

Research-Ready Data and Access Funding Opportunity – Call for Expressions of Interest



Background

During 2019 and 2020, ADR UK supported invitation-only bids to build new research datasets and carry out innovative research of importance to key public policy areas. Early engagement with Government data owners covering crime and justice, education, health and the economy initiated a flow of new research-ready datasets and subsequent research into these fields, with huge potential for public good.

With the launch of [ADR England](#), the time is ripe to provide additional funding to support both the development of new linked datasets and the better use of existing linked data for research that addresses major societal challenges.

This funding call directly supports **ADR England's strategic goals** which include:

- A Research-Ready Data building programme which enhances, enriches and makes administrative data more accessible for public good; and
- A substantial increase in cross-cutting research that enhances bodies of knowledge for public good.

The main ADR England objectives this call will address are:

- i. **To build trust and address the needs of those at the heart of public policy and practice** by sharing administrative data safely, ensuring public acceptability, and demonstrating the value of administrative data research through cross sector collaborations between government, academia and other sectors.
- ii. **To develop high-value, sustainable research assets and tools for reuse (such as reusable code and standardising linked metadata)** by linking administrative data and making it available to the wider research community through the [Office for National Statistics \(ONS\) Secure Research Service \(SRS\)](#), which can subsequently be updated and refreshed to maintain its research value.
- iii. **To enable research that addresses local, regional and national public policy, practice and wider societal needs** by focusing data linkage on cross-cutting themes, such as those identified in Departmental [Areas of Research Interest](#), and with longitudinal survey data.

- iv. **To increase the analytical capacity to produce high impact research using linked administrative data** by ensuring that all data linkage projects contribute tools which facilitate future research use of the data as well as easier and more streamlined access for accredited researchers.

What is in scope for this funding opportunity?

This call is intended to encourage innovative and creative linkages and access to linked data to drive research to new places, underpinned by academic expertise and collaborations across sectors and policy boundaries. Opportunities to be awarded funds through this call will not be limited by theme or discipline as long as proposals meet the eligibility criteria provided below. ADR England encourages applications which support:

1. **Research-Ready Data (RRD)** including both the creation of a novel data linkage or augmenting an existing administrative data linkage with additional variables or further linkages. RRD must include at least one administrative dataset linked to at least one other data source, which could include other administrative datasets, health data, longitudinal or cohort survey data and/or non-administrative data (such as surveys about service provision and need). ADR England would welcome proposals for RRD that address:
 - big societal themes (e.g. Net Zero, Covid recovery, social / environmental / educational inequality); and
 - cross-cutting themes that transcend individual departmental policy remits, for which there is an identified gap in available data.
2. **Simplifying Data Access** including the development of sustainable mechanisms which streamline research access to linked data so that processes to access are broadly consistent and predictable across datasets.
3. **Early Pathfinder Research** which is strongly tied to the creation or improvement of Research-Ready Data. Such work would need to utilise the new or improved data as part of its preparation for being deposited in the ONS Secure Research Service and should have a clear link to policy evidence gaps. Early Pathfinder Research should be an initial flagship project to demonstrate the real-world value of the data and its interoperability with other data or through other platforms as well as:
 - increasing the potential of the Research-Ready Data (for example, advancing our understanding of the data for future research use or developing research concepts) AND/OR
 - providing capacity building opportunities (for example by offering an early career researcher a placement or supervisor-led PhD project).

Note: research without the creation or improvement of Research-Ready Data is not in scope of this fund.

ADR England supports the creation of sustainable research resources including administrative data related to England (geographical coverage can be larger, but must include England) that will be made available to accredited researchers via the ONS SRS, and that can uniquely contribute to

filling evidence gaps around cross-cutting policy themes. Proposals funded through the Research-Ready Data and Access Funding Opportunity would be expected to:

- Build on and learn from best or relevant practice and existing standards or guidance.
- Deliver full and robust metadata and publicly available, well-documented linkage methodology.
- Consult with academic experts to ensure data, tools or mechanisms are fit for purpose.
- Develop tools, training materials and opportunities, in collaboration with ADR England, to support the wider use of new linked data; this could include materials to aid data familiarisation for researchers without approved secure access (e.g. synthetic data).
- Plan for data sustainability to ensure data can be maintained and enhanced over time, including refreshing data and enabling further linkages or additional variables to grow the dataset, for example via a linkage spine.
- Consider the interoperability of the data with other relevant data sources and through other platforms.

