ADR England Research Community Catalysts (Pilot)

Main Funding Opportunity Specification

Overview

ADR UK, in collaboration with other co-funders, is piloting a new approach to encourage the research use of [ADR England flagship data](). We are inviting applications for the following three Research Community Catalyst Awards:

1. [ADR England Research Community Catalyst for Children at Risk of Poor Outcomes]() (co-funded by What Works for Early Intervention & Children's Social Care)

2. [ADR England Research Community Catalyst for Youth Transitions]() (co-funded by Youth Futures Foundation and The Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education)

3. [ADR England Research Community Catalyst for Evaluation]() (co-funded by the Evaluation Task Force and the Economic and Social Research Council's Public Policy and Engagement Team)

The awards will be worth between around £670,000 to £970,000 (100% full economic cost). They are expected to run from January 2024 to March 2026.

Each community catalyst (the successful team for each award) will carry out an ambitious programme of work to develop and advance the landscape of administrative data research for public good. This will include driving up the use of ADR England flagship datasets. The community catalysts will:

- provide strategic research leadership, including development of research agendas
- build capacity for administrative data research
- develop a diverse, cross-sector research community
- allocate funding to address the research priorities they identify.

Applicants are encouraged to apply as a small team or consortium to cover the breadth of skills required.

Context

ADR UK wants to create the opportunities and conditions needed for administrative data researchers to thrive, so their work can inform public policy and practice. The [ADR England Strategy]() is designed to drive up the research use of linked administrative data. This involves increasing the number of administrative data researchers and developing their skills.

Our existing portfolio of [ADR England projects](#) covers a diverse group of award holders, from across both government and academia. Projects include those focused on:

- the creation of new research-ready linked administrative data
- administrative data research for the public good
- stakeholder and public engagement, training and capacity building activities.

This is a different model from the core government and academic awards for ADR UK partners in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. There are also other administrative data sources, research and training activities outside those funded by ADR UK. We see potential for greater join-up across all these complementary activities to support further research in the public good.

We are keen to trial new approaches to build resilience in the research community's ability to unlock the potential of administrative data, from within and beyond ADR UK's programme of work. We also want to understand future opportunities in this ever-evolving landscape.

About ADR UK

ADR UK (Administrative Data Research UK) is a partnership transforming the way researchers access the UK's wealth of public sector data, to enable better informed policy decisions that improve people's lives. By linking together data held by different parts of government and facilitating safe and secure access for accredited researchers to these newly joined-up and de-identified datasets, ADR UK is creating a sustainable body of knowledge about how our society and economy function – tailored to give decision makers the answers they need to solve important policy questions.

ADR UK is made up of four national partnerships (ADR England, ADR Northern Ireland, ADR Scotland and ADR Wales) and the Office for National Statistics (ONS), which ensures data provided by UK Government bodies is accessed by researchers in a safe and secure form with minimal risk to data holders or the public. ADR UK is coordinated by a UK-wide Strategic Hub, which also promotes the benefits of administrative data research to the public and the wider research community, engages with UK Government to secure access to data, and manages a dedicated research budget.

More information can be found about our co-funding partners within the theme-specific annexes.

Eligibility

The principal investigator must be based [at a UK research organisation eligible for ESRC funding](#) including UK Higher Education institutions, [independent research organisations](#) and [public sector research establishments](#). That organisation will be responsible for submitting the grant

application to UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). We strongly encourage interested applicants to apply as a small group or consortium to reflect the breadth of tasks and skills required. If applying for more than one theme, please submit one application per theme.

Proposals can also include co-investigators from UK business, policy, or civil society. Given the objectives and assessment criteria, we encourage non-academic co-investigators from a government department or intermediary evidence body. This is not essential, however it may help to ensure the proposal is able to fulfil the objectives. Only proposals that meet the assessment criteria will be considered for funding.

Standard ESRC eligibility rules apply. Please note that ESRC will potentially fully fund (at 100% FEC) costs for UK business, third sector or government body co-investigators as 'exceptions'. Our research funding guide contains more details on individual and institutional eligibility.

