



Funding opportunity

Pre-announcement: ESRC React Awards (pilot)

Opportunity status:	Upcoming
Funders:	Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)
Funding type:	Grant
Total fund:	£1,500,000
Award range:	£50,000 - £100,000
Publication date:	23 February 2026
Opening date:	To be confirmed
Closing date:	To be confirmed

Apply for responsive funding to generate time-critical research to support policymakers and **practitioners** delivering frontline services in the UK.

You must be based at a UK research organisation eligible for Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funding and have a confirmed partnership with at least one public sector organisation that can action your outputs within six months.

ESRC will fund 80% of the project's full economic cost (FEC). Awards can last up to six months and must start within a month of funding confirmation.

 This is a pre-announcement and information may change. The funding opportunity will open in April 2026.

Who can apply

This funding opportunity will be open to organisations with standard eligibility. [Check if your organisation is eligible](#).

Who is eligible to apply

This funding opportunity will be open to researchers based in UK research organisations, UKRI institutes, NHS bodies, independent research organisations, public sector research establishments and Catapult centres. We encourage:

- applications from diverse groups of researchers
- applications from those who have not previously held ESRC grants
- applications from individuals at any career stage, subject to ESRC eligibility.

Who is not eligible to apply

Applications which do not include collaborators from the public sector are not eligible for this funding opportunity. Collaborators will be expected to be listed as project partners, unless they are eligible to hold ESRC funding.

The ESRC project co-leads from UK business, third sector or government bodies policy will not apply to this funding opportunity.

International researchers

International researchers can apply as 'project co-lead (international)'. You should include all other international collaborators (or UK partners not based at approved organisations) as project partners.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

[We are committed to achieving equality of opportunity](#) for all funding applicants. We encourage applications from a diverse range of researchers.

We support people to work in a way that suits their personal circumstances. This includes:

- career breaks
- support for people with caring responsibilities
- flexible working
- alternative working patterns

[UKRI can offer disability and accessibility support](#) for UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) applicants and grant holders during the application and

assessment process.

What we're looking for

This opportunity is one of two pilots ESRC is launching in spring 2026 designed to fill gaps in our applicant-led funding offer.

Aim

React awards enable time-critical research to support policymakers and **practitioner**s delivering frontline public services in the UK. Researchers must work with public sector partners to respond to emerging and urgent evidence needs and deliver impactful outputs within six months.

To facilitate this, the pilot will be open to applications on a responsive basis and use a streamlined decision process, allowing proposals to be assessed, funded and start delivering within weeks. Successful projects will be expected to start within a month of funding confirmation.

Scope

This is an applicant-led funding opportunity, and applications can cover any aspect of ESRC's remit, providing at least 51% of the application is based in the social sciences.

A central objective of this opportunity is to allow researchers to support urgent policymaker or **practitioner** evidence needs in the UK. Therefore, applications will be required to include at least one collaborating partner from the UK public sector who needs and is able to action the planned project outputs within six months of them being produced. Partnerships must be confirmed at the time of application, fully aligned in terms of activity objectives, and able to begin the collaboration immediately from the start of an award.

Duration

The duration of this award is a maximum of six months.

Projects must start within one month of funding confirmation.

Funding available

The FEC of your project can be between £50,000 and £100,000.

ESRC will fund 80% of the FEC.

What we will fund

You will have a wide scope to propose activities that address the identified evidence need, which may include but not be limited to:

- research
- analysis
- evidence synthesis
- rapid evidence reviews
- urgent data collection

What we will not fund

The following cannot be funded through this opportunity:

- activity that should have been anticipated or funded through standard ESRC funding routes, for example, research grants, research centres or research institutes
- activity that could be funded through other more appropriate UKRI routes, for example, ESRC Impact Accelerator Accounts
- non-urgent activity or activity that cannot be delivered within the award period or utilised within six months
- activity that does not explicitly address the stated and emergent evidence need of the project partner

This is a pre-announcement, and the information may change. The funding opportunity will open in April 2026. More information will be available on this page at that time.

Trusted Research and Innovation (TR&I)

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) is committed in ensuring that effective international collaboration in research and innovation takes place with integrity and within strong ethical frameworks. Trusted Research and Innovation (TR&I) is a UKRI work programme designed to help protect all those working in our thriving and collaborative international sector by enabling partnerships to be as open as possible, and as secure as necessary. Our [TR&I Principles](#) set out UKRI's expectations of organisations funded by UKRI in relation to due diligence for international collaboration.

As such, applicants for UKRI funding may be asked to demonstrate how their proposed projects will comply with our approach and expectation towards TR&I, identifying potential risks and the relevant controls you will put in place to help proportionately reduce these risks.

[See further guidance and information about TR&I](#), including where you can find additional support.

How to apply

We are running this funding opportunity on the new UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Funding Service so please ensure that your organisation is registered. You cannot apply on the Joint Electronic Submissions (Je-S) system.

This opportunity is expected to use a two-stage application process, an initial outline application with shortlisted applications invited to submit a full application.

We will publish full details on how to apply when the funding opportunity opens.

How we will assess your application

Assessment process

This is a responsive opportunity. Applications can be submitted any time that the opportunity is open and will be assessed on a rolling basis. We will assess your application using the following process:

- a sift of an outline application with a shortlisting decision provided within 10 working days of submission
- expert assessment of a full application with funding decisions provided within one month of submission of the full application

This is a pre-announcement, and the assessment process information may change. The funding opportunity will open in April 2026. More information will be available on this page by then.

Contact details

This is a pre-announcement, and the information may change.

The funding opportunity will open in April 2026, and further information will be published on this page by then. We are unable to provide any further details or answer any queries about this funding opportunity beforehand.

Guidance on good research

© 2026 Copyright UKRI

<https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/esrc-react-awards-pilot>