What is out of scope?

ADR UK's mission is to support the linkage of administrative data for long-term research use, and this funding opportunity holds this mission at its heart. This is different to the mission of the ONS Integrated Data Programme (IDP) Analytical Lighthouse Projects (ALPs), which are focused on the delivery of complex data, including linked data, to support government analytical needs by supporting cross-cutting priority policy projects.

Therefore, out of scope are projects which:

- Primarily serve the current priorities and analytical needs of government and can be served by an Analytical Lighthouse Project.
- Do not include any academic involvement.
- Do not allow academic freedom to publish.
- Focus on data quality improvement only (rather than high quality data linkage or augmentation).
- Utilise only non-administrative data.
- Utilise no data related to England.
- Utilise data that are already available to wider academic access (unless adding to the data or streamlining mechanisms to make it easier to access).
- Will not deliver a 'Research-Ready dataset' into the ONS SRS (or similar), an improved/enhanced dataset or improved access to data, within the timeframe of the call.
- Early Pathfinder Research only.

Funding principles

Expressions of interest for the Research-Ready Data and Access Funding Opportunity will be initially considered by a triage group including ADR UK, ESRC and ONS. This will be to ensure that proposals invited to bid for funding:

- Are relevant to [increasing the power of administrative data](#) through linkage.
- Are specific to the remit of [ADR England](#).
- Build acceptance for the use of administrative data for research amongst the public and with data owners, by demonstrating the potential for public benefit and societal [impact](#).
- Contribute to tools to support the reuse of data for research, such as reusable code.
- Align to and build on existing [research themes](#), data and research investments.
- Align to our [ethical and responsible use of data](#).

Where possible, the triage group will also endeavour to signpost applicants to other data linkage opportunities.

How much funding is available, and over what timeframe?

Funds are available between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2026, with the total fund being in the region of £6 million. This is in addition to the ADR UK funded expertise and resource available from the ONS SRS to deliver data acquisition and curation. There are deliberately no upper or lower limits to individual awards that will be made as a result of this call. However, as ADR UK wishes to build a portfolio of projects funded through this mechanism over the next five years, we anticipate allocating funds to a number of different sized projects that can be delivered in time for the data to be made accessible to external researchers within the next five years.

The funding will be paid as a grant either by invoice/purchase order mechanism at 100% full economic cost or at 80% full economic cost if paid directly to academic partners. Funding arrangements will be agreed subject to the particular circumstances of the bid and the bidder.

Assessment criteria for the invite-only stage will be finalised after the Expression of Interest stage but will broadly be based on the [ADR England Strategy](#), alignment with the criteria set out in this funding opportunity plus deliverability and value for money. The funding panel will also bear in mind the need for a balanced portfolio of projects.

Eligibility to apply

The Research-Ready Data and Access Fund is invitation-only following this Expressions of Interest stage and is not an open competition.

Expressions of interest are invited from teams led by either UK academia or national government, which can include involvement from others such as third sector and public sector organisations, including What Works Centres and ONS. If a proposal is led by a government partner it must still feature academic involvement and expertise. In particular, we welcome collaborations between organisations and partnerships that can draw out insight from UKRI or other related investments or data linkage programmes. Applicants are expected to be part of experienced teams with existing relationships with data owners and knowledgeable about the datasets they will be linking or augmenting/enhancing. ADR England would expect that, where possible, data owners should be

involved in the project team, or alternatively that the applicant has already secured significant interest from data owners and partners to engage in the creation of novel administrative data linkage for research for public benefit.

If applicable, the Early Pathfinder Research element of a project must be led by a UK Higher Education Institution (or other [body eligible to receive UKRI funding](#)). Nonetheless, collaborative teams of government, third sector and academic bodies are encouraged. Supporting information can be found in ESRC's Co-Investigator [Policy](#) and broader [Funding Policy](#), for example around project partners.