Scope

These community catalyst awards are aimed at increasing the number of UK accredited researchers applying to use ADR England flagship datasets. These are national datasets with coverage of England; some also include data from other UK nations, depending on the devolved nature of the public service from which the data is collected (e.g., England and Wales, Great Britain or UK data).

Award holders can also consider the use of:

- other administrative datasets related to English regions or local authorities, as well as the legal frameworks that would allow their use
- other forms of data which could help fill identified gaps, if used alongside administrative data.

All data must be deidentified and made available for research purposes.

ADR England research insights may have wider relevance for public policy and practice beyond England, including at regional or local levels. The scope of these awards therefore also covers case studies from other parts of the UK to support shared learning.

Objectives

The three community catalyst funding opportunities share overarching objectives. More detail is included in each theme-specific annex; **applicants should read the theme-specific annex in addition to this full specification to understand the requirements of this funding opportunity**.

1. Strategic research leadership

To provide a focal point to consolidate the growing body of knowledge around the use of administrative data for research and inform future developments of the area of focus. This will involve:

a) **Mapping and consolidating existing research evidence,** project applications, research concepts and case studies (including the option to synthesise evidence) in order to capture and articulate evidence gaps that administrative data is uniquely placed to fill.

b) **Coordinating and co-designing a research agenda with key stakeholders**, including academics, government, parliament, third sector and the public. This should both identify and prioritise research topics (including defining research concepts) using linked administrative data. Research agendas should build upon government departments' **Areas of Research Interest**, including the consideration of place-based and other inequalities, as well as the overlap with other ADR England Research Community Catalyst themes.

c) **Mapping accessible data sources that are required to address the research agenda**. There is also scope to identify priority gaps to fill and barriers to remove, in order to improve the quality, quantity or accessibility of data available for accredited researchers. Although there is no funding within this award for additional data linkages, this work could inform strategic conversations or future funding bids to enhance or further develop key data linkages.

2. Build capacity for academic research using administrative data

To grow a diverse network of academic administrative data researchers across institutions, career stages and disciplines to develop awareness, interest, skills and confidence in using linked administrative data. This will involve:

a) **Raising awareness of available data** and its potential to address key evidence gaps in social research. This includes an awareness of legal gateways to access data.

b) **Supporting both current and new users of administrative datasets** to conduct high quality, rigorous quantitative data analyses and reproducible research. This includes providing targeted and timely training, resources or developmental opportunities - ranging from intensive courses to reusable and accessible tools.

c) **Coordinating the development of a sustainable 'training and resource hub'** to streamline research use of administrative data. This includes the collecting, sharing and signposting of tools and training resources, such as existing code, in harmony with other code repository e.g. those created by ADR UK **trusted research environments**.

3. Develop a diverse administrative data research community

To form, facilitate and empower a diverse community of data users across academic, policy, practice and third sector organisations to build meaningful and sustainable relationships around a

shared sense of purpose. This might include building on the foundation of existing communities. This will involve:

a) **Creating opportunities for stakeholders to convene around a shared research agenda to exchange knowledge and learn from each other.** Examples include community engagement activities and events designed to share strategically related activities; discuss challenges in using the data; and help to unlock more useful insights from administrative data.

b) **Stimulating opportunities for research collaborations or data development ideas across academia and with policymakers.** This work should act as a catalyst for additional research activity, brokering opportunities to realise wider impacts and/or attracting additional research co-funding.

Stakeholders include policymakers, decision-makers, data users, data owners, practitioners, researchers and others across academia, central and local government, parliament and the third sector (including advocacy groups, NGOs, charities, etc.). Other priority stakeholders are included in the theme-specific annexes.

4. **Address research priorities**

To provide opportunities for others to conduct small-scale research during the lifetime of this award, via a delegated research budget. This research will increase the use of ADR England linked administrative data via ADR UK trusted research environments, with the aim of creating impactful case studies. This work should address gaps in the research agenda developed under Objective 1 as well as contribute to the capacity building and community development under Objective 2 and 3. This should include the opportunity for:

- increasing awareness of the data at every stage (from commissioning through to research dissemination)
- encouraging opportunities for relevant connections with the emerging administrative data community (developed under Objective 3)
- leveraging additional funds to increase the scale of total research funding.

