate two academic peer reviewers, with one from outside the UK. Where possible one of these nominees will be used in the peer review group. Applicants will also be asked to nominate up to two non-academic/user reviewers. Applicants should seek reviewers' permission before nominating them. We will also approach independent user reviewers.

Proposals will then be assessed by a specially constituted expert panel. It is expected that the panel meeting and interviews of shortlisted applicants will take place in April 2019 and that the panel will report its funding recommendations to ESRC Directors in May 2019.

It is expected that the successful grant will commence **on 1 October 2019**, for a period of 60 months.

Assessment criteria

Eligible proposals will be assessed by reviewers and panel members against the following criteria:

- vision for RMTC
- quality and relevance of the training approach
- partnership and engagement approach
- management and delivery, including governance arrangements
- value for money

The successful proposal is likely to have the following features:

- an innovative approach to training and capacity building that can be fully sustained through the life of the grant
- a commitment to identifying and exploiting potential opportunities to work with existing ESRC investments
- a clear plan for developing strategies to maximise partnership working, knowledge exchange and impact
- a robust management structure with a director and clear arrangements for co-ordination and management of the strategic direction of the centre
- full consideration of the contribution of the centre in the new funding environment, including international and interdisciplinary opportunities
- strong institutional commitment and practical contributions to hosting and sustaining an ESRC centre

Commissioning timetable

The commissioning process will follow the timetable below. Proposals will be assessed by a specially constituted panel and shortlisted applicants will be invited to an interview to be held in London in April 2019. **Applicants will be notified of whether they have been shortlisted for interview in early March 2019.**

- Call for proposals issued – 5 October 2018
- Expressions of Interest submitted – **16:00 on 29 November 2018**
- Closing date for full proposals – **16:00 on 10 January 2018**
- Peer review of proposals – January 2018 – February 2019
- PI Response – March 2019
- Panel meeting and interviews of shortlisted applicants – w/c 29 April 2019
- Decision announced – Early June 2019
- Contract to commence – 1 October 2019

Please note that all dates are provisional and may change.

Contact details

Any enquiries relating to this specification or ESRC research funding rules should be e-mailed to esrcresearchmethods@esrc.ukri.org

Any enquiries relating to the Je-S application procedure should be addressed to the Je-S Helpdesk at:

- Email: jeshelp@rcuk.ac.uk
- Telephone: 01793 444164