



**UK Research
and Innovation**

Funding opportunity

Large grants for ambitious research in the social sciences: outline stage

Opportunity status:	Open
Funders:	Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) , Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)
Funding type:	Grant
Total fund:	£10,000,000
Award range:	£1,000,000 - £2,500,000
Publication date:	23 June 2022
Opening date:	23 June 2022 09:00 UK time
Closing date:	20 September 2022 16:00 UK time

Last updated: 21 June 2022

Apply for a large grant to fund ambitious social science-focused research with the potential to generate significant economic or societal impact.

This opportunity also includes funding for one ‘resilience in crises’ grant in collaboration with AHRC.

You must be based at a UK organisation eligible for funding. Standard ESRC eligibility rules apply.

This is the outline proposal stage of the opportunity.

Proposals must be between £1 million and £2.5 million at full economic cost (fEC). ESRC will fund 80% of fEC.

Proposals can be up to five years in length.

Who can apply

Standard ESRC eligibility rules apply. The principal investigator for this funding opportunity must be based at an organisation eligible for funding for the duration of the grant. Eligible organisations are:

- UK higher education institutions
- research council institutes
- UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)-approved independent research organisations
- public sector research establishments
- NHS bodies with research capacity.

[Check if your institution is eligible for funding.](#)

What we're looking for

We invite proposals from individuals and research teams at eligible institutions to take forward an ambitious research agenda with the potential to generate significant economic or societal impact.

Our expectations are that large grants funded under this funding opportunity will:

- undertake a programme of ambitious and novel research
- show strong commitment for the career development of researchers (particularly at early-career stage)
- make significant contributions to scientific and economic or social impact
- involve potential users of research and include a clear strategy for creating impact that improves outcomes for individuals, society and the economy
- drive interdisciplinary research within and beyond the social sciences
- take advantage of international collaborative or comparative opportunities.

This funding opportunity for large grants is separate from the ESRC research centres competition which provides larger scale funding. We are planning to launch the next research centres competition in 2023.

Given the scale of the grant, it is likely that successful applications will be led by either:

- researchers with appropriate experience
- less experienced researchers with appropriate mentoring and support that enables successful project delivery.

Social science-focused projects

We welcome proposals from any area of [ESRC's social science disciplines](#).

We expect to fund:

- four projects from any discipline within the social sciences as part of the open element of this opportunity
- one project specifically related to 'resilience to crises' (referred to as the 'highlight notice').

Social science-focused projects (open element)

For the open element, it is an essential requirement that your primary research area is in the social sciences.

At least 50% of the proposed programme of research must fall within ESRC's remit. Please refer to the list of research areas that fall within [ESRC's remit](#) for further information.

'Resilience to crises' highlight notice

In addition to the social science-focused open element projects, this funding opportunity also includes dedicated funding for a project relating to building societal resilience to crises at regional, national, or transnational scales.

This highlight notice is co-funded by ESRC and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and is open to interdisciplinary proposals from across the social sciences, arts and humanities. At least 50% of the proposed programme of research must fall within the combined remits of ESRC and AHRC.

ESRC and AHRC are looking to fund at least one large grant that has the capacity to help decision makers either:

- pre-empt and reduce vulnerabilities to crises
- support the sustainable management of risk
- support inclusive and sustained recoveries from crises.

Under this theme, applicants may wish to address one or more of the following:

- systems approaches to understanding fragility and how populations' resilience to shocks, and their multiple impacts, can be strengthened
- responses to cascading risks as one event triggers a series of shocks or to compounding risks as multiple risks interact in time and space
- the varied capacities and intersecting identities that shape how communities and populations respond to crises and their consequences quickly and comprehensively
- effective decision-making and management responses to crises, including the data needed to track and measure events and the institutions and policies that are needed for inclusive, informed action

- challenges and innovations around data collection and research methods in fragile or volatile settings
- approaches to supporting the recovery of the human-environment interface and evaluating the impact of responses on sustainable development
- risks and barriers to inclusive resilience (since shocks occur within a complex system of interrelated social, political, economic, cultural, health, environmental, institutional and technological factors) or solutions to overcome them
- how immediate, reactive approaches to shocks can be combined with long-term risk-mitigation strategies to increase community and population resilience.

We invite applications that are interdisciplinary. Applications may focus on any part of the world, including projects that are comparative in approach.

For the purposes of this resilience to crises highlight notice, we are interested in crises and populations (the total inhabitants of an area) at the subnational regional, national, or transnational scale. Examples of crises include, but are not limited to:

- civil and international conflict
- financial crises
- pollution events
- ecological disturbances.

