Secondary Data Analysis Initiative (SDAI) call Frequently asked questions (FAQs)

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This document has been created specifically to support applicants with additional information relating to the Secondary Data Analysis Initiative. Proposals submitted to this initiative will be processed alongside our research grants call (https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/funding-opportunities/research-grants/).

This document may be updated, so potential applicants should always check the ESRC website for the latest version before completing their proposal.

Please check this document before contacting us for advice. However, if you have a question which has not been answered in this document, please contact sdai@esrc.ac.uk.

Why have the eligibility criteria changed?

Since the SDAI moved to an open call in December 2015, operating alongside the ESRC's Research Grants open call, the number of proposals received were low, this was expected. However, there has been no significant increase. After an in-depth analysis, and further consultation, the ESRC took the decision to implement key changes to the Initiative in order to increase the number, and quality, of proposals received.

I have submitted an application in line with the previous set of eligibility criteria, is my proposal still eligible for this call, and will it be disadvantaged when reviewed and assessed by the Panel?

Yes, proposals submitted in line with the previous eligibility criteria will be eligible under the new criteria. Your proposal will not be disadvantaged in the peer review process and Panel assessment, the primary assessment criteria remains quality of proposals.

I have recently submitted an application, can I change it in light of the new eligibility criteria?

You are not able to change your proposal once it has been submitted. If you would like to make fundamental changes to your proposal you are entitled to withdraw your application and re-submit provided the peer review process has not been completed.

Can I still include an Early Career Researcher (ECR) as a named applicant (PI or Co-I) on my proposal?

Yes, whilst the inclusion of an ECR is not mandatory, we encourage the inclusion of ECR's where appropriate.

Can I use international datasets in this call?

Yes, the use of international datasets, and comparable international datasets is encouraged in this call; provided that you have permission to use. If undertaking a comparative study, please detail the ways in which these datasets are comparable.

Can I undertake new data collection as part of this call?

No. The SDAI is intended to deliver high-quality, high-impact research through the deeper exploitation of existing datasets. New datasets through data linkage can be produced as part of this, but no new data collection can be conducted.

How are you defining an "existing dataset"? Does the generation of data through querying Application Programme Interfaces (APIs) or web scraping fit within this?

We mean data which already exists and does not require new primary data collection. This applies whether or not these data currently form a "dataset", therefore, the collation of existing data into a defined dataset through, for example, web scraping or APIs is permitted as long as this is used in conjunction or as part of an established dataset, resources, or infrastructure.

Can this funding be used to enable further analysis of data at a later date?

No. This call is not looking for projects to enable and identify future research, but to conduct analysis as part of the project. Therefore, research questions need to be best tested and findings produced within the 24-month lifespan of this project. A data resource can be developed as part of this project, as long as this is only a starting point for substantive analysis conducted within the 24-month lifecycle of the project.

Can I carry out data preparation work as part of this call?

Data preparation work such as digitisation, anonymisation, etc. necessary to the conduct of the research project can be carried out, but must not be the focus of activity as projects must be research-driven and designed to answer substantive research questions.

Are there any topics or subject areas that SDAI is specifically seeking to address?

No, SDAI is not thematically driven and applicants can apply in any area of social science as long as this meets the aim of delivering high-quality innovative research, generating knowledge exchange and policy and practitioner impact through the secondary analysis of data.

We welcome inter- or multi-disciplinary proposals as long as at least 50% of the proposed research is within the ESRC's remit. If you are unsure whether your research is suitable for ESRC funding, please complete the remit query form: https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/is-my-research-suitable-for-esrc-funding/remit-query-form/.

Who is eligible to apply as a principal investigator?

The principal investigator must be based at a recognised UK research organisation (RO) eligible for *responsive mode* ESRC-funding, whether or not they are an established member of that RO. Applicants 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. For a list of eligible recognised research organisations please see:

https://www.ukri.org/funding/how-to-apply/eligibility/. For full details of the eligibility criteria please also refer to the ESRC research funding guide https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-funding-guide/.

If I am based at a research organisation outside the UK, can I still apply?

Not as a principal investigator, but international researchers (including early career researchers) are eligible to be co-investigators on proposals with a UK-based principal investigator (and via an eligible UK RO).

Can I collaborate with international partners?

Academic international co-investigators from anywhere in the world can be included in proposals in line with ESRC policy; please refer to the guidance on international co-investigators at: https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/inclusion-of-international-co-investigators-on-proposals/ and also the research funding guide https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-funding-guide/.

International non-academic organisations can be included as project partners.

Can a partner be included as a co-investigator?

It is up to the applicant and partner(s) to decide on the most effective way to work together to ensure the co-production of knowledge and to directly address the wider impact aims of the initiative. This may involve the partner being included as a co-investigator. However, all co-investigators should make a significant contribution to the scientific direction and conduct of the research. It is the responsibility of applicants to make the case for the proposed partnership and the nature of its arrangement. Please see the guidance on the inclusion of UK business, civil society or government body co-investigators at: https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/inclusion-of-uk-business-third-sector-or-government-body-co-investigators-on-proposals/, and the research funding guide: https://esrc.ukri.org/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-funding-guide/ for guidance on the inclusion of co-investigators.

Do I have to have a non-academic partner in my project?

It is not a requirement of the call however as the call promotes innovative, high-quality research with demonstrable policy and practitioner impacts we encourage applicants to include a non-academic partner in their proposal to enhance the value from the data resource for mutual benefit.

Non-academic partners may or may not be included in the application as co-investigators, but if solely included as co-investigators this will only be regarded as a suitable partnership if the role involves substantial input into the shape, direction and use of the research that is in line with the aims of the call.

What format should the partnership with non-academic partners(s) take (if applicable)?

The relationship with the non-academic partner must be substantive and meaningful; it should involve their direct and full engagement in shaping the research project, although this does not necessarily mean that partner organisations or their staff will be actively involved in conducting the research itself. Applicants are therefore encouraged to seek early engagement

with research users in the public and private sectors and civil society organisations in developing proposals.

For non-academic bodies to be considered partners we expect them to actively contribute from the planning of the project through to the economic and social impact of the grant, applicants must determine and justify the exact nature of any partnership.

How much can I apply for?

Proposals should be costed at a full Economic Cost (fEC) up to a maximum of £300,000. Applicants are welcome to seek co-funding from other organisations. Details of this should be noted in your proposal. Project partners can also provide an in-kind contribution or a combination of cash and in-kind contributions.

When is it appropriate for me to include a letter of support from the data owner?

Proposals that are utilising resources which are routinely available for research use as part of established processes do not require a letter of support. Letters of support are required where data is being accessed through an established ESRC data service, for example the Big Data Network 2 (BDN2) Centres, or data is being used which is not normally available for research purposes or where such data is being linked. This is to provide proof of support from the relevant body to access the data. Letters of support are also required to provide clarification where there are ambiguities surrounding access to the dataset(s) in order to offer assurances that if a proposal is successful the dataset(s) will be accessible.

How strict are the timeframes in the specification? Can I apply for a longer project?

Proposals are normally limited to a maximum period of 24 months only. Where the PI is in a part-time post and is the only staff on the grant the duration of the grant can be calculated on a pro-rata basis. Please contact sdai@esrc.ac.uk to discuss this further.