



Funding opportunity

ESRC React Awards (pilot): outline

Opportunity status:	Open
Funders:	Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)
Funding type:	Grant
Total fund:	£1,500,000
Award range:	£50,000 - £100,000
Publication date:	7 April 2026
Opening date:	7 April 2026 9:00am UK time
Closing date:	8 October 2026 4:00pm UK time

Apply for responsive funding to generate time-critical research to support UK policymakers or frontline practitioners in public services.

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.

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 in the UK 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 does 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.

Remit

Complete and submit [the remit query form](#), if you are unsure whether your proposed research falls within the remit of ESRC.

What we're looking for

Demand management

Demand management is not currently being applied to this funding opportunity. However, should the level of interest exceed what can be managed within the assessment process, UKRI may introduce limits on the number of applications that can be submitted. Further details will be clearly communicated where this is the case. UKRI encourages organisations to support applicants in preparing well-planned, high-quality applications that are competitive for funding relative to the funding opportunity.

Aim

High quality social science can deliver real-time evidence that helps public sector leaders make informed decisions and respond effectively to emerging challenges. React awards enable time-critical research that supports UK policymakers or frontline practitioners in public services respond to urgent societal and economic challenges.

Researchers will work with public sector partners to respond to emerging and urgent evidence needs, delivering high-quality, impactful outputs that will be used within six months of being produced.

To facilitate this, the pilot will be open to applications on a responsive basis and use a streamlined decision process. This means you will be able to submit at any time when the funding opportunity is open, and applications will be assessed and selected for funding within weeks so that projects can start delivering quickly.

Projects that secure funding will be expected to start within one month of receiving confirmation of the outcome decision.

This funding opportunity is one of two pilots we are launching in spring 2026 designed to fill gaps in our applicant-led funding offer. As this is a pilot, we will review the application process and outcomes of the awards to inform future funding opportunities. You may be asked to participate in that review process, for example by responding to surveys.

Scope

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

A central objective of this funding 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 has concrete and credible plans to action the planned project outputs within six months of them being produced.

Co-production is a crucial part of this funding opportunity, and you should demonstrate this both in how the application has been developed and in the programme of activity they propose. To this end, you have the freedom to choose the research and collaboration approaches that best enable you to deliver shared objectives with your public sector partners.

Partnerships must be confirmed at the time of application, fully aligned on activity objectives, and able to begin the collaboration immediately from the start of an award. This alignment should be clearly articulated in the **outline** application, and if invited to submit a full application you will be asked to include a project partner letter to this effect.

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 have wide scope and freedom to propose the research activities that will most robustly address the identified evidence need and meet the project objectives. Activities may include but are not limited to:

- research
- analysis
- evidence synthesis
- rapid evidence reviews
- urgent data collection
- urgent analysis of existing data resources

What we will not fund

Through this funding opportunity, we will not fund:

- activity that should or could have been funded through standard ESRC funding routes, for example, research grants, research centres or research

institutes

- activity that should or could have been funded through other more appropriate UK research and Innovation (UKRI) routes, for example, ESRC Impact Accelerator Accounts
- activity that should or could have been funded through the partner organisation's own existing resources or budget
- non-urgent activity or activity that cannot be delivered within the award period or utilised within six months
- urgent responses arising from previous inaction. For example, evidence needs that have been known for some time but only considered at a late stage, are not eligible as they could have been submitted to a regular grant funding opportunity
- activity that compensates for long-standing or intentional limitations in partner capacity or capability or where there will be insufficient capacity or capability within the partner organisation to utilise the results
- activity that does not explicitly address the stated and emergent evidence need of the project partner or includes limited scope for generalisability and impact at scale
- follow-on activity from a previous or existing collaborative project with the project partner; this includes the continuation, extension or repackaging of existing collaborations unless a demonstrably new and time-critical evidence need has arisen

Knowledge exchange should not be treated as an 'add-on' at the end of a project but considered before the start and built into a project. Standalone knowledge exchange activity cannot be funded through this funding opportunity.

Trusted Research and Innovation (TR&I)

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.