This funding will be available to the award holder in the following modes:

- The Children at Risk of Poor Outcomes and Youth Transitions Community Catalysts will fund 'Embedded Fellowships' supervised by their team to address research priorities identified by Objective 1.
- The Evaluation Community Catalyst will manage a 'Test and Trial Fund' to support demonstration projects and use cases to address public policy evaluation challenges.

There is also the option for the community catalysts to allocate a small amount of the core grant for their own research activity that progresses Objectives 1 to 3 or addresses the research agenda.

Collaboration and stakeholder engagement

We expect the community catalysts to commit to the following in the delivery of their work programme. They must ensure that equality, diversity and inclusion are a priority in planning and delivering all aspects of the work.

Engagement

- Ensure buy-in and regular engagement with central government and data owners throughout.
- Engage with ESRC, UKRI and other research funders to increase visibility, accessibility and alignment between related research investments.
- Engage with ADR UK and, where relevant, other partners to build on plans to deliver on shared objectives, including raising awareness of data and how to access it via appropriate legal gateways.
- Conduct public engagement during the development of the research agenda with third sector and/or public stakeholders. This should be a meaningful two-way exchange that actively listens, responds and builds trust in the use of linked administrative data for public good. Where relevant this work should consider how participation of young people could form part of the programme.
- Engage in learning and knowledge exchange across the UK and advocate for the research agenda at key events (potentially internationally), including those arranged by ADR UK partners in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

Collaboration

- Actively collaborate with other successful community catalysts to identify areas of overlap and alignment between the other themes. Community catalysts should agree ways to address these most effectively in practice, including co-delivery.
- Collaborate with current and future ADR UK Research Fellows and other ADR UK funded award holders who are accessing relevant administrative datasets for research.
- Develop a clear approach to collaborating with other non-academic partners (e.g., local authorities, evidence intermediaries such as What Works Centres, other data users, and relevant third sector/public stakeholders).

- Engage with current and emerging ADR UK collaborators to add value to existing activity such as:

  - UK Parliament, working in collaboration with Parliament's Knowledge Exchange Unit, Parliamentary Thematic Research Leads and Parliamentary Academic Fellows
  - Integrated Data Service
  - Additional theme specific collaborators, as set out in the relevant annex.

Consultation

- Consult with other ADR UK funded activities, including:

  - Development and enhancement of Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) data, University College London
  - Data Access and Engagement Programme (DAEP), Department for Education
  - [Data First Programme](), Ministry of Justice
  - [Linked local data on children and young people](), Imperial College London

Outputs and Milestones

We recognise that the objectives of this award are long-term and ambitious. The community catalysts will need to formulate plans to ensure their proposals are deliverable given the time frames and budget. Specific milestones and baseline delivery dates will be approved once the awards have started and following a period of consultation with the steering group.