More information about the background to resilience to crises project is in the ‘additional info’ section.

Who can be included in proposals

Research proposals can include multiple applicants, for example, co-investigators. However, there must be one principal investigator who takes the lead responsibility for the conduct of the research and observance of the terms and conditions. An applicant can act either as principal investigator or co-investigator on only one proposal for this funding opportunity.

Studentships are not eligible under this funding opportunity.

International co-investigators

ESRC attaches major importance to the position of UK social science in the international and global arena.

We positively encourage active collaborations 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.

Find out more about [the inclusion of international co-investigators](#).

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.

Get further information on the [inclusion of business, third-party or government co-investigators](#).

Knowledge exchange and generating impact

While some research topics are more theoretical than others, awards made under this funding opportunity will provide for excellent research with economic or societal impact.

You are expected to carefully consider how best to build links and contacts with potential beneficiaries and users of the research at the earliest possible stages of research design and development, and to work towards co-production of knowledge with research users and people with lived experience where appropriate.

In addition to knowledge exchange and impact strategies that focus on particular user groups or specific named beneficiary organisations, we also strongly encourage public engagement activities which bring together researchers and the wider public.

Consideration of, and advance planning for, knowledge exchange (KE) and strategies to maximise economic or societal impact should be central elements of proposals submitted to this funding opportunity.

You are encouraged to:

- work with your institution's professional services to ensure that you build on existing strengths and good practice for impact and knowledge exchange
- identify and actively engage relevant users of research and stakeholders at appropriate stages
- articulate a clear understanding of the context and needs of users, and consider ways for the proposed research to meet these needs or increase understanding of them
- outline the planning and management of associated activities including timing, personnel, skills, budget, deliverables and feasibility
- include evidence of any existing engagement with relevant users.

We expect sufficient budget to be dedicated to delivering knowledge exchange activities. The resources required to undertake effective knowledge exchange will need to be accurately reflected and costed into the full proposal.

You may find it helpful to refer to ESRC guidance on including [impact in your research proposal](#).

You can also refer to the [ESRC impact tool kit](#) which includes information on:

- developing impact strategies
- promoting knowledge exchange and public engagement
- communicating effectively with key stakeholders.

Leadership and management

We ask you to explain how you will provide leadership to a potentially diverse group of collaborators and support an inclusive research environment, and how the proposed programme of activities and its outputs will be managed.

Promoting equality, diversity and inclusion is an integral part of UKRI's vision to deliver new knowledge and an enriched, healthier, more sustainable and resilient society and culture, and to contribute to a more prosperous economy.

Partnerships within research proposals, particularly involving research in low-income and middle-income countries, should be transparent and based on mutual respect. They should recognise different inputs, different interests and different desired outcomes. You should ensure:

- data is shared and used ethically and meets the identified needs of society
- partnerships are ethical, equitable and sustainable with meaningful, substantive and clear engagement.

Those invited to submit full proposals will be required to develop more detailed leadership and management plans.

Career development and capacity-building

We will be looking for evidence of a strong commitment to supporting the development of researchers (particularly at the early-career stage) and of plans for capacity building.

There are a range of career development opportunities and capacity-building activities that could be incorporated into the proposal. We expect these kinds of approaches to be summarised in the outline and addressed in detail in the full proposal.

Proposals should specifically enable early career researchers, particularly at the postdoctoral level, to move towards becoming independent researchers in the chosen field of the proposal. This may include:

- leading workstreams with supervision
- the development of a training and mentoring programme as a workstream within a grant, or designed in a way that can be embedded across the initiative.

We welcome innovative approaches to early career researcher development and will consider how these can be accommodated in detail at the full proposal stage.

Following the [review of the PhD](#), part of our strategy to support doctoral training is the ambition for all ESRC-funded students to have the opportunity to undertake a three month placement in academia, policy, business or third sector organisations.

We encourage you to consider how you might identify and develop placement opportunities for ESRC-funded students across the lifecourse of the grant.

Research ethics

You must:

- ensure that the proposed research will be carried out to a high ethical standard
- clearly state how any potential ethical and health and safety issues have been considered and will be addressed, ensuring that all necessary ethical approval is in place and all risks are minimised before the project commences.

All proposals must comply with the [ESRC framework for research ethics](#).

Grant details and budget

The full economic cost (fEC) of proposals should be between £1 million and £2.5 million for a period of up to five years.

ESRC will fund 80% of the fEC. Grants are expected to start by 1 October 2023.

Investigator time must be costed into the proposal and justified in the ‘justification of resources’ attachment.

Co-investigator funding

Co-investigators must make a significant contribution to conducting the research.

