

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

Frequently Asked Questions

Version 1.4

Updates since first version: 4

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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. What will the relationship between the funded projects and working groups be?

The working groups will be cross community groups which bring together expertise around a particular area. The members will act as expert guides and sounding boards to the DARE UK programme and to the projects selected in each area. The projects will be separate to the working groups. However, they will be expected to work closely with the working groups, seeking guidance, sharing progress and be actively engaged with the working groups.

2. Can international researchers be named as Co-Investigators?

Yes. However, please contact us in advance to discuss this before submission of application. You will be expected to justify their inclusion (e.g. how do they provide expertise that is not available in the UK).

For eligible overseas costs, please see [this guidance](#) for general information. Please note that some steps may be different due to application for this opportunity submitted via e-mail rather than the usual UKRI systems.

3. What is the intended scope for the Core Federation Services projects?

The Core Federation Services will provide an infrastructure of APIs to support federated analytics across environments. This should include services which support federated identity management, data discovery, workload distribution and management. This should build on existing projects both within the UK and internationally. These services will need to integrate with disclosure control and output checking. Please refer to the [DARE UK Phase 1a recommendations](#) for more information.

4. Can you suggest a role for industry given the outputs are to be open source?

There are many successful open-source projects that include active industry participation. A common model is that core components are open-source, with industry partners looking to provide higher level services above these components (e.g., Kafka and Confluent) or providing product support for these components. It is therefore anticipated that this call will be attractive to industry partners. For examples on how industry can be involved with projects where the outputs are open source, please refer to the [DARE UK Phase 1a Sprint projects](#).

5. For things like federated ID, will you be encouraging solutions that build on and deploy existing technology (e.g. GA4GH passports) rather than inventing something new?

Projects should build on existing capabilities, wherever possible.

6. For the statistical disclosure control work, is manual review the only allowed mechanism which will be considered or will automated statistical disclosure control be considered?

Both mechanisms will be considered. However, if the proposal is for full automation, the trust and transparency (PIE) procedures will need to be particularly robust to account for the lack of manual review. This will need to be addressed specifically in the proposal's approach to Public Engagement and Involvement.

7. Can you please expand on where there might be links to the NHS England sub-national SDE programme, which includes a large-federated element?

The DARE UK programme is in regular communication with NHS England to discuss alignment of our activities. Colleagues from across the NHS in all four nations will be invited to sit on the working groups, where relevant, when they are established. However, DARE UK is a cross research domain programme and therefore whilst the NHS England's Secure Data Environments work is important, the projects must address the requirements from across research domains.

8. Will there be a professional legal team involved in the Working Groups?

If appropriate, we will engage legal expertise working with existing initiatives around ethics and governance.

9. Is there a TRE Architectural Framework you are using for the development of the Core Federation Services and Risk Management Services?

There is work underway (e.g., <https://rse-tre-community.readthedocs.io/en/latest/>) to develop an open reference architecture for Trusted Research Environments (TREs), and this call along with the DARE UK working group around TREs will be collaborating (or joining if more sensible) with these existing initiatives to further this activity. However, this will be proceeding in parallel to the work on Core Federation Services and therefore collaboration will be essential between the successful projects to ensure that the deliverables across the projects

can be utilised together to support work in future phases of the DARE UK programme. Applications should not assume a particular TRE architecture and should ensure that any developed services can be deployed into existing environments (on-premise, hybrid and public cloud) and alongside a future reference architecture.

10. If a consortium plans to address more than one of the five areas, should they apply for multiple bids (i.e one project per area) and how would this affect funding?

We expect a single application per project area. You may submit multiple applications covering more than one of the five project areas. The funding allocation of a minimum of £100K per project and a maximum of £750k will apply to each successful application. However, applicants must carefully consider the value for money aspect of your application(s) and that this is proportionate to the proposed deliverables.

11. What type of organisation can lead an application?

Applications must be led by a recognised research organisation which is UK based and one of the following:

- higher education institution
- institute or unit funded by UKRI research councils
- NHS body
- independent research organisations
- academic health sciences networks and centres
- public sector research establishment (PSRE)

Please refer to the eligibility criteria set out in the [call specification](#) and the [list of UKRI approved research organisations](#) for more information.

If the PI is affiliated with more than one organisation that is eligible to lead, it is up to the applicant to decide. UKRI is not able to advise on which is the preferred organisation as there may be unique arrangements at these organisations that we are not aware of.

12. For the funded area focused on semi-automated risk assessment, are you looking for frameworks that address both data access and output checking? Or could the project include just one or the other?

Projects can choose to either address a single area through an application or address both areas through an application in each area, it should be clear that a single application covering both areas is not acceptable. It must be two applications each addressing a single project area.

13. Can industry partners be named as Co-Investigators?

Yes, industry partners can be named as Co-Investigators. However, we will not support costs for organisations bigger than SMEs as these should have sufficient internal resources. Large industry partners costs can be included if they are named as sub-contractors supplying a service.