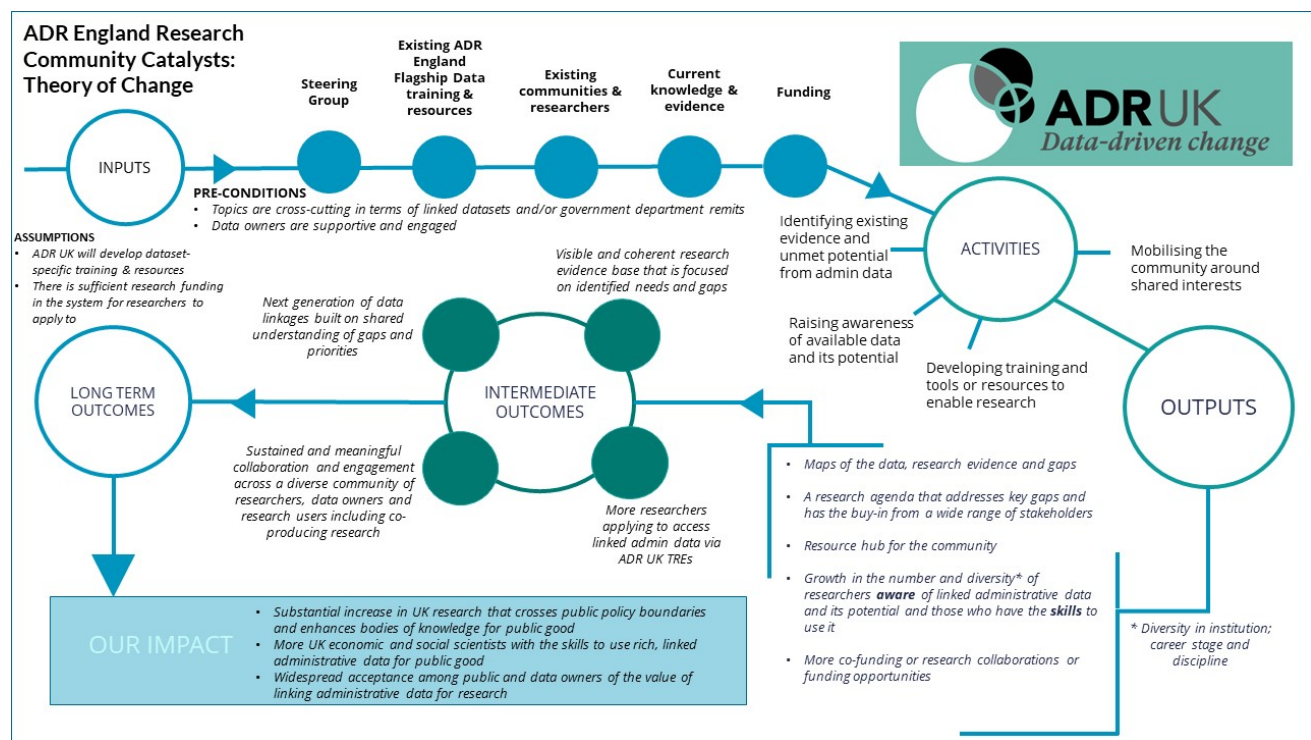These outputs and milestones are to be a priority:

- Appropriate and accessible outputs (for reuse by policymakers, practitioners and third sector groups) to summarise the current and growing relevant research evidence base.
- A visual map of relevant data sources, highlighting important gaps that could be filled and recommendations to enhance the data portfolio.
- A written research agenda that addresses key gaps and has the buy-in from a wide range of stakeholders.
- A training and resource hub for the community to streamline mechanisms for the research use of administrative data.
- Events, learning opportunities and other outward-facing communications to inform, raise awareness and build support for this work.
- A targeted deliverable communications and engagement plan for connecting with the relevant research community and priority stakeholders including third sector stakeholders.

- A report for ADR UK and co-funders (within six months of award start date) on the confirmed programme of work and timetable following initial consultation including alignment with other ADR England Community Catalysts.
- An end of award proposal on the sustainability of the outputs and momentum generated during the award, as well as recommendations for future strategic direction around the use and development of data and onward translation of evidence into practice.
- Appropriate and accessible research outputs.
- Additional milestones for the Evaluation Community Catalyst around the 'delegated research budget' are specified in the Evaluation annex.

Theory of Change

This diagram sets out a model for the design of this initiative and how it is envisaged to work in practice. As this is a pilot, this theory of change can be tested and refined with the experience of the Community Catalysts via the Monitoring and Evaluation Group (see the governance section below).

Figure 1: Theory of Change for ADR England Research Community Catalysts (Pilot)

View a larger version of the theory of change diagram.

Assessment Criteria

We strongly encourage interested applicants to apply as a small group or consortium to reflect the breadth of tasks and skills required. We expect the successful team to bring the following knowledge and skills and provide supporting evidence of each of the six criteria detailed below within their case for support and other required and optional documentation set out in the [Je-S applicant guidance](#).

