Towards a National Collection: Opening UK Heritage to the World
Discovery Projects Call FAQ.

These FAQs should be read in addition to the Discovery Projects Call Guidance.

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Theme and content of call

Would a project focusing on ‘x subject area’ be eligible under this call?
If you have an idea for a proposal please get in touch with the Programme Director, Rebecca Bailey, to discuss it (rebecca.bailey@hes.scot). The Director is happy to discuss ideas for proposals, whatever stage of development they are at, and can advise on whether they would be a good fit for this call.

The AHRC remains the main point of contact in answering questions around process and policy. Please contact National.Collection@ahrc.ukri.org should you need guidance on policy or process.

All projects must, at their core, be about developing new ways of joining together digital collections and must deliver impact in each of the three key impact areas outlined in the call document: dissolving barriers between collections; enhancing research capability; and public engagement. Provided they meet these criteria, proposals in any subject area or on any theme could, in theory, be eligible under this call.

What is meant by “key thematic areas”? Are these the same as the “impact areas” also mentioned in the call document?
No, these are two different things. The three impact areas (dissolving barriers between collections; enhancing research capability; and public engagement) are the areas that each project must deliver impact in. By ‘thematic areas’ we mean any theme or subject that a particular project focuses on. We have not given any examples of potential ‘thematic areas’ to try to ensure that the call is as open as possible to different approaches. If you are concerned about whether proposals in a particular thematic area would be eligible under this call then please get in touch with the Programme Director, Rebecca Bailey (rebecca.bailey@hes.scot), and she will be able to advise.
Could developing a new collection be involved as part of a project, or is the call only for work on existing collections?

No, the call is only for projects working on existing collections. Due to the scale of the challenges involved in joining together existing collections, the creation of new collections is out of scope for this call.

Would projects working on non-arts and humanities (i.e. scientific, biological, natural science) collections be eligible under this call?

The goal of the “Towards a National Collection” programme is to create innovative ways in order to make collections more accessible. AHRC accepts that this may include scientific collections that may be used by arts and humanities researchers. Therefore, scientific collections may be included, as long as the focus of the project is on collections as heritage assets, rather than on undertaking scientific research. The applicants will need to demonstrate how the project fits the requirements of the call.

Please get in touch with the Programme Director, Rebecca Bailey (rebecca.bailey@hes.scot) if you have any concerns as to whether your proposal would be eligible.

Is there scope for Public Engagement and Research-Driven, Practice-led Public Outputs?

Yes, the call is open to such outputs. However, any resources allocated for such outputs should be proportional to those allocated to developing new ways to join together digital collections.

Would a project focusing on a small or niche collection be eligible under this call?

Yes. However, the programme is about developing new ways of linking together digital collections at a large scale, so any such project would need to clearly demonstrate how it’s outputs would be scalable.

How much digitisation/documentation of existing collections can be included as a part of a proposal?

A small proportion of a project’s budget can be allocated to digitisation of collections provided that work is critical for achieving the aims and objectives of the project as a whole and this can be justified within the scope of the call document.

Can work with creative practitioners be included?

Yes. Provided the work is within the scope of the call and all costs are fully justified in the final proposal.

Is developing new tools, technologies and research methodologies as part of the project eligible?

Yes, this could include the development of new tools and technologies as well as improving existing ones. This programme aims at dissolving barriers between collections including addressing technological and methodological issues that stand in the way of an integrated virtual ‘national collection’.
Relationship to Foundation Projects

All of the Foundation Projects are led by IROs. Will this mean all the Discovery Projects will be led by IROs also?
No, there is no expectation that the five Discovery Projects will be direct successors to the Foundation Projects. Proposals can be led by either HEIs or IROs – in each case the project should be led by the person best placed to do so, regardless of whether they are based at a HEI or IRO. We expect that the funded Discovery Projects will be led by PIs based at a range of different institutions.

Will there be an expectation that the Discovery Projects build directly on the work done by the Foundation Projects?
A direct link between Foundation Projects and Discovery Projects is not expected in all proposals but applicants should consider the areas under investigation in the Foundation Projects and seek to benefit from that early work, where relevant and useful to their project. Summaries of the Foundation Projects are available [here](#).

Will the AHRC expect to see the 8 Foundation projects applying for Discovery projects, too?
No, but they are welcome to do so, and some Foundation PIs have expressed readiness for potential collaboration with others.

