IRC Flex Fund Three Funding Call Action to Impact Stream

About the Call

In collaboration with the IRC's UKRI Stakeholders, including the Economic and Social Research council (ESRC), Innovate UK, and UK Research & Innovation (UKRI), this call invites proposals that generate actionable insights to inform research and innovation (R&I) strategy, policy and support, with a focus on both economic and non-economic outcomes.

Proposals commissioned under this fund should contribute to:

» informing R&I policies, strategies and decision-making through robust evidence
» helping improve support for R&I in universities and businesses
» producing evidenced based insights for the IRC's UKRI Stakeholders and policymakers about what works, where and why within the research and innovation system

Projects commissioned under this fund should:

» Align with the IRC's aims and objectives
» Illustrate their strategic importance for UKRI stakeholders.

This fund is not seeking to support applications where there is a clear alternative research council responsive mode scheme.

Deadline for applications: 12pm 22 October 2025

To apply, please complete this form, attach short CVs (maximum 2 pages) for all members of the research team, and submit to info@ircaucus.ac.uk.

For all enquiries, please contact info@ircaucus.ac.uk.

Funding Themes and Priorities

In addition to the themes outlined below, we particularly welcome proposals that address areas not already covered in the IRC's existing project portfolio. See the full list of IRC projects here: https://ircaucus.ac.uk/projects-2/.

» **A Resilient R&I System**

   We invite proposals that explore the challenges and solutions to ensuring a sustainable R&I system and the key actors involved:

   o Understanding **what makes a resilient research and innovation system**, the different actors and organisations required, and incentives and approaches needed to build a sustainable system
   o **Transforming research and innovation environments** to ensure that they are resilient

Examples of focus could include but are not limited to:

- o Ensuring financial sustainability of the R&I system
- o Resilience of the UK R&I system to external shocks
- o Maintaining the UK's position in the international R&I space
- o Understanding how a research & innovation funder addresses gaps in the R&I system (including perverse incentives and structural gaps between funders and other bodies)
- o Understanding how UKRI catalyses positive change in the R&I system beyond direct investment in research and innovation
- o The relationship between social/economic background career pathways and outcomes in a resilient research and innovation system
- o Understanding the connection between accessibility, research infrastructure and environmental sustainability in a resilient system

» **Understanding the Economic and Societal Impact of Research and Innovation (R&I)**
We invite proposals that explore the economic and societal impact of R&I – with a focus on long-term, system-level perspectives. Proposals may address (but are not limited to) the following themes:

- o Evidencing the role of different actors in the system, including funders, in enabling and achieving economic and societal impact
- o Exploring the pathways from curiosity-driven research to economic growth
- o Understanding the time-lag between research and impact – exploring how different types of R&I generate outcomes over varying timescales, and the factors that influence this lag
- o The role of underpinning R&I capabilities (e.g. resilient system, infrastructure, talent and skills) in achieving impact

Funding Available

This call invites two types of proposals: Action to Impact projects or Targeted Research projects. This document focuses on the **Action to Impact** stream.

This call has up to £200,000 (100% fEC) available to fund projects across both streams.

Action to Impact Projects

The purpose of these projects is to translate existing research into usable, policy-relevant insights and outputs.

Projects can seek up to a maximum of £15,000 (100% fec). The IRC will fund 80% of the full economic cost.

- » **Type of activity funded:** translating existing research into usable, policy-relevant insights and outputs.
- » **Evidence base:** Draws on existing, credible research. Applicants must demonstrate the relevance and quality of this evidence.
- » **Key outputs:** Practical outputs tailored to decision-makers (e.g. toolkits, frameworks, briefs, dashboards).
- » **Assessment emphasis:** Usefulness, clarity, and applicability of outputs; stakeholder fit.
- » **Budget focus:** supporting output development and dissemination.

Additional Notes for Applicants

- » Project duration must not exceed 6 months.
- » This call invites two types of proposals: Action to Impact projects or Targeted Research projects. **Choose the stream that best fits your project's goals** and methods. You cannot apply to both with the same proposal.
- » Both streams will be assessed by the same reviewer panel, with criteria tailored to the stream type.
- » All projects must to generate actionable insights to inform UKRI, DSIT, or broader government strategy in the research and innovation ecosystem.

If you are unsure which stream best fits your proposal, you are welcome to contact the IRC team (info@ircaucus.ac.uk).

Application Process

How to Apply

To apply, please complete this form, attach short CVs (maximum 2 pages) for all members of the research team, and submit to info@ircaucus.ac.uk.

Please provide:

- » A project summary
- » A project description demonstrating the feasibility and strategic fit of the approach, and how the project will produce evidence and insights for research and innovation (R&I) strategy, policy and support.
- » The intended outputs and impact pathway
- » Information on the research team
- » Budget breakdown

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Timetable

Activity	Date
Q&A Webinar *Book your place here.*	8 September: 15:00 – 16:30 *This will be recorded and available on the IRC website after the event*
Call opens	1 September 2025
Call closes	12:00pm 22 October 2025
Review Panel	Mid November 2025
Decision communicated	Mid-Late November 2025
Cohort Webinar *Webinar with successful applicants*	Early December 2025
Projects start	1 January 2026
Projects must end by	1 July 2026

What We're Looking For

What are Actionable Insights?

This call invites proposals that generate actionable insights to inform research and innovation (R&I) strategy, policy and support, with a focus on both economic and non-economic outcomes.