1. **Stakeholder engagement and collaboration**

    - Ability to successfully establish and develop a diverse community (policy, academia, practice and third sector/public) around a common purpose.
    - Ability to expand and bring in existing networks including from research, and beyond.
    - Ability to play a strategic role in bringing together stakeholders across disciplinary and sector boundaries and achieving their buy-in.

2. **Effective communication and openness to perspectives**

    - Experience in engaging a wide range of stakeholders in accessible and meaningful ways including non-academic audiences.
    - Strong listening and communication skills including curiosity and openness to perspectives and ideas.
    - Ability to translate between different audiences including tailoring the approaches or outputs to encourage greater participation and engagement.

3. **Research knowledge and expertise**

    - Demonstrable knowledge and research capability in the community catalyst area of focus including experience with large-scale quantitative research and / or evaluation methods.
    - Evidence of experience in and strong ideas for developing the skills and capability of researchers.
    - Good knowledge and understanding of relevant linked administrative data and its potential. Experience of working successfully with relevant administrative datasets is desirable.
    - Appropriate and robust research ideas proposed under Objective 4 (if applicable).

4. **Management and coordination**

- An achievable workplan.
- An appropriate balance of expertise.
- Sufficient skills and capacity to resource communication, engagement, event planning and project management support.

5. **Equality and diversity**

- Commitment to and understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion in the context of the topic and as an organisation.

6. **Value for money**

- An affordable proposal with well justified and realistic costs that will be spent on time.
- Value for money.

Governance and Reporting

There are two main levels of governance for all ADR England Research Community Catalysts. A monitoring and evaluation group that all community catalysts will attend, and a steering group that will be specific to each theme. These are detailed as follows including in Figure 2 below:

1. **Monitoring and Evaluation Group**

The Monitoring and Evaluation Group, chaired by ADR UK, will meet every six months. This group will bring together all co-funders and award holders from all themes plus key strategic and cross-cutting stakeholders. The three community catalysts will be required to submit a light-touch reporting template to allow the group to hold the awards to account on behalf of all funders (more details provided below under 'success measures'). The group will also evaluate the overall effectiveness of the community catalysts in meeting their objectives and support their success by:
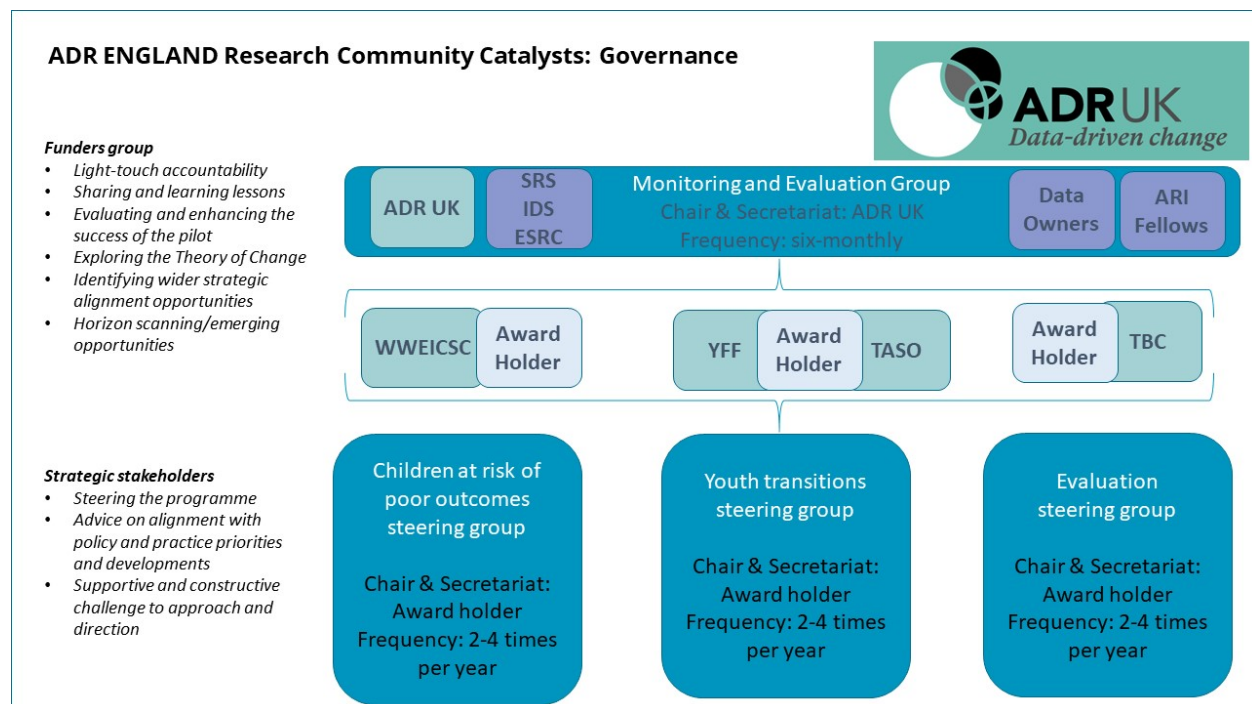
- addressing cross-cutting issues
- identifying future opportunities, for example for wider strategic alignment with external activity
- maximising the potential overlap between themes.