Partnerships

I have an idea for a project/proposal, is there any help available to meet potentially interested HEI/IRO partners?
AHRC has set up a discussion mailing list with JISC for use as a partner matching tool. The mailing list can be found [here](#). If you wish to speak to a particular IRO, but are not sure who to get in touch with, please get in contact with the Programme Director, Rebecca Bailey ([rebecca.bailey@hes.scot](mailto:rebecca.bailey@hes.scot)) and she will be able to put you in touch with the appropriate person.

Can a proposal include funding for coordinating research activity with international partners?
Yes, such costs can be included provided they are fully justified. International Co-Is (and their costs) can also be included as per standard AHRC eligibility rules. However, projects should be primarily focused on UK-based rather than international collections.

Which organisations are eligible to be ‘Collaborating Organisations’?
Any organisation can be a ‘Collaborating Organisation’, provided they are not eligible to directly receive AHRC funding. Those that are eligible for AHRC funding, such as IROs cannot be ‘Collaborating Organisations’ and should instead be included as Co-Is or ‘Project Partners’. This includes university museums, galleries, libraries and archives working with a Higher Education Institution that they are not formally affiliated with.

What is the difference between a ‘Project Partner’ and a ‘Collaborating Organisation’?
A Project Partner is an organisation that is making a significant and specific contribution (either in cash or in kind) to the project, for example, expertise, staff time, use of facilities etc. A small proportion of their costs can be included in the proposal (please see p.8 of the call guidance document for further
details). A ‘Collaborating Organisation’ is an organisation where all or a substantial amount of their involvement is being charged to the project.

IROs can apply to be a ‘Project Partner’ but are not eligible as a ‘Collaborating Organisation’.

Is there a threshold for the amount of costs that could be included in the grant before a ‘Project Partner’ becomes a ‘Collaborating Organisation’?
There is no set amount or proportion of costs that can be covered by a grant before a ‘Project Partner’ is instead classed as a ‘Collaborating Organisation’. As individual proposals and grants can vary significantly there are no set guidelines. If you are unsure about which category a partner should be included in, please get in touch with us at national.collection@ahrc.ukri.org and we can advise accordingly.

What costs can be charged by the ‘Collaborating Organisation’?
Collaborating organisations can charge any directly incurred costs, i.e. staff time and any other costs/resources directly attributable to a project e.g. cost of running workshop. They are not eligible for overheads.

The AHRC does not fund costs that are reasonably expected to be covered by an established organisation (such as estate costs, basic IT, equipment, printing costs, etc.). Under the scope of the call, Co-Is from collaborating organisations cannot be included, therefore we encourage applicants to provide additional context in the Case for Support and Justification of Resources on what the contribution of the collaborating organisation is and who will be working on the project.

Is there a limit on the number of Co-Is/Collaborating Organisations/Project Partners that can be involved on any single proposal?
No. All costs must be fully justified but there is no limit on the number of partners or organisations that can be involved in any one project.

Eligibility

What are the eligibility requirements for PIs? What is meant by track record?
To be eligible as a PI, you must be actively engaged in postdoctoral research and be of postdoctoral standing. This means that you either have a doctorate or can demonstrate in the application that you have equivalent research experience and/or training. You must also have a level of skills, knowledge and experience appropriate to the nature of the proposed project.

For this call, we would expect PIs to have a track-record of delivering large-scale projects with multiple partners and multiple work-streams or packages. They should also be actively engaged in research relevant to Towards a National Collection. They do not have to be from academia.

Would someone who has taken career-breaks be eligible to be a PI? How should they address this in the proposal?
Yes. A line in the respective CV to indicate that there has been a career-break over a certain period would be sufficient.

What is the status of UKRI recognised Research Institutions with respect to this call?
Eligible Research Council Institutes are eligible to be Co-Is on any proposals. They cannot lead as all proposals must be led by either a HEI or an IRO.

Costs

As there is no Justification of Resources required at the outline stage, what costings are expected for outline applications?
An indication of overall costs will be expected at outline stage. There will be space on the submission form on J-eS to indicate the overall cost and under which headings these costs fall, but a detailed breakdown is not expected. We expect the costs to be as accurate as possible but recognise that the final costs (submitted at the full—stage application) may differ as proposals are further developed and partnerships finalised. The usual tolerance that we expect to see between the outline and full stages budget is +/- 10%.

