UKRI Funding Finder Call: Inform design of cross-council digital research environments

Frequently Asked Questions

Version 1.6

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Applicants are strongly advised to check back for future updates to this document and ensure they read the latest version available to support the call.

Further advice can be sought by contacting Dr Yan Yip, informatics@mrc.ukri.org with enquiries@dareuk.org.uk in copy, including 'DARE UK' as the first word in the subject title.

1. How does Phase 1 of DARE UK fit into the longer-term vision?

The purpose of Phase 1 of the DARE UK programme, and this call within it, is to understand through open dialogue with the community, what's needed to enable safe and ethical research across council remits. That might be novel infrastructure but equally might not. Other mechanisms of support may prove to be better suited to achieving the ambition of the programme, for example supporting programmes to improve governance. By taking these views and the learnings from aligned projects in specific areas of need, UKRI will ensure that subsequent phases of investment address the needs of UK research and innovation in making the best use of sensitive data at scale for tangible public benefit.

2. Can you define sensitive data?

Sensitive data could be data which includes personally identifiable data (from various domains) but sensitive data might extend beyond this, for example commercially sensitive data.

3. How do you envisage the DARE UK programme will complement the ongoing NHSX TRE work?

DARE UK is seeking to address the use of sensitive data across the breadth of UKRI's remit and which may or may not involve linkage with data that may come under the NHSX TRE programme. The DARE UK programme will continue current and ongoing dialogue with NHSX and other UK data controllers and stakeholders across the UK research and innovation spectrum, to understand how DARE UK might complement and add value to each other's approaches and ambitions.

4. How does this initiative integrate (or not) with PRUK?

There is complementarity between DARE UK and a number of other investments and initiatives across the UK (and potentially beyond) including PRUK. DARE UK will continue current dialogue with

stakeholders to understand how DARE UK fits into this landscape to add value to all parties.

5. How will you manage the potential technical proliferation and possible lack of interoperability across partners - will there be an element of need to manage down technical and associated environmental debt in the future?

Technical proliferation is a big challenge, especially in terms of managing the technical and environmental debt going forward, and will be an ongoing conversation with stakeholders in developing new approaches and infrastructures, including DARE UK.

6. The assumptions include "It is ethically and legally feasible and would be trusted by the public". What evidence base do you have for that assumption?

In the case of using sensitive data for research and innovation, UKRI sees meeting the test of public trust as a reasonable assumption in developing new approaches, evidenced by the rich and ongoing societal debate about such uses. To address this in this call, this includes having approaches where DARE UK can actively involve the public and demonstrate to the public that proposed approaches are trustworthy. As well as including lay members on the independent review Panel for this call, it is one of the reasons why DARE UK is currently recruiting public representatives to sit on the Scientific and Technical Advisory Group and on the Program Board for DARE UK.

Throughout the DARE UK programme, it is our intention to include active public participation to seek to ensure that we deliver this programme and investment in a way that is transparent and trustworthy. When DARE UK publishes recommendations from Phase 1 in August next year, those recommendations will include how we move forward into subsequent phases in a way that maintains and builds on that public involvement and engagement and maintains and builds the trust with wider publics.

7. What have been the key lessons learned from similar past sprint projects?

Sprint projects should be ambitious and addressing difficult but potentially tractable issues but, importantly, with realistic prospects for delivering new insights and learnings. To meet the delivery timeline, applicants need to carefully consider and explain how they can bring the necessary resources to bear (including staff and other resources, e.g., data assets, which may have long lead times if not in place) to deliver a convincing programme of work within the 8-month term of an award (starting 4th January 2022).

8. Do Principle Investigators (PIs) need to be a senior academic or can others, such as early career researchers, lead projects?

PIs do not need to be a senior academic and could be an early career researcher or other suitable person. However, at least one of the senior investigators must have a strong track record of grant support or research and innovation outputs, noting the fast-paced delivery and nature of projects that will be supported by this call. Evaluation of the expertise of the delivery team is part of the assessment criteria that will be addressed by the Panel and must be addressed in the proposal.