2. Community catalysts steering groups

Each community catalyst will chair and administer a steering group that will comprise key strategic stakeholders in the sector identified by the co-funders and the award holders. The steering group will provide access to senior practice, policy and third sector partners and ensure the community catalysts remain well-aligned with policy and practice priorities and developments.

It is also anticipated that the membership of the steering groups will include third sector stakeholders or advocacy groups to provide a mechanism for public engagement. These steering groups will be convened two to four times per year and are a key vehicle for the community catalyst teams to consult on the development and delivery of their work plan throughout the award and to embed into the specific context of the theme.

Figure 2: Governance for ADR England Research Community Catalysts (Pilot)

View a larger version of the governance diagram.

Measures of success

Light touch reporting for all community catalysts will be via the Monitoring and Evaluation Group set out above. The following measures of success will be monitored during and at the end of the award and award holders are expected to provide evidence against their progress:

- Growth in the number of academic researchers who have the skills to use the data
- Durable training and capacity building tools and resources for future use
- Evidence of research co-funding, research collaborations or funding opportunities, or interest in this from relevant stakeholders
- Evidence of effective collaboration with policy and third sector/public stakeholders.

Community catalysts will be periodically invited to contribute evidence to other key performance indicators, as part of ADR UK's reporting to its Programme Delivery Board. These may include:

- Case studies aligned to government / public service need
- ADR UK-led stakeholder engagement events.
- Academics attending training events organised by ADR UK to increase knowledge of how to analyse relevant data sources.
- Evidence that ADR UK-funded research has influenced government or public policy.
- Whitehall departments, devolved governments, public service and/or policy organisations engaging with ADR UK research.
- Evidence that ADR UK influenced policy has led to positive outcomes for UK citizens.

Role of ADR UK

To support the work of the community catalysts, ADR UK will:

- address dataset-specific training needs to ensure researchers have the skills and resources to use the data
- signpost to general training and capacity building activities led by ADR UK
- drive up awareness of and promote the use of all ADR England flagship data
- create greater transparency around data access processes and timelines across all flagship datasets
- provide advice and support for planning communications and engagement activity, editorial, design, publication, as well as opportunities for engagement including with the existing third sector and public stakeholders. Support will also be offered for any public engagement activity.
- establish and deliver the secretariat for the Monitoring and Evaluation Group across all themes as well as conducting monitoring and evaluation of the awards via light-touch reporting by community catalysts
- allocate a representative for each community catalyst steering group

- conduct any additional light-touch reporting and evidence collection for ADR UK's
  [Programme Delivery Board](#)
- provide advice and support in recruiting fellows or developing a robust commissioning process to allocate the delegated research budget.

The role of the co-funders is specified in the theme-specific annexes.