14. When do you anticipate the working groups will be in place?

This will differ according to the focus area of the working group, as our intention is to collaborate with existing groups wherever possible such as for example the recently formed [RSE TRE Community](#). Unfortunately, at this stage we cannot say when exactly all working groups would be in place, it is currently a fluid process.

15. Can you give some guidance on what may be considered as sufficient justification for the inclusion of an international collaborator?

There are a number of reasons which will be considered sufficient justification for using an international collaborator such as an existing relationship, the speed by which they can come on board, their international expertise or involvement in complementary international projects or programmes.

16. Will the level of collaboration via the working groups be similar to the level of collaboration which existed in the Phase 1 DARE UK Sprint projects?

For these driver projects we would encourage a tighter, more structured level of collaboration than was the case in the previous Phase 1 Sprint projects. The DARE UK Delivery Team is aiming to support project teams in enabling and facilitating some of that collaboration, in particular through the working groups.

17. Is this funding scheme open to individual researchers, or is it limited to institutions only?

Applications must be led by a UKRI recognised research institution. The principal investigator (PI) or co-investigator (CoI) must have a contract of employment with the research organisation (RO) for the duration of the grant prior to application.

There may be co-investigators who are not based at a UK research organisation – please refer to question 11 for full eligibility criteria.

18. If a project is going to be jointly led by two UKRI recognised research institutions, can both institutions co-lead the application?

For administrative purpose (e.g. award of grants), there can only be one lead applicant for each application. It is down to the institutions who are applying to decide which institution they would like to lead an application.

It may be possible to have co-leads for post-award comms purposes. However, please get in touch with UKRI to discuss the specifics of your arrangements.

19. Is there any guidance on the preferred number or spread of co-applicants?

No, the spread of co-applicants should be determined by what each individual project aims to achieve. Therefore, there is no set guidance.

20. If industry is part of a consortium, what additional documentation needs to be submitted?

As per the call specification, when an industry partner is involved a [MRC Industry Collaboration Framework \(ICF\) – UKRI](#) form must be submitted.

You must also submit a letter of support from the industry partner(s).

If your application is successful, any award offer will be conditional upon MRC receiving a copy of a fully signed, legally binding collaboration agreement between the partners (which must be consistent with information outlined in the ICF form) within 3 months of the issue of an award letter.

21. Does a Heads of Terms document need to be submitted at the application stage?

You do not need a Heads of Terms at the application stage. However, if your consortium includes industry partners, you will need to fill out an [MRC Industry Collaboration Framework \(ICF\)](#) form (please see the How to Apply section) and provide a letter of support from the industry partner(s).

If your application is successful, any award offer will be conditional upon MRC receiving a copy of a fully signed, legally binding collaboration agreement between the partners (which must be consistent with information outlined in the ICF form) within 3 months of the issue of an award letter.

22. Does an application number need to be included in all applications? If so, how do can one be obtained?

No. Applicants do not need to include an application number. All applications will be allocated an application number after they have been submitted.

23. What is the budget Excel spreadsheet and where can this be located?

The budget Excel spreadsheet can be found at the end of this [webpage](#) in the Additional Information section: <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/MRC-261022-FundingOpp-DAREUKcallFinancialResourceRequestTemplate.xlsx>

24. We are unable to change some details on the DARE UK Industry Partner Finance Form. How can this be resolved?

The form has been updated on the funding opportunity page to address this and can be found at <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/MRC-251122-DAREUKIndustryPartnerFinanceForm.xlsx>

25. Can members of the public be included as co-investigators?

No, members of the public cannot be included as co-investigators. However, we encourage their participation in the consortium and they should be remunerated accordingly, for example, as recommended by National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) guidelines.

<https://www.nihr.ac.uk/documents/payment-guidance-for-researchers-and-professionals/27392>

New questions

26. What will the selection process entail?

Applications will be shortlisted. Shortlisted applications will be invited to give a 5-minute presentation about their project during the week beginning January 16th before responding to any questions from the panel.

27. Please could you clarify the expected deliverables around the TRE Reference Architecture driver project?

There are already a significant number of open-source TRE or TRE-like projects underway in the UK and Internationally. The successful project is not expected to develop another new offering. However, they will be expected to review the existing landscape, established relationships across these projects and working with the delivery team and the community, and in particular the RSE Open TRE working group, establish a consolidated approach that provides for a reference architecture and reference implementation, based on one or more existing projects, that can be developed through a structured open-source framework with a community of contributors.

28. Is it expected that proposals addressing the semi-automation of risk assessment at the data access request stage will build on the previous DARE UK sprint projects?

It is not necessary for the proposals to build directly on previous DARE UK work; however it is expected that all proposals will develop from prior work in the UK and Internationally so that this funding delivers new capability rather than duplicates existing activity. All proposals should be able to demonstrate that they will develop, pilot and make available open source tools that can materially assist in the risk assessment and/or semi-automation of the access request management processes for sensitive cross-domain data.