ESRC will fund all eligible and justified costs associated with international co-investigators and UK business, civil society or government bodies at 100% fEC. However, these combined costs must not exceed 30% of the full 100% fEC cost of the grant.

How to apply

There are two application stages to this opportunity:

- outline application stage
- full application stage.

Applicants successfully shortlisted at the outline stage will be invited to submit full applications.

Outline application stage

You must submit your outline application using the [Joint Electronic Submission \(Je-S\) system](#).

All principal and co-investigators must have a Je-S account which has been verified by a third party before they can be found in searches within the Je-S system and added as an applicant. To get you started on creating an account, please refer to the [Je-S helptext](#).

We recommend you start your application early. You can save completed details in Je-S at any time and return to continue your application later.

When applying, select ‘new document’ then:

- council: ESRC
- document type: outline
- scheme: outline proposal
- call/type/mode: 2022/2023 large grants outline call.

If applying for the resilience to crises highlight area, please include the phrase ‘crises highlight’ at the beginning of your grant title so that we can clearly identify it.

Once you have completed your application, make sure you ‘submit document’.

You can find advice on completing your application in the [Je-S handbook](#).

Your host organisation will also be able to provide advice and guidance on completing your application.

ESRC must receive your application by 20 September at 16:00.

You will not be able to apply after this time. Please leave enough time for your proposal to pass through your organisation’s Je-S submission route before this date.

You should allow sufficient time for your research organisation to complete the submission process. It will not be possible to submit proposals after the set deadline.

There are further details about how to add information and attachments to Je-S in the ‘Je-S guidance’ document in the ‘additional info’ section of this opportunity.

Attachments

Along with your Je-S application, you will also need to include the following mandatory attachments:

- case for support (no more than four sides of A4)
- justification of resources (no more than one side of A4).

You may also include a list of key publications (no more than one side of A4). This is optional.

For more information to help you complete these documents refer to the [Je-S ESRC specific requirements](#).

No other attachments are permitted. You must not upload CVs.

Case for support

The case for support is the body of your research proposal. It must not exceed four sides of A4 and should cover the main features of the research. Include details of any potential for linkages to other research activities (for example, those supported by other funding bodies in the UK or overseas).

The case for support must include:

- an introduction that sets out the aims and objectives of the research in context. It should briefly sketch the main work on which the research will draw. Any relevant policy or practical background should be included
- the research questions you will address. These should be written out clearly in plain English
- a description of the proposed research methods and explanation of the reasons for their choice. Particular care should be taken to explain any innovation in the methodology or where you intend to develop new methods
- a clearly stated framework and methods for analysis, including an explanation of the reasons for their choice
- an explanation on the steps you will take, to provide opportunities for users to benefit from your research, and to ensure that your research has maximum economic and societal impact

- the expected outputs both academic and those orientated to potential users (such as articles, papers, datasets, events). Where possible, describe the expected impact.

Using up to one of the four sides of A4 in the ‘case for support’ attachment, you must include:

- a management plan explaining how you will provide leadership to a potentially diverse group of academic and (as appropriate) non-academic collaborators, how the proposed programme of activities and its outputs will be managed, and the role and function of any advisory or management groups. This section should include:
 - how various work-streams in the proposal will be coordinated and managed and briefly detail project management resources and administrative support
 - how the grant’s leadership will provide adequate operational capabilities and resources to meet the demands of the research
 - consideration of equality, diversity and inclusion, and evidence that any partnerships are equitable
- an outline of your commitment and plans regarding capacity-building and the professional development of researchers at all stages of their career. This detail will need to be further developed at the full phase of the opportunity.

Ethics

Applicants must:

- ensure the proposed research will be carried out to a high ethical standard
- clearly state how any potential ethical, and health and safety issues have been considered and will be addressed, ensuring that all necessary ethical approval is in place before the project commences and all risks are minimised.

ESRC’s framework for [research ethics](#) contains a full explanation of our approach, with guidance for applicants.

Justification of resources

This statement (of up to one side of A4) should be used to justify the resources required to undertake the research project, and to confirm the feasibility of the proposed activity within the requested budget. Explain why the indicated resources are needed, taking account of the nature and complexity of the research proposed.

Proposals which include co-investigators from third sector organisations that are deemed not to engage in economic activity must provide evidence of this status within the justification of resources statement.

List of key publications

This is optional.

The bibliography (up to one side of A4 in length for references cited in the proposal only) should be attached. Please note publications not cited in the proposal should not be added.

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 or 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 with the relevant scheme guidelines.

How we will assess your application

Assessment process

There are two stages to this opportunity:

- outline proposal stage
- full proposal stage.