ESRC data infrastructure

We support a range of data infrastructure. You should carefully consider whether existing data resources can meet your project needs. See [Facilities and resources](#) for information on finding and using ESRC datasets which are available across the UK.

If your application is dependent on data access, appropriate approvals must be in place beforehand so that the project can start on time.

Where relevant, details of datasets and infrastructure to be used in your project should be given in the Facilities section of the full application, if you are invited to submit one.

Data requirements

We recognise the importance of data quality and provenance. Data generated, collected or acquired by ESRC-funded research must be well-managed by the grant holder to enable their data to be exploited to the maximum potential for further research. See our [research data policy](#) for details and further information on [data requirements](#). The requirements of the research data policy are a condition of ESRC research funding.

Where relevant, you are required to include details on data management and sharing in the Data Management section if invited to submit a full application. See [the importance of managing and sharing data](#) and [content for inclusion in a data management plan](#) on the UK Data Service (UKDS) website for further guidance. We expect you to provide a summary of the points provided. The UKDS (datasharing@ukdataservice.ac.uk) will be pleased to advise you on the availability of data within the academic community and provide advice on data deposit requirements.

Research ethics

ESRC requires that the research we support is designed and conducted in such a way that it meets ethical principles and is subject to proper professional and institutional oversight in terms of research governance. We have agreed a Framework for Research Ethics that all submitted proposals must comply with. Read [further details about the Framework for Research Ethics](#) and guidance on compliance.

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.

The project lead is responsible for completing the application process on the Funding Service, but we expect all team members and project partners to contribute to the application.

Only the lead research organisation can submit an application to UKRI.

This funding opportunity is using a two-stage application process: an initial **outline** application, with shortlisted applications then invited to submit a full application. The guidance below refers to the process for completing an **outline** application. Further details of the full application process will be sent directly to shortlisted applicants.

To apply

Select 'Start application' near the beginning of this Funding finder page:

1. Confirm you are the project lead.
2. Sign in or create a Funding Service account. To create an account, select your organisation, verify your email address, and set a password. If your organisation is not listed, email support@funding-service.ukri.org. Please allow at least 10 working days for your organisation to be added to the Funding Service. We strongly suggest that if you are asking UKRI to add your organisation to the Funding Service to enable you to apply to this opportunity, you also create an organisation Administration Account. This will be needed to allow the acceptance and management of any grant that might be offered to you.
3. Answer questions directly in the text boxes. You can save your answers and come back to complete them or work offline and return to copy and paste your answers. If we need you to upload a document, follow the upload instructions in the Funding Service. All questions and assessment criteria are listed in the How to apply section on this Funding finder page.
4. Allow enough time to check your application in 'read-only' view before sending to your research office.
5. Send the completed application to your research office for checking. They will return it to you if it needs editing.
6. Your research office will submit the completed and checked application to UKRI.

Please be aware that research office and finance teams undertake checks on hosting arrangements and financial eligibility. The ultimate responsibility for ensuring compliance with all opportunity requirements lies with the applicant.

Where indicated, you can also demonstrate elements of your responses in visual form if relevant.

When including images, you must:

- provide a descriptive caption or legend for each image immediately underneath it in the text box (this must be outside the image and counts towards your word limit)
- insert each new image on a new line
- use files smaller than 5MB and in JPEG, JPG, JPE, JFI, JIF, JFIF, PNG, GIF, BMP or WEBP format

Images should only be used to convey important visual information that cannot easily be put into words. The following are not permitted, and your application will be rejected if you include:

- sentences or paragraphs of text
- tables
- excessive quantities of images

A few words are permitted where the image would lack clarity without the contextual words, such as a diagram, where text labels are required for an axis or graph column.

For more guidance on the Funding Service, see:

- [how applicants use the Funding Service](#)
- [how research offices use the Funding Service](#)
- [how reviewers use the Funding Service](#)

References

References should be included within the word count of the appropriate question section. You should use your discretion when including references and prioritise those most pertinent to the application.

