

EDICa Flexible Fund FAQs

Last updated: September 25, 2023

How will the topics for future research and flexible funding be chosen?

Each call, and the relevant topics focused on in that call, will align with a different workstream (call 1 aligns with workstream 1, call 2 aligns with workstream 2 and call 3 aligns with workstream 3).

The topics of each call will be identified through ongoing work by the EDICa team. For example, the focus of call 1 was identified as a priority area through co-design with the Funders (UKRI and the British Academy), a Delphi Study of experts in equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), and through co-design workshops with volunteer participants.

How do we engage with the EDICa workstreams?

The Flexible Fund enables the EDICa team to commission research which addresses the stubborn inequalities which persist across the Research & Innovation (R&I) ecosystem, in addition to the work that EDICa workstreams are doing. The projects that are commissioned must be in line with the EDICa call in question – each one aligning a different workstream (1-3).

Therefore, Flexible Fund projects are not in collaboration with EDICa, rather alongside the existing research being done by EDICa.

Can projects focus on anything to do with EDI?

Projects must address the needs of each call. For example, for Call 1 a project must address the needs of Workstream 1 – which is inequalities across the career life-cycle. Priority will be given to studies focussing on mitigating the impact of Covid-19 on EDI in research and innovation. Those submitting in the Expression of Interest would receive feedback early such that if their ideas do not fit, then they have time to reframe their research project or look for alternative sources of funding.

It is not clear what the difference between workstream 1 and flexible fund call 1 is, and why are there two topics and how are they related?

EDICa is organised into three workstreams, with each workstream driving one flexible fund call. The first call of flexible funding is driven by the Workstream 1 themes, which encompasses anything to do with the career life-cycle. In addition to this, for the first call we are prioritising proposals that focus on mitigating the impact of Covid-19 on inequalities across the career life cycle (within the parameters of workstream 1).

EDICa will still consider proposals that focus on Workstream 1 themes, but do not prioritise mitigating the impact of Covid-19 on inequalities. There is also no expectation that there is a relationship between EDICa's own research projects in Workstream 1, and the Flexible Fund projects.

Is Co-design essential to the proposal?

The proposed delivery timeline and likely available budget for any project is quite limited, particularly considering the (necessary) requirement for co-design. Can any guidance be provided on the types of co-design methodologies that are being looked for?

Co-design is essential to this process. EDICa have provided resource materials on our website. We are also happy to chat to anybody who might have some questions about co-design. We know from experience that co-design is essential to creating effective outcomes. “Nothing about us without us”. Although co-design is essential to the proposal we recognise that building relationships can take time and having a maximum of one year to complete the project may not see evidence of impact to the community in question until much later. The key is that co-design principles are embedded.

Due to the tight deadlines and timeline of the funding call, are you able to review the application requirements to reduce the burden on participants such as allowing applications to be indicative of partnerships in the co-design phase at the beginning. How close of a firm commitment from – for example – partners do you need to submit from the outset?

We do ask for a description of your co-design process and therefore would expect that you build the co-design phase of the project into your budget and timeline. In terms of the indicative partnerships, reviewers will have to be convinced of the feasibility. If you do not have letters of support from partnerships, the project doesn't have that strength of feasibility. Letters of support are needed for all academic and non-academic partners and collaborators. However, if any applicants are unable to get letters of support by application submission, they will be required before funding is awarded.

I'm struggling to find a partner for my project. // How do people find each other to collaborate?

If you are struggling to find a partner for your project, please contact the EDICa team at edicaucus@hw.ac.uk and we may be able to connect you with relevant organisations. There may also be other people who have come forward looking for people to partner with on a similar kind of topic and we can broker and introduction.

The application form states: 'Proposals must engage with, or be led by, those with lived experience of marginalisation in the research and innovation space'. How will this be assessed?

This will all be assessed by reviewing the EDI plan and the research proposal itself. An example of engagement could include the co-design process, a lived experience advisory board, engagement in evaluation and/or dissemination. Please note that EDICa believe in self-identification and reflect this practice and therefore will not expect evidence of lived experience. There is also no need for applicants to disclose any personal or sensitive information to be eligible.

Is the financial competitiveness or value for money of the bid assessed? What is the scoring matrix of that?

This is not a question of competing. The reviewers will look at whether all the costs are justified, appropriate and proportionate to the research proposed. This is not a section which is scored, we are looking for the justification of resources to determine that resources will be used appropriately.

Can academics be involved in multiple projects that are applying to the fund?

Yes, this is possible. For those considering it, consider the politics and dynamics of that with the other people you're involved with, but there's nothing to preclude you being involved in more than one application.

Do investigators have to be based in the UK?

EDICa is bound by the ESRC guidance. As such, lead applicants (Project Lead, Principal Investigators or Co-Leads (UK)) must be UK based and have a substantial relationship with the Lead Organisation, which must be UK based.