Funding

The total funds available for each award, stipulated in the Table 1 below, are broken down into a maximum sum for the Community Catalyst core grant and a maximum sum for the delegated research budget. All figures are at 100% full economic cost (unindexed) and inclusive of co-funding.

Table 1: Maximum sum available by theme (100% full economic cost - unindexed)

	Children at risk of poor outcomes	Youth transitions	Evaluation
Total funds available	£732,092	£672,085	£972,122
Community catalyst core grant	£552,069	£552,069	£675,085
Delegated research budget	£180,023	£120,015	£297,037

Community catalyst core grant

The funds available in the community catalyst core grant should cover the following:

1. All costs for objectives 1-3.
2. Training, resources, events and any other community or capacity building activities (expected to be in the region of 22% of the community catalyst core grant). There is scope for these costs to be adjusted to allow for emerging opportunities throughout the grant and consultation with the community. An audit trail should be maintained including the justification for spending decisions which may be requested by ADR UK during and at the end of the award.
3. Supervision of the embedded research fellowships (children at risk of poor outcomes, and youth transitions themes only).

4. Staff costs for administering the delegated research budget (evaluation theme only) – up to £60,000.
5. Option of small-scale research activity under Objective 4 – up to £33,000.

Staff costs should include a proportionate amount to be spent on administrative and support functions such as communications, events planning and project management. For the Evaluation Community Catalyst, costs for the administration of the delegated research budget should also be included. If mutually beneficial, community catalysts may share support staff. Please check the theme-specific annex for any in-kind contributions from co-funders that may affect costs (for example: office space).

Delegated research budget

Embedded fellowships (Children at Risk of Poor Outcomes, and Youth Transitions Community Catalysts): Funds for the embedded fellowships should be included in the total cost of the proposal and are capped at £125,000, of which ESRC will fund 80% of the full economic cost. Applicants can either cost a named research fellow (or 2) OR include costs for un-named fellows that are recruited once the grant has been awarded. There is flexibility in terms of the number and duration of fellows (for example. 1 x full time vs 2 x part time OR 2 x 6 months vs 1 x 12 month). There is also flexibility about when they start and finish with the option of being onboarded before or during the research agenda development phase.

'Test and Trial' Fund (Evaluation Community Catalyst): Funds for the Test and Trial Fund should be included in the total cost of the proposal and are capped at £297,037, of which ESRC will fund 80% of the full economic cost. It is expected that the successful team will award projects by January 2025 at the latest with all funds spent by January 2026. It is essential that this funding pot enables use of ADR England linked administrative data via an ADR UK trusted research environment. This research must be concluded before the end of the award and in time for findings to be captured in the end of award reports

Where relevant, applicants should consider opportunities for leveraging in additional funds to increase the scale of the delegated research budget.

Key dates

March 2023	Applications open
20 April 2023, 11:30 – 13:00	Applicant webinar – Evaluation Community Catalyst
24 April 2023, 14:00 – 15:30	Applicant webinar – Children at Risk of Poor Outcomes Community Catalyst
25 April 2023, 13:00 – 14:30	Applicant webinar – Youth Transitions Community Catalyst
6 June 2023, 16:00	Applications close
June – September 2023	Independent Expert Panel reviews
Early October 2023	Panel meeting day(s)
End of October 2023	Funding decisions shared with applicants
November – December 2023	Grant agreements and other documentation agreed
January 2024	Projects start
June 2024	6-month review to set out plans
September 2024	Proposal for additional ADR UK ringfenced research commissioning budget
January 2026	(for the evaluation theme only): all funds for the Test & Trial (Objective 4) to be spent
31 March 2026	Projects end

Annexes

To support application writing, the below essential documents are available:

- **ADR England Research Community Catalysts: Je-S applicant guidance**
- **ADR England Research Community Catalysts: children at risk of poor outcomes annex**
- **ADR England Research Community Catalysts: youth transitions annex**
- **ADR England Research Community Catalysts: evaluation annex**

For any further support, please contact **hub@adruk.org**.