

Secondary Data Analysis Initiative (SDAI) call Frequently Asked Questions

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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 (www.esrc.ac.uk/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.

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Why has SDAI moved from an annual completion to an open date call?

The aim of the move to an open date approach is to allow researchers greater flexibility in the timing and focus of their proposals, and to enable ESRC to meet new strategic priorities, target particular datasets (for example around the release of a new wave of data), and provide more opportunity to work with partner organisations.

Have you changed the scope of the SDAI in light of this change?

No. In previous rounds we have aimed to adapt the call to meet particular strategic needs, taking into account evidence from previous phases. The open call is largely based on the principles established for phase three of the initiative. The overarching aims of the initiative remain funding innovative, impactful research using secondary analysis of data, as well as meeting other strategic aims of the ESRC to maximise the use of existing datasets. The extent to which the specification is supporting us to achieve these aims will be reviewed annually.

Why does the SDAI call only consider projects which use specific ESRC- funded resources/ infrastructure?

We have substantial investments in developing a rich portfolio of data resources and infrastructure, ensuring that researchers have the data to carry out world-class research. This call focuses on these resources in order to support the ESRC's continued aim to maximise the use of our data resources.

The specification says that there will be a highlight notice involving other funders, in those instances would proposals still need to link to these resources?

There may be some flexibility relating to highlight notices and this, if relevant, will be detailed within the highlight notice itself. Any proposals not submitted in response to a highlight notice must include at least one of the resources or infrastructure detailed in Appendix I of the call specification.

The dataset I want to use is not listed in the specification, is it still eligible to be used in this call?

Other dataset(s) can be used (whether ESRC-funded or from other agencies), as long as it is in conjunction with at least one ESRC-funded resources or infrastructure specified in Appendix I of the call specification, and provided that you have permission to use them.

Can I use international datasets in this call?

Yes, as long as your proposal also includes at least one of the ESRC-funded resources or infrastructure specified in Appendix I of the call specification; you can also include comparable international datasets provided that you have permission to use them. 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 one of the ESRC-funded resources or infrastructure specified in Appendix I of the call specification.

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 18-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 18-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 per cent 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:

www.esrc.ac.uk/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 www.rcuk.ac.uk/funding/eligibilityforrcs/. For full details of the eligibility criteria please also refer to the ESRC Research Funding Guide www.esrc.ac.uk/rfg.

Do all proposals need to include an early career researcher?

Yes, a key aspect of this call is to promote training and capacity-building in secondary data analysis, therefore all proposals must have at least one early career researcher either as a principal investigator or as a co-investigator.

How are you defining early career researcher?

For the purpose of this call, an early career researcher must meet the following criteria:

- A maximum of four years academic research experience following the completion of their PhD, or be of equivalent professional standing (see below). This period is measured from the submission date of the PhD thesis to the date on which the proposal is submitted to ESRC. Career breaks (including periods of employment outside of academia that would not have aided their academic career progression) will be excluded from the four-year period. Therefore, applicants who have not undertaken a career break must be within four years of the original submission date of their PhD by the date they submit their SDAI proposal.
- Not current or former principal investigators on ESRC or other Research Council grants, except ESRC Postdoctoral Fellowships and Research Councils UK Fellows.

What information should I include in my proposal relating to the early career researcher?

The early career researcher's CV must clearly demonstrate that the applicant meets the above criteria.

Early career researchers are expected to play a substantive role in the project and this should be clearly described in the staff duties section proposal. Projects are expected to provide training and capacity-building activities for early career researchers details of which must be provided in the case for support. This should include, where possible, the involvement of early career researchers in impact and dissemination activities.

What is meant by 'equivalent professional standing'?

An applicant that may not have a PhD but has had experience of conducting research at postgraduate (and beyond) level and may hold a postgraduate qualification. For example, this may apply to an applicant who has been working at a non-governmental organisation, in

government or the private sector. The ESRC will not advise potential applicants on their eligibility; early career applicants must include a statement on their CV to articulate the grounds on which they meet the requirement of being of 'equivalent professional standing'.

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 www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants/inclusion-of-international-co-investigators-on-proposals/ and also the Research Funding Guide www.esrc.ac.uk/rfg.

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 <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants/inclusion-of-uk-business-third-sector-or-government-body-co-investigators-on-proposals/>, and the Research Funding Guide www.esrc.ac.uk/rfg 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 strongly 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.

What commitments are required from non-academic partners? Do they have to provide co-funding to be considered partners?

Co-funding from project partners is not mandatory, but a demonstrable commitment from partners can be included through either contributions in-kind, or combinations of cash and in-kind contributions to project costs. Examples of in-kind contributions include staff time, provision of data and use of equipment or facilities.

Partner contributions, either in cash or in kind should be detailed on the Je-S proposal.

Can staff such as research assistants be funded under this initiative?

Yes, research assistants can be included.

How much can I apply for?

Proposals should be costed at a full Economic Cost (fEC) up to a maximum of £200,000. 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.

Is there a minimum amount of funding for the SDAI?

The minimum funding limit is £15,000. An application for any amount between £15,000 and £200,000 at 100 per cent fEC is acceptable, as long as it meets the aims and objectives of the call specification and is eligible for this call.

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 through the UK Data Service or elsewhere do not require a letter of support (eg the specified ESRC-funded longitudinal studies). Letters of support are required where data is being accessed through the Administrative Data Research Network (ADRN), 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.

I plan to access data via the ADRN. Do I need my project to have received approval from the approvals panel before submitting it?

Yes. Please note, proposals seeking to use the ADRN must meet the criteria of an ADRN project as outlined here: adrn.ac.uk/using-the-network. Part of these criteria is that applicants should not seek to access data via the ADRN if they can access it via other means. Applicants are strongly encouraged to develop such proposals in parallel with the ADRN.

For these proposals, applicants must obtain support from the approvals panel prior to submitting their proposal and include proof of this approval with their application.

I plan to access data via the Big Data Network Phase 2. Do I need my project to have received full approval from the relevant data centre's approvals process before submitting it?

Yes, for proposals seeking to access non-open data from the Big Data Network Phase 2 Centre applicants are required to contact the relevant data research centre and obtain approval from the relevant approvals body prior to application. Applicants should include proof of this approval in their proposal.

Do I still need to obtain approval to access open-data via the Big Data Network Phase 2?

No, approvals are not required for these data. Where these data are planning to be used it should be clearly detailed in your application that this data is being accessed via the Big Data Network Phase 2, in order to demonstrate that your proposal meets the eligibility criteria.

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

Proposals are normally limited to a maximum period of 18 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.

How will proposals be assessed?

Each proposal will be reviewed by two academic reviewers and one user reviewer identified by the ESRC office. Applicants will be given the opportunity to respond to reviewers' comments before the proposal is considered by members of a Grant Assessment Panel (GAP). Funding decisions will be made by the Grants Delivery Group.

How do I access highlight notices in Je-S?

There are not separate Je-S calls for highlight notices therefore proposals should be submitted to the SDAI open call on Je-S (please refer to the open call Je-S guidance for further information on this). Proposals to highlight notices will need to specify in their title that they are apply to the highlight, please refer to the highlight notice for further details on this.