Hyperlinks can be used in reference information. When including references, you should consider how your references will be viewed and used by the assessors, ensuring that:

- references are easily identifiable by the assessors
- references are formatted as appropriate to your research
- persistent identifiers are used where possible

General use of hyperlinks

Applications should be self-contained. You should only use hyperlinks to link directly to reference information. You must not include links to web resources to extend your application. Assessors are not required to access links to conduct assessment or recommend a funding decision.

Generative artificial intelligence (AI)

Use of generative AI tools to prepare funding applications is permitted, however, caution should be applied.

For more information see our policy on the [use of generative AI in application and assessment](#).

Deadline

This is a responsive funding opportunity. You should apply when your application is ready for submission and not wait for a closing date. Your **outline** application will be processed when it is submitted, and we aim to provide a decision on whether you will be invited to submit a full application within 10 working days.

We will not consider any applications received after 4:00pm UK time on 8 October 2026. You will not be able to apply after this time.

We reserve the right to close the funding opportunity early or amend the processing times in the event of factors that impact the pilot's viability, such as excessive demand, insufficient remaining budget or other external events .

Make sure you are aware of and follow any internal institutional deadlines. Given the expedited decision and award timelines, we strongly advise you to engage with your research office at the earliest stage.

Following the submission of your application to this funding opportunity, your application cannot be changed, and submitted applications will not be amended. If your application does not follow the guidance, it may be rejected.

Personal data

Processing personal data

ESRC, as part of UKRI, will need to collect some personal information to manage your Funding Service account and the registration of your funding applications.

We will handle personal data in line with UK data protection legislation and manage it securely. For more information, including how to exercise your rights, read our [privacy notice](#).

Sensitive information

If you or a core team member needs to tell us something you wish to remain confidential, email react@esrc.ukri.org

Include in the subject line: [the funding opportunity title; sensitive information; your Funding Service application number].

Typical examples of confidential information include:

- individual is unavailable until a certain date (for example due to parental leave)
- declaration of interest
- additional information about eligibility to apply that would not be appropriately shared in the 'Applicant and team capability' section
- conflict of interest for UKRI to consider in reviewer or panel participant selection
- the application is an invited resubmission

For information about how UKRI handles personal data, read [UKRI's privacy notice](#).

Institutional matched funding

There is no requirement for matched funding from the institutions hosting the project lead, project co-leads or other staff employed on the application, beyond the standard 20% FEC. Expert reviewers and panels assessing UKRI funding applications must not consider levels of institutional matched funding as a factor on which to base recommendations. Direct and in-kind contributions from third party project partners are encouraged.

This policy does not remove the need for support from host organisations who must provide the necessary research environment and infrastructure for award-specific activities funded by UKRI. For example, research facilities, training and development of staff.

Publication of outcomes

ESRC, as part of UKRI, will publish the outcomes of full applications submitted to this funding opportunity at [ESRC funding decisions](#).

If your full application is successful, we will publish some personal information on the [UKRI Gateway to Research](#).

Summary

Word limit: 250

In plain English, provide a summary we can use to identify the most suitable experts to assess your application.

We may make this summary publicly available on external-facing websites, therefore do not include any confidential or sensitive information. Make it suitable for a variety of readers, for example:

- opinion-formers
- policymakers
- the public

- the wider research community

Guidance for writing a summary

Clearly describe your proposed work in terms of:

- context
- the partner need and the challenge the project addresses
- aims and objectives
- applications and benefits

Core team

List the key members of your team and assign them roles from the following:

- project lead (PL)
- project co-lead (UK) (PcL)
- project co-lead (international) (PcL (I))
- specialist
- grant manager
- professional enabling staff
- research and innovation associate
- technician

Only list one individual as project lead.

Collaborators will be expected to be listed as project partners (meaning not part of the core team), unless they are eligible to hold ESRC funding.

UKRI has introduced a new addition to the 'Specialist' role type. Public contributors such as people with lived experience can now be added to an application.

Find out more about [UKRI's core team roles in funding applications](#)

Application questions

As your **outline** application will be assessed by ESRC staff, who may come from different disciplinary backgrounds, you should write your responses in clear language that can be understood by non-experts.

Outline vision

Word limit: 500

What are you hoping to achieve with your proposed work?