9. Will there be a cap on the number of applications that an institution can submit?

There is no cap on the number of applications that an institution can submit.

10. Can charity partners support be funded through this call?

Yes, charities can be funded. Charities can receive 100% of their full economic cost but other rules to be applied:

- they are undertaking research (this may be experimental, theoretical or critical investigation work to gain knowledge, skills or understanding vital to the Project);
- they meet requirements for dissemination of the Project results;
- they include their eligible costs for research purposes in the total research organisation involvement;
- they make sure they are not applying for a grant towards costs which are already being paid by the public purse such as labour and overheads.

11. How can interested technology partners meet with TRE providers or recognised researchers/research organisations? Who/how will this be facilitated?

There is no match-making or facilitation service to bring prospective partners together. You are expected to use your own networks and due diligence to identify opportunities to participate in the call.

12. Do you know if organisations actively involved in the TRE environment and putting forth applications will be listed on the HDRUK or UKRI website?

All applications to this call are submitted in confidence. We will not share information on applicants nor will we be offering match-making or other partnership facilitating services. Details of successful applicants will be published by UKRI. Further details on the successful projects and their progress are expected to be shared on the forthcoming DARE UK website.

13. Do applications have to span remits across all UKRI's Councils and Innovate UK?

Proposals must have relevance beyond a single UKRI Council/Innovate UK but proposals may or may not address all of these bodies. For example, this may include taking best practise in one Council's area/Innovate UK and demonstrating applicability to another. However, the ambition and utility of the application is part of the assessment criteria that will be addressed by the Panel and must be addressed in the application.

14. Are you expecting all projects to address each of the three key areas or focus in on one or two of them?

Sprint projects do not need to address all three of the key areas and can choose to focus in on one or more of the areas.

15. With a start of 4th January, are you expecting projects to be extending work already in this area and/or not recruiting new staff?

The start and end dates of awards and reporting requirements are fixed and not subject to further negotiation. In most cases, it is expected that staff involved will likely be in post and available, as will the resources you need also be readily available. However, should you wish to recruit, or need time to secure other resources, you should provide careful justification and explain how such considerations fit with your project plan and timely delivery of outputs.

16. Can existing staff be repurposed to focus on these projects and either have their salary paid or apply for 'backfill' funding to replace them in their other roles?

We will pay the relevant salary costs of staff working on DARE UK projects where that involvement is outside of the scope of their current funding and duties. We would expect institutions to manage any onward implications for other staff positions arising as a result. Where staff duties and current funding include scope to work on additional projects at no extra cost to agencies otherwise supporting those projects, in this case UKRI, then those staff costs would not be eligible for further support.

17. Is the call only looking for technical developments or will applications from groups completing theoretical/practical examples of use cases being tested/implemented be welcomed?

The call is not just looking for technical developments. As set out in the call specification, DARE UK welcomes use cases, technology demonstrators and those addressing best practice. To note, use cases could be new use cases or they could be reflective, informing future directions of travel.

18. For a technology demonstrator project, are you looking for a ready prototype within the 8-month award term or would you accept projects seeking to identify relevant use cases and define specifications of a demonstrator which might address those?

Whilst the criteria do not preclude development of specifications, proposed delivery of a demonstrable running prototype technology demonstrator is likely to be viewed by the Panel as a stronger proposal than simply developing the specifications of what might be built and what it might be built for.

19. Is a sprint project delivering a running prototype more likely to looked on favourably than a 'use case' or governance "best practice" project?

DARE UK is looking for projects in all three areas and places equal importance on them. See FAQ Q18 which specifically relates to Technology Demonstrator projects only.

20. As normal NHS data agreements restrict usage per-project and do not normally allow novel or speculative projects, can you confirm that you expect all data projects to follow their existing agreements?

Sprint projects are required to fully abide by their existing data sharing and other relevant agreements.