However, ESRC does support international collaboration and projects may include Project Co-Leads (international). ESRC's International Co-Investigators Policy provides the opportunity for UK researchers to collaborate with appropriate researchers from anywhere in the world to enhance and strengthen international collaboration. The Policy allows researchers from established international research organisations which have the capacity and capability to conduct and support research, to be included on ESRC proposals and be recognised intellectually and financially for their contribution to the work conducted and 'ownership of ideas'.

Please note that the combined costs for international co-investigators, and UK business, third sector and government body.

Definitions of 1) Project Lead 2) Project Co-Lead (UK) 3) Project Co-Lead (international)

Project Lead

- The **project lead** is responsible for the intellectual leadership and overall management of the project.
- Usually, your application should only include one project lead, however if a joint PI/ co-PI would suit a team's structure or particular needs, that is fine.
- To be the project lead you must be affiliated with the 'lead organisation' on the application.

Project Co-Lead (UK)

- A **project co-lead (UK)** is a member of the project leadership and management team. They may take over the leadership of the project, if required. Your team can have as many project co-leads as needed.
- To be a project co-lead you must be affiliated with one of the research organisations involved in submitting the application.

Project Co-Lead (international)

- As a project co-lead (international) you assist with project leadership and management. However, you cannot take over the leadership of a project as you do not meet the residency criteria for a project lead.

ESRC guidance on Eligibility and Responsibilities (document 1): [Roles in funding applications: eligibility, responsibilities and costings guidance – UKRI](#)

ESRC guidance on Eligibility and Responsibilities (document 2): [ESRC-230623-ESRCResearchFundingGuide.pdf \(ukri.org\)](#)

ESRC guidance on Eligibility and Responsibilities (document 3): <https://www.ukri.org/apply-for-funding/before-you-apply/check-if-you-are-eligible-for-research-and-innovation-funding/eligibility-as-an-organisation/>

Can a Project Lead and/or Co-Lead be from a non-academic organisation, and not have a PhD?

Yes, as long as applicants demonstrate throughout their application their ability to lead or be part of a project.

Do research participants need to be based in the UK only?

No, participants do not need to be UK-based. However, your research has to provide evidence base for reducing inequality in UK Research and Innovation careers. But there could be, for example, excellent practice from other national contexts that might be relevant, or international project teams you might need to speak to, or comparative studies.

How do I know if my research organisation or business is eligible?

Please use the following ESRC link to find all information around eligibility for organisations: <https://www.ukri.org/apply-for-funding/before-you-apply/check-if-you-are-eligible-for-research-and-innovation-funding/eligibility-as-an-organisation/>

I am interested in your Covid-19 survey results. Will the results be viewable, and if so, when?

The survey is due to close on 31 October. Full results will be available at the start of 2024. We are looking at interim results, in particular to identify particular populations that we're not hearing from. Once we have reached 250 responses, we will be able to provide some meaningful descriptive findings for people.

Can you please clarify the difference between a Network Plus and a Caucus?

Both funding models share important similarities in bringing together diverse groups and approaches in specific research areas under the leadership of a central team. The Caucus model, however, as per the call document, has a couple of key features that make it distinct: (1) collaboration with funders, both in terms of co-designing the programme of work, and funders being a core evidence user group; (2) a focus on 'what works' and being highly responsive to the needs of evidence users across multiple sectors (in this case across the research and innovation system) through synthesising existing evidence and making it accessible to user groups as well as addressing evidence gaps through a programme of new research.

For evaluative studies looking at previous UKRI projects, should we cost in those previous PIs [principal investigators] or can they be a partner in a different way? If there's been a previously-funded study and the proposal is to evaluate that.

This is a decision for the proposing team as to whether they're an active participant or a partner. Consider how much of their time you might need to pay for and cost in to the budget. This could be as an investigator, as a partner paid or as an in-kind contribution for which you would gain a Letter of Support.

Alternatively, you might be evaluating a previous project or intervention as part of your proposed work, and the original PI and others could simply be participants and you might reach out to them to interview them.

Will the proposals be "blind reviewed"? - *We have had a request not to use the term "blind" in this context, which is seen as ableist language. Instead the term anonymous review was suggested as a more inclusive alternative.*

Realistically, this will not be possible because we have asked for an EDI Plan explaining applicants role. EDICa will do its best but it will not be completely anonymous. As a project team addressing EDI issues, we will try and treat applicants and make decisions in ways that represent good practice. We are a research site as well and will be reflecting on how this process has worked and what we could do differently between each round of Flexible Funding. One of the projects in Workstream 2 is on how to reduce bias in peer review for applications for funding.

We have **an EDI Survey** we're asking applicants to complete but **will not** be linked to the proposals. This survey is so that EDICa can monitor the data on applicants and study who were more likely to apply and get funded. We will also be reporting to EDICa's funders (UKRI and British Academy) a HESA data summary with figures like the number of proposals from men, women, etc.

