

Transformations to Sustainability (T2S) Frequently Asked Questions

Last updated: 25 January 2017

This document sets out answers to a range of frequently asked questions which potential applications may have. It may be updated while the call is open to elaborate on supplement answers, in response to received queries. However, the guidance is not supplement to, nor substitute for, the detail provided in the call for proposals and associated guidance documents. These documents are available on the NORFACE website (www.norface.net/programmes/t2s/).

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Questions about Official Development Assistance (ODA)

What is ODA?

ODA stands for Official Development Assistance. The OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) sets the international standard for defining and registering ODA. The DAC defines ODA as those flows to countries and territories on the DAC List of ODA Recipients and to multilateral development institutions which are:

- provided by official agencies, including state and local governments, or by their executive agencies; and
- each transaction of which: a) is administered with the promotion of the economic development and welfare of developing countries as its main objective; and b) is concessional in character and conveys a grant element of at least 25 per cent (discounted at a rate of 10 per cent).

(www.oecd.org/dac/stats/officialdevelopmentassistancedefinitionandcoverage.htm)

What is the DAC list and which countries are on it?

The DAC List of ODA Recipients shows all countries and territories eligible to receive official development assistance (ODA). These consist of all low and middle income countries (LMICs) based on gross national income (GNI) per capita as published by the World Bank, with the exception of G8 members, EU members, and countries with a firm date for entry into the EU. The list also includes all of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) as defined by the United Nations. The DAC List presents countries and territories in groups, but all countries listed are eligible to receive ODA and therefore relevant to GCRF funding. The DAC revises the list every three years. Countries that have exceeded the high-income threshold for three consecutive years at the time of the review are removed. The next review of the DAC List will take place in 2017. The current DAC list is available online at www.oecd.org/dac/stats/daclist.html

How do I judge if my proposal meets ODA requirements?

The ESRC's contribution to the T2S call is funded through the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF). As such, applicants must clearly demonstrate how the ESRC-funded components of the project meet ODA requirements through the 'Summary of the Project' and 'Project Description' sections of their Outline Proposals and Full Proposals. An ODA compliance statement will also be required to accompany the Full Proposal.

The definition of ODA eligible research provided by the OECD makes clear that the primary purpose must be to promote the economic growth or welfare of developing countries (see Converged DAC Statistical Reporting Directives, available at www.oecd.org/dac/stats/methodology.htm).

There are guidelines to ODA eligibility but slight differences in context and detail within applications will impact on whether or not an activity or project would meet ODA requirements. When trying to decide whether an activity meets ODA requirements, it is important to focus on the questions typically asked by the OECD. Questions you may wish to consider when writing your proposal include:

- Is the project addressing the economic development and welfare of an ODA-eligible country?
- Is there a development need that my project or activity is addressing?

- Are the countries involved on the DAC List of ODA Recipients, or will countries on the DAC list directly benefit from the research?
- Would this project or activity be applied in an ODA-eligible country – in which case when, how and with whom?
- What would the impact of my project or activity be, and who would benefit?
- How does my project or activity contribute to sustainable development?
- What would success for this activity look like?
- How would success or impact be measured?

Applicants should ensure they have considered existing advice on ODA requirements. Any queries about ODA eligibility should be raised with ESRC by emailing t2s@esrc.ac.uk

The ESRC reserves the right to reject applications that do not meet the ODA criteria, both during the outline and full proposal application stages. Initial assessment of ODA compliance will take place within ESRC, though final decisions may include input from the commissioning panel as well as external sources of ODA expertise. We expect applicants to refer closely to ODA guidance as part of preparing the ESRC-funded components of the proposal.

If I've chosen to submit an ODA relevant proposal, does my research have to take place in a DAC list country?

No. Where research is conducted, or where research participants are from, are not sufficient indications of whether or not research meets ODA requirements. The key to ODA compliance is what the primary purpose of the research is, and where the benefits of the research are expected to be experienced. The primary purpose of any ODA relevant proposal must be to promote the economic development and welfare of a country or countries on the DAC list. Any benefit to the UK or any other non-DAC list country can only be a secondary consideration: the primary benefit must be to a country or countries on the DAC list. Not all research conducted in DAC list countries will meet these criteria, but some research involving non-DAC list countries may. Applicants will therefore need to carefully consider how they demonstrate ODA compliance regardless of where their proposed research takes place.

Are proposals relevant across more than one country eligible?