What the assessors are looking for in your response

Explain how your proposed work:

- is timely given current trends, context and needs
- is scientifically rigorous and will result in robust research outputs
- will deliver impactful outputs that are needed and will be used by the partner
- meets the strategic aims of the funding opportunity

References may be included within this section.

You may demonstrate elements of your responses in visual form if relevant. Further details are provided in the Funding Service.

You must include at least one collaborating partner from the UK public sector who needs the project outputs and has concrete, credible plans to act on the planned outputs within six months of them being produced. Partnerships must be confirmed at the time of application and fully aligned in terms of activity objectives. Details of the partnership should be included in the **outline** vision. If you are invited to submit a full application, a letter of support from the collaborating partner will be required.

Your response should show clear evidence and justification of timeliness, specifically that:

- the research activity is driven by the collaborating partner's urgent and unforeseen evidence need. Urgency caused by previous inaction (for example evidence needs known for some time but only considered at the last minute) are not eligible as they could have been submitted to a regular grant funding opportunity. Activity that could or should have been funded through standard ESRC funding routes or other non-urgent activity that cannot be delivered within the award period is also not eligible
- that the output needs to and can be utilised by the partner(s) within six months of the grant ending

Your response should include clear evidence and justification of the strength of collaboration, including:

- that a genuine partnership is in place
- that the application has been co-produced, and that co-production extends through the duration of the award
- that the proposed outputs are needed by the partner and that they plan to use them

You must clearly specify intended outputs and how these will generate impactful outcomes for the project partner.

You must clearly articulate why the research:

- could not have been anticipated or funded through standard ESRC funding routes (for example, research grants, research centres, research institutes.)
- could not be funded through the partner organisation's own existing resources or budget; is not the result of long-standing or intentional limitations in partner capacity or capability or where there will be insufficient capacity or capability within the partner organisation to utilise the results
- does not constitute follow-on activity from a previous or existing collaborative project partner; and cannot be supported through other more appropriate UKRI routes (for example, ESRC Impact Accelerator Accounts)

Outline approach

Word limit: 500

How are you going to deliver your proposed work?

What the assessors are looking for in your response

Explain how you have designed your approach so that it:

- is effective and appropriate to achieve your objectives

References may be included within this section.

You may demonstrate elements of your responses in visual form if relevant. Further details are provided in the Funding Service.

You should clearly evidence how the proposed research activity can feasibly be completed and deliver impactful outputs within six months. You should demonstrate how the award can feasibly start within one month of the funding decision and explain how the proposed collaboration will begin immediately from the start of an award.

Outline applicant and team capability to deliver

Word limit: 500

How will the application team deliver the proposed research programme?

What the assessors are looking for in your response

Evidence of how you, and if relevant your team, have:

- relevant research experience and skills to develop and deliver the proposed research programme
- planned to identify and embed additional expertise where gaps in the team exist

The core leadership team should consist of the project lead and the project co-leads identified on the **outline** application. There will be scope to expand this

team and include new collaborators on the full application and you will be able to add further detail.

Showcase the range of relevant skills you and, if relevant, your team (project and project co-leads, researchers, technicians, specialists, partners and so on) have and how this will help deliver the proposed work.

[The roles in funding applications policy](#) has descriptions of the different project roles.

Outline costs

What are the expected costs of the proposed work?

Provide the approximate total values in GBP (£) for the expected directly incurred, directly allocated, indirect costs and exceptions. View the guidance on the costs you can apply for.

How we will assess your application

Assessment process

We will assess your application using the following process.

This is a responsive funding opportunity. Applications can be submitted any time that the opportunity is open and will be assessed on a rolling basis.

Outline shortlisting

We will assess your **outline** application using an internal sift carried out by ESRC staff. We will aim to provide a shortlisting decision within 10 working days of submission. If your **outline** application is successful you will be invited to submit a full application.

Full application

Additional guidance will be provided to invited applicants on how to complete the full application. You will be required to submit the full application within one month of being invited to do so.

Full application assessment

Following internal checks, your full application will be assessed by at least one external expert.