Does the career lifecycle start with students or people at the beginning of their working career life?

Yes, we do see it starting with students, but with a **very clear focus** on that trajectory and path into careers in research and innovation – **not** the student experience or classroom or impact on assessment. In terms of the call, did Covid-19 affect the career choices that people might have made about moving into R&I- for example. Some may have been inspired and for others it was detrimental.

EDICa considers PhD students to be "working" in this sector.

The early part of most journeys into paid career research is often some form of student journey – e.g. a doctoral student. EDICa is interested in the start of research and innovation careers as well as retention. Broadening to the innovation sector rather than just research sector, there will be some non-students but they'll often have some student journey into that career. We're working with National Museums of Scotland looking at children and young adults "imagining" a career in research and innovation– so we are interested in the full journey.

How can EDICa support people from the wider research innovation field like professional services people, lab managers, technicians – who might not be used to applying or submitting research proposals?

Anyone working in the research and innovation space can apply, as long as they meet the eligibility criteria set out by ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council). If people are in non-academic roles we would encourage you to collaborate. As per ESRC guidelines, you normally have a Project Lead and then a number of co-leads – there is no restriction on the number of co-leads.

If someone is less experienced – whether an academic or non-academic (e.g. technician) – try and collaborate with someone who is a bit more experienced. We are prioritising people who haven't had external funding before.

How many projects does EDICa aim to fund?

We have £1 million over 3 years, which roughly breaks down to £333,000 per year. We don't have a firm estimate and it will depend on the nature and scale of projects and how much projects are asking for – there might be some awarded more and some less. The ballpark is about 10 projects of £33,000 each. This could be more or could be less; it depends on the nature of the projects submitted.

If you apply in round one can you apply in round two whether successful or not?

Yes – no restriction if you apply in round one to apply to another round. But note the calls are different and it would be a different project.

Do you see Covid-19 as in the past, or current?

We see it very much as current; we know that there's Covid still circulating, and some people are still experiencing the impact of long-Covid. The proposal just has to be related to Covid somehow – whether it was past, present, or even future. EDICa is using "medium-term" in our survey of Covid-19's impact on careers.

What will rounds 2 and 3 will include?

The next two calls won't be on Covid, but we don't yet know what they will be. EDICa has co-design embedded in its process, so we won't know what the calls will focus on until we've met with our Stakeholder Engagement Groups and Advisory Board, and seen the results of the current literature reviews and research being undertaken.

Each call will be tailored to fit each workstream. You can review what the research themes for Workstreams 2 and 3 are on our website here: <https://edicaucus.ac.uk/research-themes/> to get an idea.

Is it the case that senior members of staff should not be PIs [principal investigators]?

In the interests of diversity and inclusion, we are trying to facilitate opportunities for earlier career researchers and innovators to lead on projects. Some institutions may have regulations around whether early career researchers can lead on projects. If you're from such an institution, get in touch with us and we can support you to find a way to still apply.

We encourage co-leading with a more senior member of staff, but with the clear expectation that the early career researcher who hasn't previously lead on an externally-funded project will be the project lead. but might need to co-lead with someone who's more senior in order for the institution to approve the submission. We are trying to be flexible but we are prioritising opportunities for people that perhaps experience more barriers in accessing funds in that way.

If you are a senior member of staff interested in our fund, we want to make sure that you bring on board somebody else who needs more experience to give them the opportunity to be co-lead on a project. So even if the inexperienced member can't be the primary project lead, they still have the opportunity to take on responsibility. See definitions of project lead and project co-lead, etc. earlier in this FAQ document. Senior academics can be involved, but we want to see opportunities for less experienced people to be involved as well.

Can the project focus on the EDI in a single discipline or does it need to cover the experience across disciplines?

The project can be in one discipline but the call is open to all disciplines. EDICa is heavily focused on social science research due to the nature of EDI research, but we encourage interdisciplinary research. We are not proscribing disciplines at all.

Given the short deadline, do we need to get support letters from all proposed partners for the co-design and will this impact the assessment of the proposal?

Yes. You do need to provide support letters because it confirms the viability and the feasibility of a study. If we agree to fund a study, there's only a maximum of one year to conduct and complete it, so we need to ensure that obtaining support would not eat into that timeline.

Consider whether a partner is critical for the research of the project, or whether it would be viable without it. If the latter, then a narrative in your submission that would say potential other supports haven't been achieved at this moment in time probably wouldn't weaken your application, but if you are relying on certain partners for the viability of the project, then it's critical those letters are received and included.

We are aware of the short deadlines in this particular call. If you are not able to secure a support letter in time for the submission deadline, but you have indications – like an email from a partner promising a letter of support – you can include this in your submission. And then if you are successful in your application, we will need to see the support letters before any funding is released.

Will you fund proposals that fit with the workstream but not focused on the impact of Covid?

Not for this call. EDICa decided the priority would be on the impact of Covid to help with the focus of the call.