What balance would you expect between academic and collaborating organisations in terms of costs/amounts of funding?
All costs need to be fully justified but the balance of where those costs are allocated is dependent on what is appropriate for that particular project, there are no set limits.

What proportion of costs would you expect to be allocated to technology vis a vis researcher time?
All costs need to be fully justified but the balance of where those costs are allocated is dependent on what is appropriate for that particular project, there are no set limits.

Project Staff

Can Research Assistants (RAs) be embedded within collections?
Any Research Assistants would need to be employed by an eligible institution as per AHRC funding rules, but their work could take place at a different institution or collection if this was the best option for delivering the project.

You can find more guidance on this under the Eligibility section in the AHRC Research Funding Guide [https://ahrc.ukri.org/documents/guides/research-funding-guide1/](https://ahrc.ukri.org/documents/guides/research-funding-guide1/)

Can proposals include studentships or placements?
The costs of studentships or placements are not eligible.

How large are you expecting project teams to be?
Due to the size and scale of the projects, it is unlikely that a team consisting of a PI and a single Co-I would be able to deliver them effectively. We would expect to see a team consisting of a number of people, with a range of different expertise, and with varying levels of involvement in the project.

Submitting an application

Is there a preference that bids will be led by IROs or HEIs?
No. We welcome proposals from either HEIs or IROs. In each case proposals should be led by the person best qualified to deliver that particular project, regardless of the institution at which they are based.
What is required in the ‘Case for Support’ document for outline stage applications? How will this differ from the requirements for full-stage applications?
The requirements for the Case-for-Support document at outline stage are set out in ‘Annex A – Attachment Guidance’ in the call document. The Case-for-Support document for the full-stage application will use the same headings, but we would expect the proposal to have been further developed by the submission of the full-stage application, and the Case-for-Support to have been significantly re-written in order to reflect the further developed complexity of the project.

What are the requirements for letters of support?
Where possible you should attach letters of support from each collaborating organisation or project partner. Where those partnerships have not yet been finalised due to the impact of COVID-19, then the application can proceed at the outline stage without a letter of support. However, if the partnerships have not been finalised, then applicants should detail why this is the case, and outline a pathway for these partnerships to be finalised under the ‘partnerships and collaborations’ section of the case for support.

What will happen to my application?

How will my application be assessed?
Outline applications will be assessed by an expert panel comprised of UK and international experts from academia and collections organisations, this will include members of the TaNC Steering Committee who do not have a conflict of interest. Applicants will be notified whether they have been shortlisted by the end of January 2021. All short-listed applicants must attend the workshop on 17th February 2021 in order to proceed to full-proposal stage.

How many projects do you anticipate shortlisting?
We do not know. It will depend on the quality of applications we receive and the assessments of the expert panel, but we have no pre-established view on how many will be short-listed. The total funding envelope for this call is £15 million.

Will AHRC fund five Discovery Projects – or does it reserve the right to increase the number of projects and adjust the budgets accordingly?
The total funding envelope for this call is £15 million and we will only be able to fund projects up to that limit. The indicative limit for each project is £3m where £3m represents 80% of the project’s full economic cost (fEC). Applicants may submit proposals for less than the indicative limit where this is appropriate to the research proposed. If we can fund more than five projects whilst remaining under the total funding envelope then we would reserve the right to do so.

Guidance on adjusting costs and budgets may be provided to shortlisted applicants at the workshop stage if required.

Other

Is there an ECR route for the call?
There is no ECR specific route for this call due to the size, nature and complexity of the intended research projects. However, ECRs can be included as Co-Is, and the involvement of ECRs in proposals is strongly encouraged.

What is the relationship between this scheme for funding the development of a virtual national collection and ongoing discussion about creating national digital infrastructure?
This is a conversation in development, and it is too early for us to share conclusions at this stage – however, there certainly is an understanding of a link between the two.

Is there a plan for sustainability included? Is sustainability a requirement for the Discovery Projects?

Sustainability is a priority for AHRC and the Programme Director, and we are currently looking at this at a programme level. All proposals should consider the legacy and potential sustainability of their research and other outputs, but as projects will only last three years, we are realistic about what can be promised.

UKRI has recently published a Sustainability Strategy, which sets out how UKRI will protect and enhance the environment across our investments and operations, while ensuring that the research and innovation we support stays at the cutting edge. One of our aims is to embed environmental sustainability across all our investments by 2025. We will encourage applicants to consider sustainability in alignment with this.