Yes, proposals may be relevant to one or multiple countries on the DAC list.

Is collaboration with a researcher or non-academic partner in a country or countries on the DAC List of ODA Recipients required?

It is not mandatory to have a partner in a country on the DAC List of ODA Recipients. However if you are submitting an ODA relevant proposal and have chosen not to have a partner in a DAC list country you need to think particularly carefully about how you will demonstrate that the research will benefit those countries, as often this is something that an in-country partner helps achieve. Partnerships may build on existing relationships or represent the development of a new collaborative relationship. Where partnerships are included, there must be a strong underpinning research ethic based on mutual respect and understanding for different cultural, ethnic, social, and economic beliefs and practices.

Can I include researchers from outside the UK as co-investigators on ODA relevant proposals?

Yes. ESRC's standard international co-investigator rules apply. It is permissible to include researchers based in any country, not just those on the OECD DAC list, as international co-investigators as long as they comply with the policy. Please refer to ESRC's international co-investigator policy for further information (www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-forapplicants/inclusion-of-international-co-investigators-on-proposals/).

Can I include costs for international non-academic organisations in my proposal?

While non-academic partners from outside the UK, including DAC list countries, are not eligible to be included as co-investigators, they can be included as project partners or employed on a consultancy basis. It will be up to the project team to decide on and justify the specific required involvement within the proposal. Where costs for non-academic international organisations are to be included as international consultants, please note that it is expected that in most cases a consultant will not make a significant contribution to the project overall, rather that they facilitate the research in some way. Please refer to the relevant section of the international co-investigator guidance (www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants/inclusion-of-international-co-investigators-on-proposals/) for more information. All overseas consultants should calculate costs at a daily rate appropriate to the going rate for their level of expertise in their country.

Questions about the thematic scope of the call

Does my research need to focus on all three themes of the call?

No. Every research project should focus on at least one of these themes.

The call states you encourage inter- and transdisciplinary collaboration. Does this mean social scientists working with basic scientists?

Proposals can cross any disciplines providing the project is primarily (ie more than 50 per cent) in the social science disciplines. For example social scientists working with researchers from natural sciences and/or humanities are welcome. It is important that the collaborations you form are genuinely required to answer the questions you are asking and not tokenistic.

Questions about eligibility and costs

Does the lead research organisation have to be based in the UK?

If applying to ESRC as the Main Applicant (equivalent to PI), you must be based at a UK Research Organisation that is eligible for ESRC funding. Guidance on eligibility for Research Council funding can be found on the RCUK website (<http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/funding/eligibilityforrcs/>). Proposals can be submitted by researchers who are not established members of the proposed institution. By submitting the proposal, the research organisation is confirming that, in the event of an award, they guarantee to provide facilities for the Main Applicant (as if they were an established member of staff) for the duration of the award.

Can I be the principal investigator if I'm not affiliated with a UK eligible institution?

If applying to the ESRC as the Main Applicant, applications must be led by a researcher at a UK-based organisation eligible to hold ESRC grants. However, non-UK academic researchers may be eligible for ESRC funding as international co-investigators, as explained below.

What level of institutional support is required for a T2S proposal?

The level of institutional support for GCRF calls is the same as standard Research Council proposals, ie the Research Council provides 80 per cent of the full Economic Costs (fEC), and the research organisation provides the remaining 20 per cent. International co-Investigators, as well as non-academic partners are funded at 100 per cent fEC.

Can I include researchers from outside the UK as co-investigators?

Yes. ESRC's standard international co-investigator rules apply to the costs being requested from ESRC under the T2S call. It is permissible to include researchers based in any country, not just those on the OECD DAC list, as international co-investigators as long as they comply with the policy.

Costs for international co-investigators are limited to 30 per cent of the overall costs of the proposal. Please see the guidance at the link below for specific information.

Academic researchers (at PhD or equivalent status) from an established overseas research organisation of comparable standing to a UK research organisation will be eligible to be listed as an international co-investigator under the T2S call. Please refer to ESRC's international co-investigator policy for further information (www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants/inclusion-of-international-co-investigators-on-proposals/). It is important that applicants seeking to include international co-investigators also consult the specification of the call.

I'm not based at an organisation eligible for research council funding. What ways can I be involved in a proposal?