21. Can you define what you mean by "federation"?

The ability to discover and analyse data held in distinct [Trusted Research] Environments without requiring metadata or data to be aggregated into a common location.

22. To avoid reinventing existing tools unnecessarily, is there a list of tools in use across UKRI remits (e.g. Github repositories) to use?

Unfortunately, there is no common list of tools. In this instance, we would be looking for projects from teams who are already familiar with tools from one research domain to evaluate their application to data in a different research domain.

23. It is stated that federated analyses are "technically possible" but with significant challenges such as data standardisation/harmonisation. Are UKRI open to alternatives?

Yes. DARE UK is open to exploring new approaches that can achieve federated analyses of sensitive data that may be adopted more widely across the UK.

24. Are any example use cases available?

DARE UK is looking for novel use cases that span across UKRI remits. Some examples of collaboration (without this implying limitation) across MRC and ESRC can be seen from the COVID-19 National Core Studies Programme.

25. Can we use synthetic data instead of real data in projects?

Yes, use of synthetic data to support a project is appropriate.

26. Do individual projects need to include public, patient and practitioner involvement and engagement (PPPIE) as well?

Yes, we would absolutely expect every project to be demonstrating how it will be working with the relevant publics.

27. How should proposals balance the need of building on prior work, leveraging in-kind effort (such as institutional investments in TREs and industry contributions) whilst avoiding duplication of effort of work already funded elsewhere?

DARE UK are looking for projects to make a distinct contribution which can inform the design of later phases of the DARE UK programme. This can extend existing programmes of work provided this DARE UK objective can be met and the request clearly does not duplicate existing funded activity. Whilst leveraging of additional investment to act in concert with UKRI funding would be welcomed, this is not a requirement or assessment criteria in and of itself. Your case for support is an opportunity to set out

how your proposal will fit alongside other relevant investments which you are involved with.

28. Is there an expectation for the level of industrial co-funding support required for individual projects?

No. The programme is not mandating explicit co-funding/match funding but whilst small and medium enterprises may claim up to 100% of their direct costs, large industry partners are expected to bear their own costs. This opportunity is subject to UK Subsidy Control; please check the industry funding details for this opportunity on the UKRI Funding Finder website.

29. What are the assessment criteria and will they be published?

The assessment criteria are laid out in the call specification on the UKRI Funding Finder.

30. How will you mitigate risks that applicants/awardees will only be addressing safe projects likely to only make minor incremental advances in understanding in order to be ready for the January start date?

The independent Panel will review the ambition of the project proposal for innovation, added value and impact as part of their assessment, recognising that projects still need to be able to start by the 4th January and that any necessary resource dependencies should be appropriately addressed within the application and project plan.

31. When will applicants be told if they are successful noting the short lead-time to the 4th January 2022 start date?

We expect to inform successful applicants and issue award letters within a few days of the Panel meeting. Previous experience indicates this is sufficient time to enable institutions and teams to meet the required project start date.

32. Where existing HRA / Devolved Nation equivalent approvals need to be amended or new ones sought, or if there is another need to divert attention to COVID related matters, would the Project end of August timeframe be movable?

Projects are required to deliver to the August timeframe in order for UKRI to be able to plan the next steps for DARE UK. Whilst we appreciate current and future uncertainties relating to the pandemic which may come to bear, requests to extend projects beyond this will be rejected as outcomes would no longer be timely or relevant to the purpose of this call.

33. What will the review process look like? Will there be a chance to respond?

Proposals will be checked for remit and content by UKRI officers, in consultation with HDR UK and ADR UK as needed. There will be an opportunity to clarify/correct minor administrative issues identified during these checks (incomplete or late submissions will be rejected). Complete proposals which are in remit will

be reviewed by an independent Panel, including lay representation, convened by UKRI specifically for this call. Whilst brief feedback will be provided to explain Panel outcomes, there will be no opportunity for rebuttal; the Panel's recommendations to the Funder are final and not subject to challenge.