Outline proposals will be assessed and shortlisted in December 2022 by an assessment panel.

Outline stage assessment criteria

Outline proposals will be assessed against the following criteria:

- originality and potential contribution to knowledge, including:
 - originality and potential to make a significant contribution to theory, methods or knowledge
 - ambition and innovation (including drawing on combinations of disciplinary and cross-disciplinary expertise and approaches)
- research design and methods, including:
 - clarity of conceptual and theoretical foundations
 - suitability of research design and methods to address aims and objectives
 - appropriate consideration and management of risk and ethical issues
- outputs, dissemination and impact, including:
 - strong evidence of engagement with users at the project planning and inception stages through to completion and impact of the project

- evidence of considered and realistic engagement and dissemination strategy and clear plans to maximise academic and societal or economic impact that improves outcomes for individuals, society and the economy
- leadership, management and deliverability, including:
 - convincing management plans on how the programme of activities and its outputs will be delivered
 - consideration of equality, diversity and inclusion, with clear evidence that any partnerships are equitable
 - clear commitment to capacity building and career development activities.

Shortlisted applicants will subsequently be invited to submit applications to the full proposal stage in December 2022, with a closing date in March 2023. Further Je-S guidance will be issued at this time.

Full stage assessment criteria

At the full proposal stage, we will assess proposals for:

- originality and potential contribution to knowledge
- research design and methods
- outputs, dissemination and impact
- value for money
- leadership, management and deliverability.

Full proposals will be referred to a minimum of four external peer reviewers, including reviewers from outside the UK. Proposals will need to meet the standard ESRC minimum quality threshold based on reviewer scores to be shortlisted for the assessment panel.

Shortlisted applicants to the full stage of the funding opportunity will be given the opportunity to respond to anonymised reviewer comments before proposals are considered by the assessment panel. The full stage commissioning panel will meet in June 2023.

At both the outline and full proposal stages, the assessment panel will take into consideration the overall thematic balance across the open element and the themes detailed in the highlight notice. ESRC reserves the right to modify the assessment process as needed.

Funding decisions

Funding decisions are expected to be available in late July or early August 2023.

Grants will commence on 1 October 2023.

Contact details

Get help with developing your proposal

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.

Ask about this funding opportunity

Any questions relating to this funding opportunity, including about ESRC research funding rules, should be emailed to:

ESRC large grants team

Email: largegrants2022-23@esrc.ukri.org

We aim to respond within three working days.

Get help with applying through Je-S

Email

jeshelp@je-s.ukri.org

Telephone

01793 444164

Opening times

[Je-S helpdesk opening times](#)

Additional info

‘Resilience to crises’ highlight notice background

Crises often expose the fragility of populations at regional, national and transnational scales. Such events can be triggered by a broad range of shocks and stresses, including environmental, political, economic, and social.

Such events can have severe and far-reaching consequences, including:

- mass displacement
- economic hardship
- disease outbreaks
- food and water scarcity
- supply chain vulnerabilities
- biodiversity and heritage loss
- political instability
- psychological trauma.

They may also create or exacerbate other vulnerabilities.

While it is not possible to predict or prevent every risk or emergency, we want to understand what more we can do to build societal resilience to withstand, adapt to, and recover from acute or chronic shocks.

Understanding evolving crises and shock events through the lens of resilience can enable a deeper understanding of how to better manage and address population-level vulnerabilities. The interconnected and interdependent nature of these vulnerabilities requires systems approaches and recognition of multiple coping mechanisms.

Grant management, monitoring and evaluation

Each successful award will be assigned an investment manager from ESRC. The investment manager will work with award-holders to provide guidance on:

- reporting
- monitoring
- evaluation
- impact
- communications.

They will act as the first point of contact for any queries award-holders may have for ESRC about their terms and conditions.

ESRC's investment managers oversee portfolios of research, and will be aware of other complementary research that ESRC and UKRI have funded. They can assist in facilitating collaboration between awards, and keep award holders updated on relevant news and opportunities from ESRC and UKRI.

Supporting documents

[Je-S guidance for applicants \(PDF, 226KB\)](#)

[Equality impact assessment \(PDF, 321KB\)](#)

Timeline

○ **23 June 2022 09:00**

Outline application opening date

○ **20 September 2022 16:00**

Outline application closing date

○ **December 2022**

Outline application shortlisting panel meeting

☐ **January 2023**

Full application opening date

☐ **March 2023**

Full application closing date

☐ **July 2023**

Full application panel meeting

☐ **August 2023**

Decisions communicated

☐ **1 October 2023**

Grants commence

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<https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/large-grants-for-ambitious-research-in-the-social-sciences-outline-stage>