UK based researchers and others with relevant skills from other organisations can be included as co-investigators, project partners or consultants. Further information below:

- **Co-investigators:** Co-investigators are welcome where they have a substantive and meaningful role in relation to the proposal. To include UK business, third sector or government body co-investigators, please see the guidance on the ESRC website: www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants/inclusion-of-uk-business-third-sector-or-government-body-co-investigators-on-proposals/. In most instances, costs co-investigators from business, the third sector or a government body are limited to 30 per cent of the overall costs of the proposal. Please see the guidance at the link above for specific information.
- **Project partners:** Where an organisation is providing specific contributions (either direct or indirect) to the research, the details of their organisation and their contributions to the research should be added to the cooperation partners section of the proposal form, and a specific letter of support attached.
- **Consultants:** Partners may be included as consultants within the Other Directly Incurred Costs cost heading where specialist skills or services are required to

facilitate the research. Normally, the inclusion of consultants would be expected to be subject to competitive purchasing requirements, and the proposal should provide a strong justification in the Justification of Resources for including a specific consultant in the proposal without a competitive exercise.

If I include a UK business, third sector or government body co-investigator and an international co-investigator, is there a limit on the total costs that can be associated with these co-investigators?

Yes, the combined costs associated with UK business, third sector or government body co-investigators and international co-investigators should not exceed 30 per cent of the overall cost of the grant (at 100 per cent fEC).

ESRC's rules mean that a maximum of 30 per cent can be spent on international co-investigator costs. Is there any flexibility on this?

No, the 30 per cent is a maximum for proposals to this call. However, it is worth noting that only costs specifically incurred by the co-investigator and their research organisation form this 30 per cent. For example, the following costs would not be counted as part of the 30 per cent cap:

- a survey that is competitively tendered and sub contracted (whether by a principal investigator or co-investigator)
- a research assistant appointed in the UK but undertaking fieldwork overseas
- travel costs and subsistence associated with those ordinarily based in the UK
- consultancy costs.

What can the roles and responsibilities of a non-governmental organisation (NGO) be on a project?

NGOs can be involved in any way that is most appropriate to answer the research questions. It is entirely valid for them to play a research role similar to a PI or a Co-I, or to support aspects of the project through providing data, research staff or other expertise. There are no restrictions to the extent to which an NGO may be involved in the research. However, many NGOs will not have sufficient research capacity to meet the Research Council recognition criteria, and therefore will not be eligible to be the grant-holding institution on a project (ie the PI). If this is the case, an NGO may wish to partner with a research organisation which does have this capacity, whilst still maintaining a clear and active role on the project as a partner or co-investigator, making a significant contribution to the conduct of the research.

Can I include costs for international consultants in my proposal?

Yes, costs associated with international consultants may be included on proposals. It is expected that in most cases a consultant will not make a significant scientific contribution to the project overall, rather that they facilitate the research. However there may be cases when it is not viable for a researcher to participate unless they do so as a consultant. Please refer to the international co-investigator guidance (www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-forapplicants/inclusion-of-international-co-investigators-on-proposals/). All overseas consultants should calculate costs at a daily rate appropriate to the going rate for their level of expertise in their country.

How would the ESRC view proposals where monies would be transferred to countries where there may be the risk of corruption or potential misuse of the funds?

Where this is a possibility the proposal should explain what risk management strategies will be employed and what contingencies might be deployed. Issues such as this will be considered by assessors and the commissioning panel on a case-by-case basis.

How long can a grant last?

Projects can last up to 36 months. Projects can start in June 2018 at the earliest, and must have started by 1 December 2018 at the latest. Proposals for projects lasting more than 36 months will be declared ineligible.

What is the highest limit for grants?

Up to €500,000 can be requested from ESRC per project.

Can I apply for more than one proposal?

Participation is strictly limited to a maximum of two proposals per individual (whether as Main Applicant, Co-applicant or team member), and no individual can act as Main Applicant in more than one proposal. In the Full Proposal stage, applicants who are involved in two proposals will be asked to show how they will distribute their time between the two proposals, should they both be funded.

Can I resubmit a proposal previously submitted to the research councils?

The ESRC does not allow the resubmission of any previously unsuccessful proposal, unless explicitly invited to resubmit. Please see ESRC's policy on resubmissions on the ESRC website, including definitions of what constitutes a resubmission:

www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants/resubmissions-policy/

Is it possible to apply for funding from this call if a proposal builds on previous research?

Yes, although it is important that the proposal still proposes new and cutting-edge research of the highest quality and clear relevance to the call specification. Such proposals must be a discrete piece of work that can be judged on their own merits and does not duplicate previous work. It would be expected that in such instances applicants will demonstrate where there may be added synergies between the two projects.

