Enhancing Biomedical and Health-Related Data and Digital Platform Resources Webinar Questions and Answers

What is the scope of this opportunity?

This pilot funding opportunity aims to invest in enhancing Digital Research Infrastructures (DRIs), services, tools and standards that are outward facing and create a stimulating environment for all participants, from those delivering a harmonised and seamless data infrastructure ecosystem to those who will utilise this ecosystem to advance UK life sciences, health and care research and innovation.

Your application must focus on DRI, services, tools, standards or other resources needed to support research within the remit of MRC, National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) or both.

We are looking for applications that will support, manage, link, share and access data at scale for use in cutting edge data science intensive research, including:

- support for the development of essential services and capabilities required by users to enable them to work seamlessly and with minimal additional effort within and across DRIs, for example mechanisms of data ingress or export
- mechanisms to manage data and ensure that it is findable, accessible, interoperable, reusable (FAIR), including work on standards
- developing and providing next generation software and tools for analytics to enable secure and transparent use of data
- support for the skilled operational and development staff needed to deliver excellent services for life sciences, health and care researchers
- support for unique linkage of health and health-related datasets (including, but not limited to, research generated data, environmental, administrative, and wearable data)
- other support needed to enhance databases, platforms, environments and their operations, including addressing environmental sustainability

What research areas are within the scope of this opportunity?

This funding opportunity covers the ecosystem for research areas within the MRC and/or the NIHR remit. The MRC remit includes areas outside of NIHR, more information on the MRC remit can be found here, the research funded by NIHR can be found here. The assessment criteria for this funding opportunity judges quality and impact and will not penalise those that focus on the remit of one funder.

Given the joint funding, to what extent are the MRC priorities balanced by NIHR ones?

The expert Oversight Group will have membership embedded in both the MRC and NIHR landscapes and will use criteria to assess the impact of applications in bringing the data ecosystem more closely together and enabling access to data for research, whether this be in the remit of MRC, NIHR or both.

What would a strong project for this funding opportunity look like?

The opportunity specification outlines the aims and assessment criteria. The specific needs for building a more coherent ecosystem will be different across the landscape. Strong applications will understand what is available, what the gaps are and make a case for how their projects addresses researcher needs.

Are projects expected to be regional or national?

The scale of a project should reflect the intended impact. Those enabling more granular research, or seeking to develop the local eco-system to inform future national interoperability, may have high-value to research but not be feasible at a national level in this time scale, other projects may require a national approach for the intended outcome.

Can research be funded as part of a project, for example funding to generate further sequencing data or imaging data with a view to be integrated to a platform?

Research exemplars using the system developed by a project needed to test system integration/tooling/fit to end user needs are effective in implementation and would be in scope. Research that cannot be tied into that requirement and could otherwise be funded through other NIHR or MRC schemes, including substantial data generation, would be out of scope for this funding opportunity.

I have an idea for a proposal, how do I know whether it is within remit?

Applicants can contact the opportunity inbox (ddpr@mrc.ukri.org) ahead of application with a 1-2 page project summary covering background, key objectives and research plan (including dissemination activities and approximate resources to be requested) for a remit check.

Do projects have to enhance the SDE network or is it available to enhance any kind of existing research infrastructure?

Projects within MRCs [remit](#) would be in scope, including those not concerning health or care data.

Projects working with health and care data, within or outside of the SDE network are also in scope. Testing the best ways to build scalable, federated/interoperable infrastructure and building new functionality is an NHSE SDE network priority, applicants with aligning goals should contact the (ddpr@mrc.ukri.org) to discuss opportunities for collaboration.

How does the NHS SDE network interact with the Federated Data Platform?

The Federated Data Platform (FDP) commissioned by NHS England is an internal platform for direct care, planning, and population health management use cases. The NHS Research SDE Network is setup specifically for the research use case, and to safely enable access to NHS data for external users. As data is onboarded into the FDP, it is likely it will be made available for research via an NHS SDE if there is demand.

Is there further guidance on eligibility and project partners?

Standard UKRI eligibility rules apply for this funding opportunity, more information on organisation eligibility can be found on the UKRI [website](#) and the funding opportunity provides guidance on project partners.

Organisations can lead more than one bid and joint bids will be accepted. The opportunity page provides guidance on how the quality of an application will be assessed, including the applicant and team capability to deliver.

How will applications be assessed?

The funding opportunity provides guidance on how applications will be assessed. All applications will be assessed by an expert Oversight Group which will consider fit to the scope and provide comments on the technical feasibility. The group will also provide strategic advice towards securing a more cohesive digital research infrastructure landscape.

Applications that do not fit the scope, are unlikely to be competitive within a rounded portfolio of opportunities or are not technically feasible will be rejected at this stage.

Applications that are shortlisted by the Oversight Group will be routed to the MRC responsive mode board most appropriate to the application.

The final rankings at research boards will be brought together for consolidation by the Oversight Group and a final funding recommendation made.

How will proposed costs be considered during assessment?

The funding opportunity provides guidance on how assessors will review resources and cost justification. Overall, they want you to demonstrate how the resources you anticipate needing for your proposed work:

- are comprehensive, appropriate, and justified
- represent the optimal use of resources to achieve the intended outcomes
- maximise potential outcomes and impacts

Are you anticipating further funds will be available for successful projects and how will a platform's future maintenance/sustainability model be used to evaluate the grant proposal?

There is no guarantee the funding will be repeated. This pilot opportunity will be used to assess demand and, if successful, will be used to evidence a strategic case for further funding in this space.

Projects seeking to generate a persistent impact beyond the end of the award should clearly articulate credible plans for sustainability. This could include cost recovery models, securing additional funding, development or expansion after the initial period of funding, and address retention of suitable technical staff and user support.