34. How should applications consider other initiatives that would appear to have an overlapping scope with DARE UK?

DARE UK is seeking to address the use of sensitive data across the UKRI councils. As such, DARE UK is very aware that there are other complimentary initiatives that share our aims and objectives of improving the trustworthy, secure use of sensitive data across research domains for the public good. It would be advisable for applications to consider how their scope might also align with these other strategic initiatives (for example the NHSX Secure Data Environment initiatives, the National Data Research Cloud and the ONS Integrated Data Service/Platform.).

Please also refer to question 3.

35. Should use cases be scientific/academic or relate to health improvement or both?

Use cases should be either new, real-example, scientific problems or reflect on similar projects that have been previously funded that use data from across UKRI research councils. They will be expected to generate insights that will inform the future development of the DARE UK programme. Please note, this is a UKRI wide initiative and not a health specific programme.

36. Please clarify the definition of cross council or domain collaboration.

"Domain" refers to the research remits of each of the UKRI Research Councils/Innovate UK and "Cross-Council" to working across those remits.

37. Is there a min population size in mind for this collaboration?

No, except to bear in mind the aims and objectives of DARE UK and the Sprints within that.

38. What does good look like for this collaboration cross sector and is there a minimum in kind investment to be achieved?

The project team should be appropriately constituted to deliver the proposal; we are not prescribing how that team should be constituted. There is no minimum "in kind" investment required.

39. Can you specify what is meant by novel techniques?

We are not prescriptive, excepting it must be clear to assessors how such inform the future development of DARE UK.

40. Are there key milestones for this funding call?

The milestones must be defined by applicants in their proposal, noting the timings of the Sprint Days and final reporting requirements.

41. Would a project focused on a use case around Health Improvement be in scope for funding?

It is possible that a project based on Health Improvement could be within scope but it would need to demonstrate cross council collaboration beyond health data and show innovation, delivering tangible outcomes that will inform later phases of the DARE UK programme.

42. Would it be acceptable for a lead institution of an application to include a Co-I from another institution as directly incurred costs on an application?

Providing the requirements of being evidenced on the basis of "directly incurred" costs are met, this is acceptable. This is a matter for the award's host research organisation to agree as they would need to provide that evidence if required.

43. We're working with TRE providers on our project. What is the maximum budget we can allocate against this line item - is this counted against research equipment?

Costs should be presented either in terms of costs of the service contract (not counted as Research Equipment if subcontracting) or setting out costs against expected headings if a closer working relationship is involved e.g. where the TRE providers are providing intellectual input. Only if the TRE provider is considering purchasing additional equipment to deliver their role and needs to specifically charge this to this proposal, would this count towards the allowed expenditure on Research Equipment. To note, no single item of Research Equipment may cost in excess of £10,000 including VAT and is therefore not considered Capital under UKRI rules.

44. Can you please advise on the shared Intellectual Property requirements? Does this mean that we need to assign IP to UKRI or simply, that we share any source code or outputs as a public good under a creative commons license?

All findings will be published openly and IP will not be assigned directly to UKRI. However, anything that is produced must be available to be reused by subsequent DARE UK delivery teams under the terms set out in the call specification.

45. Is there a requirement for applications to be submitted by consortia or can an application be submitted by a sole organisation?

No. Please refer to Q38 for more information.

46. Can I confirm that overheads can be requested for Higher Education Institutes?

HEIs should follow [UKRI guidance for costing proposals](). For this call, MRC will fund 80% of the FEC and the HEI must agree to find the balance of FEC from other resources.

47. In relation to technology demonstrators in the area of the Trusted Research Environments 'Five Safes' principles, would these be expected to address each of the Five Safes or could the application focus on say, one to three of the safes?

An application does not need to focus on all Five Safes. It could, for example, focus on improvements, especially automation, of one of the Five Safes.

48. Can you include cost for expenses for PPPIE groups involved in the project?

Yes.

49. Do technology demonstrators need a research-based case study?

No. However, the application will need to describe how the technology demonstrator will add value to research use cases.