I want to include an associated PhD studentship – can I do that?

No. the ESRC does not provide support for stand-alone or associated doctoral students as part of this call.

Do I need to complete a Data Management Plan?

Yes, if you are planning to generate data. It is a requirement of the ESRC Research Data Policy (www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-grant-holders/research-datapolicy/) that all applicants planning to generate data as part of their grant must include a Data Management Plan in both the Outline and Full application stage, if applicable.

Who should I provide a CV for in the proposal?

Anyone who is named on the project should provide two sides CV of A4.

When do I need to provide a letter of support?

In a project where cooperation partners from non-eligible institutions are participating, a letter of commitment must be included as an annex to the Full Proposal summarising the commitment of the cooperation partner to the project and demonstrating the source of funding.

Should I include references to scientific literature in the proposal?

Yes. References should be included in the Project Description section of both the Outline and Full Proposals, if applicable. Please note that bibliography for reference cited in the proposals should only be submitted with your proposal. Please note that publications not cited in the proposal should not be included.

Where can I find more on what 'impact' means in this call?

Please refer to the Research Councils UK established definition of what we mean by impact: www.rcuk.ac.uk/innovation/impact/.

Applicants may also find it helpful to refer to the ESRC guidance on developing an impact strategy: www.esrc.ac.uk/research/impacttoolkit/developing-a-communications-and-impact-strategy/.

Please note that impact is broadly defined and we leave it up to applicants to consider the various pathways through which impact can be achieved, depending on the nature of research proposal.

Can impact activities continue after the grant period has finished?

All research activities, including those related to creating impact must be concluded within the time scale specified in the call. We also recommend that 10 per cent of all funds are allocated for impact related activities. We do encourage projects to continue promoting and maximising the impact of their research after awards have completed; however, no project funds can be used for this.

Questions about the call process**What criteria will proposals be assessed against?**

All Outline and Full Proposals are assessed against three sets of criteria: 1) scientific excellence; 2) quality and efficiency of the implementation and management; and 3) potential impact.

Is there any weighting assigned to the assessment criteria for this call?

All three sets of criteria will be taken into consideration and will be given equal weight.

How will my proposal be scored by peer reviewers?

Each criterion will be scored on a scale of one to five, with a maximum threshold of three on each criterion being necessary for the proposal to be considered for funding.

When will I find out if my proposal has been successful?

All applicants will receive notification of the shortlisting decisions in June 2017. Shortlisted applicants will be invited to submit a Full Proposal, with a deadline of 26 September 2017.

Will I receive feedback if my proposal is not shortlisted?

All applicants will receive a brief assessment of their Outline Proposal from the panel. For Full Applications, a written statement on the evaluation of each full proposal will be sent to the Call Secretariat to the Main Applicants. The Call Secretariat will inform the Main Applicants of projects that have been recommended for funding, on the subsequent contracting procedure

Will I have the chance to respond to reviewers' comments?

Full Proposals will be given the opportunity to comment on the reviews during a rebuttal phase in January 2018.

How will my proposal be reviewed?

Eligible Outline Proposals will be assessed in an 'open competition', in which an international panel of experts identifies a shortlist of proposals that are potentially fundable based on the programme's assessment criteria. Proposals in the Full Proposal round are submitted for assessment to external expert reviewers. An international panel of experts will then assess the proposals, the reviews and the rebuttals, arriving at a list of projects recommended for funding.

Other Questions**If my proposal is unsuccessful, can I re-submit under another ESRC call?**

No, the normal ESRC restrictions on resubmissions apply to this call. Only proposals specifically invited will be able to re-submit. For more information, please see our resubmissions policy at www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants/resubmissions-policy/

I already hold an ESRC grant. Can I apply again?

There is no restriction to the number of ESRC research grants you may hold simultaneously. ESRC will, however, have a careful eye to potential over-commitment when considering a new proposal. You may not exceed a time commitment of 1,650 hours per year, which is equivalent to 37.5 hours a week, 44 weeks a year (this includes applications, so for example you may not apply simultaneously for two projects where you would commit 60 per cent of your time on each).

Who should I contact if I have an enquiry?

Please direct all queries to t2s@esrc.ac.uk. Your query will be dealt with by the appropriate colleague in ESRC.

For queries relating to technical issues with the BFGO online portal, please email support@bfgo.org