How to apply:

Stage 1: expressions of interest

Potential applicants are asked to submit an Expression of Interest to ADR England using the guidance provided in Annex 1 by Friday 17 September 2021. This should include a summary of their idea and an outline of their objectives, engagement and outputs. Expressions of Interest will then be sifted by a multi-partnered triage group and selected bids will be invited to make a full application for funding.

If the essential eligibility criteria are met and if the Strategic Case is compelling, the procedure continues as below.

Note:

- *Expressions of interest for this funding opportunity will remain 'live' until further notice. Funds are available until 31 March 2026. The times set out below apply to the first wave of applications in 2021. Funds permitting, we will repeat this Expressions of Interest phase periodically until 2025.*
- *ADR England may fast-track applications at their discretion with agreement from all relevant parties.*
- *Potential applicants are encouraged to contact the ADR England team to discuss their idea in advance of making their submission.*

Stage 2: invited submissions (indicative timetable for first wave)

1. Expressions of interest should be submitted to ADR England by 17 September 2021.
2. Invitations to make a full application will be issued late 2021.
3. Invitees submit their proposal early 2022.
4. An independent panel makes an initial assessment on paper and may ask for further information from applicants.
5. Applicants present in person to the panel.
6. The panel will offer advice and recommendations to ADR England in relation to each application.
7. ADR England will consider panel advice and make funding decisions including:
 - a. Fund (in full; in part; with conditions; with stage gates)
 - b. Refine and resubmit
 - c. Reject
8. Awards commence from June 2022 onwards (unless agreed otherwise).

Assessing Eligibility at the Expressions of Interest Stage

To ensure the Research-Ready Data and Access Fund is used to deliver the aims of ADR England, those who submit expressions of interest will only be invited to make a full submission when it is clear to the ADR England team that they meet the following essential eligibility criteria and are within the scope of this funding opportunity. Annex 1 provides details of what is expected in an Expression of Interest, including a commitment to meet the following eligibility criteria.

Essential eligibility requirements:

- New or augmented/improved research-ready data and associated resources will be made accessible to accredited UK researchers via an ADR UK Trusted Research Environment (e.g. the ONS Secure Research Service (SRS), or similar).
- Data owners can provide letters of support for the use of their data or clear evidence of their support for improved mechanisms for accessing their data.
- There is evidence of demand from government to use the proposed research-ready datasets and associated research/analysis/insights for public good.
- The work specified is deliverable within the ADR England funding timeframe (March 2026).
- The sustainability of the data (updates and access to) and any new mechanisms will be considered beyond the life of the ADR England investment.
- For government-led proposals, sufficient academic expertise and involvement is factored in, including an expectation of academic publication, where relevant.
- Proposal-specific public engagement plans to ensure public acceptance of data linking and sharing for research is intrinsic, including clear communication and transparency on the mitigation of public risk, and plans to ensure relevant publics/communities are actively engaged and supportive.
- Fully accessible code, shared with other researchers accessing the relevant datasets (including through reporting of methods).

Expressions of interest should be submitted by Friday 17 September 2021. Guidance is available at Annex 1, and any queries should be sent to hub@adruk.org.

Annex 1: Expressions of interest

Instructions:

Please complete and return your expression of interest via email to ADR England at hub@adruk.org with the title: **ADR England RRD Expression of Interest**. In doing so please address the following points:

1. A succinct and compelling narrative in the form of an overarching strategic case in approximately 500 words to **include the following sub-headings**.
 - a. **Drivers for this proposal:** the initiatives, reports, or policy agendas which this work will form a part. What particular social or economic problem(s) does the project seek to address?
 - b. **Objectives:** The *goals*, the desired *impact*, and the *timing* of this work within that context.
 - c. **Engagement:** What public authorities, interest groups, and research teams are/will be *engaged* with this work? Please also indicate if you already have any funding approved for this proposal.
 - d. **Benefits:** How this work serves the *public interest* as defined in the Research Code of Practice.
2. Your role: why are you/your team are well positioned to do this work?
3. Why does your proposal fit with the scope of the [ADR England Strategy](#)?
4. A statement of commitment that you can meet the essential requirements.
5. Type of project, indicative costs, timeframes, and deliverables as per the below table:

Financial Year	Research-Ready Data	Simplifying Access to Data	Early Pathfinder Researcher (academic led)
2022/23			
2023/24			
2024/25			
2025/26			
Main Outputs			