50. Would something novel demonstrated within one council for the sprint that could then be rolled out to other councils be acceptable?

The focus of DARE UK is establishing an infrastructure that spans the whole breadth of research on sensitive data - for example, economic and social data, physical science data, climate data etc. We are looking at how to move to a more integrated approach to analysing sensitive data across research council domains. A Sprint that focused on a cross-organisational or cross-sector use case but which clearly shows how these address cross-research council use cases would be in scope.

51. You mentioned you are looking favourably on high risk or high return research proposals - can you elaborate more on what you mean in the context of sensitive data?

We are looking for project risk and not data risk. Projects are expected to push boundaries and should document their risk and mitigations in the submitted risk register. Safe and trusted use of sensitive data is core to the DARE UK mission, so this is expected to be reflected in any proposed use of sensitive data.

52. Is a researcher Co-I allowed for this scheme?

Yes, in principle, a Researcher Co-I is allowed. However, it will be critical for the required Letter of Support to carefully address the requirements set out in the guidance, particularly as these are fairly short-term projects. In particular, close attention would most likely be paid to the support from the host organisation for the future career development/trajectory towards research leadership beyond the term of this funding.

If this is not compelling, then we reserve the right to withdraw this recognition, though the person involved could still be supported otherwise as a member of the wider research staff.

53. Do Heads of Terms only need to be submitted if there are industry partners in our consortium?

Heads of Terms need to be submitted regardless of industry participation.

54. Can the costs of international staff/collaborators or international SMEs be included in proposals?

If the SME has a UK presence (UK registered and bank account for funds deposit), then these costs can be included.

55. How should applications budget for external software development and consultancy? Are the costs fully covered?

If it is a contracted "service" cost then how much of the costs is covered will depend on who is doing the contracting, for example an application by a HEI would be 80%. An SME to be named as a Co-I (and hence funded at 100%) must have contribution towards the project design, leadership and management and the panel will take this into consideration when assessing the application.

56. Can a single PI submit two applications?

Yes, a single PI can submit two applications.

57. Are letters of support required from Co-Investigators and partner institutes?

No.

58. If all collaborators have agreed that no sensitive, personal/patient data will be used, generated or stored in the project; does the "Ethics and Data Governance Approval" section of the application still need to be completed?

If no ethics approvals are needed, please include a statement detailing that no sensitive data will be used.

59. Is it possible to include salary inflation in the budget?

Yes. However, please note that these awards are of short duration so indexation may not be relevant.

60. Is it possible for a sprint project to span 7 months, with a later start from 1st February for example- instead of the stipulated 4th January start with an 8 months project span?

No. It is important that all projects work collaboratively as a portfolio, meeting key milestones and informing the progressive design of phase 2. Therefore, they must stick to the same timeline of a 4th of January start.

61. Can an international Co-I and its associated costs be included?

Yes, this is possible. However, prior approval must be sought from the UKRI programme manager. If you require approval for this please send an email to informatics@mrc.ukri.org with DARE UK in the subject line.

62. Please can you clarify what is expected in the "Heads of terms" and "Ethics and data: governance approval" sections of the application.

All applicants will need to submit Heads of terms so we can check the proposed approach does not breach our proposed IP approach, for example. It is the responsibility of the Lead Applicant to ensure that the Heads of Terms are reflected in the final Consortia Agreement and that the proposed of Heads of Terms is understood and agreed to by the members of the consortia.

The Ethics and data: governance approval section is for an applicant to declare any identified legal, ethical and governance issues and describe how these will be managed. If no ethics approvals are needed, please include a statement detailing that no sensitive data will be used.

63. As part of the Heads of Terms document, do institutional affiliations and signatures from all members of the proposed consortium need to be included?

It is the responsibility of the Lead Applicant to ensure that the Heads of Terms are reflected in the final Consortia Agreement and that the proposed Heads of Terms is understood and agreed to by the members of the consortia. Whilst we do not require formal signatures in the Heads of Terms, they would be helpful in providing reassurance.