Funding recommendations will be made on a regular basis and a tiered approach will be utilised. The final funding decisions for this funding

opportunity may include a portfolio approach to ensure an appropriate balance of projects to achieve the pilot's aims.

For more information on how we prioritise applications for funding please visit [How we make decisions](#).

ESRC will make the final funding decision. We reserve the right to change the process of assessment in the event of factors that impact the pilot's viability, such as excessive demand, insufficient remaining budget or other external events.

Timescale

We aim to complete the assessment **outline** applications within 10 working days of receiving your application.

If you are invited to submit a full application, this must be submitted within one month.

We aim to complete the assessment of full applications within one month of receiving them. If successful, you would be expected to start your award within one month of receiving funding confirmation.

Feedback

We are unable to provide any feedback on **outline** applications.

If you are invited to submit a full application, we will give feedback with the outcome of your application.

Principles of assessment

We support the San Francisco [declaration on research assessment \(DORA\)](#) and recognise the relationship between research assessment and research integrity.

Find out about [the UKRI Principles of Assessment and Decision Making](#).

Using generative artificial intelligence (AI) in expert review

Reviewers and panellists are not permitted to use generative AI tools to develop their assessment, including to correct language, spelling, grammar and formatting. Using these tools can potentially compromise the confidentiality of the ideas that applicants have entrusted to UKRI to safeguard.

For more detail see our [policy on the use of generative AI](#).

Assessment areas

The assessment areas we will use for **outline** applications are:

- **Outline** vision
- **Outline** approach
- **Outline** applicant and team capability to deliver
- **Outline** costs

Find details of assessment questions and criteria under the 'Application questions' heading in the 'How to apply' section.

If you are invited to submit a full application, the following assessment areas will be used:

- Vision
- Approach
- Applicant and team capability to deliver
- Resources and cost justification
- Ethics and responsible research and innovation (RRI)
- Data Management and sharing

Contact details

Get help with your application

If you have a question and the answers aren't provided on this page.

The helpdesk is committed to helping users of the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Funding Service as effectively and as quickly as possible. In order to manage cases at peak volume times, the helpdesk will triage and prioritise those queries with an imminent opportunity deadline or a technical issue.

Enquiries raised where information is available on the Funding finder opportunity page and should be understood early in the application process (for example, regarding eligibility, content or remit of a funding opportunity) will not constitute a priority case and will be addressed as soon as possible.

Contact Details

For help and advice on costings and writing your proposal please contact your research office in the first instance, allowing sufficient time for your organisation's submission process.

For questions related to this specific funding opportunity please contact react@esrc.ukri.org

Any queries regarding the system or the submission of applications through the Funding Service should be directed to the helpdesk.

Email: support@funding-service.ukri.org

Phone: 01793 547490

Our phone lines are open:

- Monday to Thursday 8:30am to 5:00pm
- Friday 8:30am to 4:30pm

To help us process queries quicker, we request that users highlight the council and opportunity name in the subject title of their email query, include the application reference number, and refrain from contacting more than one mailbox at a time.

For further information on submitting an application read [How applicants use the Funding Service](#).

Additional info

Research and innovation impact

Impact can be defined as the long-term intended or unintended effect research and innovation has on society, economy and the environment; to individuals, organisations, and the wider global population.

Supporting documents

[React – Equality Impact Assessment \(PDF, 247KB\)](#)

Research disruption due to COVID-19

We recognise that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused major interruptions and disruptions across our communities. We are committed to ensuring that individual applicants and their wider team, including partners and networks, are not penalised for any disruption to their career, such as:

- breaks and delays
- disruptive working patterns and conditions
- the loss of ongoing work
- role changes that may have been caused by the pandemic

Reviewers and panel members will be advised to consider the unequal impacts that COVID-19 related disruption might have had on the capability to deliver and career development of those individuals included in the application. They will be asked to consider the capability of the applicant and their wider team to deliver the research they are proposing.

Where disruptions have occurred, you can highlight this within your application if you wish, but there is no requirement to detail the specific circumstances that caused the disruption.

Guidance on good research

[Good research resource hub](#)

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