64. We are a mixture of academics and IT SMEs – what is the usual protocol for naming co-applicants? Are the industry partners considered contractors/service providers, or would they usually be named co-applicants?

This depends on the role that the IT SMEs will play in the project.

If they are named as a contracted "service", then the costs covered will depend on who is doing the contracting, for example an application by a HEI would be 80%.

For an SME to be named as a Co-I/co-applicant (and hence funded at 100%), they must make a significant contribution towards the project design, leadership and management and the panel will take this into consideration when assessing the application.

65. What costs can UKRI core funded institutions claim?

Advice should be sought on a case-by-case basis by contacting the UKRI programme manager by sending an email to informatics@mrc.ukri.org with DARE UK in the subject line.

66. Can any amendments be made to the IP guidelines set out in the funding call?

The objective of the DARE UK Sprint Exemplar Projects is to inform the design and delivery of Phase 2 and subsequent phases of the DARE UK programme. The IP guidelines in the call are intended to ensure that all results, outputs, and artefacts developed through this programme are available unencumbered for use by the DARE UK Phase 1 delivery team to develop the design and business case for Phase 2, and that they can subsequently be used by the delivery team that is appointed for DARE UK Phase 2 and beyond.

The awards will therefore include a set of IP clauses consistent with the call outline and UKRI practice. We would not be in a position to accept modified clauses that could potentially restrict use by either the current or future delivery teams, or that would restrict licencing options on those assets as might be the case, for example, with LGPL licencing.

67. If an SME in a proposed project is expected to be an active participant in the project and a 'collaborator', are we expected to include VAT in their costing, using the DARE Industry Partner Finance Form, or are their costs exempt from VAT as a collaborator?

Applicants are responsible for seeking their own VAT advice. All sums requested should be inclusive of non-recoverable VAT. Awards will not be supplemented if the VAT position laid out in the proposal is incorrect.

68. If an SME is providing a fee for service, should they be paid as a subcontractor from one of the collaborating partners and can they still be paid at 100% FEC?

For an SME to be named as a Co-I and hence funded at 100%, they must have intellectual contribution towards the project design, leadership and management, otherwise they should be treated as sub-contractors. If sub-contractors are engaged through fee for service, the relevant FEC rate of the contracting organisation will apply.

69. Does the funding limit of £400,000 refer to 100% FEC or take into account the relevant FEC rates for each participant and are these costs indexed?

The maximum cash-limited award you would receive is £400k taking into account the varying FEC rate that may apply across your partners.

You can include indexation in your calculations but this may not be relevant given the short duration of the funding period.

70. Is a letter of support required from a proposed project partner?

No.

71. Do charity co-applicants also need to fill in the DARE UK Industry Partner Finance Form, as well as social enterprises and NHS bodies?

No. Only commercial enterprises need to fill in the DARE UK Industry Partner Finance Form.

72. Is there a specific budget Excel spreadsheet template that should be used for submitting costs with the DARE UK applications?

Yes. There is a finance resource spreadsheet to be filled out. Please scroll to the bottom of the 'Additional Information' section of the funding call [Inform design of cross-council digital research environments – UKRI](#)

If the applicant has an industry partner, please also complete the Industry Partner Finance Form, also available on the same page.

73. **Does a project which is addressing best practice need to address all 4 of the bullet points set out in the funding call?**

There is no requirement to address all 4, however the ambitions of each application will be considered by the panel in the selection process.

74. Are conference and/or publication costs eligible to be included under this funding call?

Publication costs are not eligible under this funding call, but you can include conference costs. Only conferences that will be attended within the term of the award are eligible for inclusion. Please provide justification for this cost in your proposal so that the panel can assess if the funds requested fit with the intended aim of the call and represent value for money.

75. Do all partner organisations need to be listed in the Heads of Terms?

Yes. This is needed to provide reassurance to the funders that all partner organisations required to be signatory to the consortium agreement are aware of and will follow the Heads of Terms.