Actionable insights are succinct conclusions drawn from research findings that:

» Can be turned directly into an action or a response
» Help stakeholders understand why something is happening, and how to act on it
» Are relevant, specific, and valuable to the target audience, helping them to build actions, create and adapt strategies, and make decisions

Example and Inspiration

Please see below for further guidance and steer on what type of projects the IRC funds:

» Visit the About Us section on the IRC website. This provides an overview the IRC's aims, objectives and the types of activities we undertake and shows the IRC's logic model
» Visit the IRC's project page. This provides summaries of all IRC projects we have in our portfolio.
» Review the UKRI strategy documents and delivery plans. These documents outline areas of interest and priority to our UKRI stakeholders. Projects aligning to and/or addressing challenges in these areas will be of interest our stakeholders

Project Expectations

Outputs

All projects funded by the IRC are expected to produce at least one output targeted at UKRI Stakeholders. This output should be designed for an informed but non-specialist audience, using accessible, jargon-free language suitable for non-academic users. It will be formatted in IRC branding and published on the IRC website. All project outputs will undergo a light-touch internal review conducted by the IRC Core Team before they are published on the IRC website, ensuring they align with the IRC's strategic objectives and communication standards.

We strongly encourage creativity in the format and presentation of outputs. The format should resonate with the intended audience and clearly convey actionable insights. Suggested formats include reports, videos, apps, interactive tools, or web-based repositories. Other formats are also welcomed.

Applicants may also produce additional output types, such as toolkits, frameworks or proof of concepts materials that support further engagement and impact.

UKRI Stakeholder Engagement

To maximise the impact of funded projects, UKRI Stakeholder engagement will be embedded throughout the project lifecycle. In collaboration with IRC's Knowledge Exchange (KE) and Impact Manager, each project is expected to develop a stakeholder engagement and impact plan. This is not intended as a reporting tool, but rather a support mechanism to help projects plan meaningful activities and identify opportunities for the IRC to assist.

In collaboration with IRC's Communications and Engagement Manager, projects will also have the opportunity to:

» Promote key activities and events via IRC's website and social media
» Access support for communications planning

Engagement Points

Funded projects will participate in two engagement meetings UKRI, ESRC and/or Innovate UK stakeholders, supported by the IRC Knowledge Exchange (KE) and Impact Manager - one at the start of the project and another at the three-quarter point. These meetings aim at providing feedback and guidance to ensure alignment with UKRI stakeholder evidence needs and to maximum the usability and reach of project outputs.

» **Start-of-project:** This session will bring together each funded project and relevant UK Stakeholders. Each project will be asked to give a short (5 minute) presentation using a standard template, followed by discussion and feedback with stakeholders. This meeting is intended to give UKRI Stakeholders an opportunity to meet the researchers, learn more about the project, and provide guidance to ensure the project is aligned with their evidence needs and will therefore have maximum impact.

>> **Last quarter of the project:** Projects will share early findings with UKRI stakeholders. This session will explore opportunities to enhance the dissemination and diffusion of outputs/actionable insights within UKRI stakeholders and, potentially, wider stakeholders within the R&I system. This will also be an opportunity for projects to present their draft output(s) and receive feedback on format and how well they meet the needs of the intended users.

Ahead of these meetings, project teams will meet with the IRC's KE and Impact Manager, and the Communications Manager, to help prepare for the discussions. Additional meetings may be arranged depending on project needs and by mutual agreement.

Post-Project Broader Engagement

While the primary focus of these projects is to generate actionable insights, applicants are encouraged – but not required – to contribute to wider communication and dissemination activities, with support from the IRC's Communications & Engagement Manager, and Knowledge Exchange & Impact Manager.

Optional activities may include:

>> Producing a short blog, infographic, or social media posts content to accompany the final output, with support from the IRC's Communications and Engagement Manager.
>> Sharing insights and outputs through the applicants' own institutional channels, social media, and networks.
>> Participating in webinars to share findings the IRC network and wider UKRI stakeholders through webinars (e.g. thematic panels or spotlight sessions).
>> Condensing research findings into accessible, actionable formats (e.g., infographics, presentations, videos, policy briefs, case studies, or other formats) aimed at targeted stakeholder groups within the wider research and innovation system, developed in collaboration with the IRC's Knowledge Exchange & Impact Manager.

Assessment and Selection Process

Selection process

This competition will be carried out in accordance with the principles of Peer Review upheld by UKRI: https://www.ukri.org/apply-for-funding/how-we-make-decisions/

Submission of applications will be a one-stage process. Following eligibility checks, applications will be reviewed by a panel comprising stakeholders from the IRC, ESRC, Innovate UK and UKRI. Applications will be scored against the criteria below.

All applications will be treated as strictly confidential and seen for the purpose of review only.

Criteria

Project Design	Proposal clearly describes and justifies its research approach.
	The selection of existing evidence is appropriate, and the translation approach is feasible and credible.
Outputs & Impact Pathway	**Outputs**: The proposed outputs are well-defined, tailored to stakeholder needs, and appropriate in format and scope. There is a clear vision for how outputs will be delivered, disseminated, and used.
	Impact Pathway: The proposal articulates a realistic and compelling pathway to short-term and longer-term outcomes. It explains how outputs will inform decisions, contribute to improved policies or strategies, and align with the goals of UKRI, DSIT or wider government objectives.
Research Team	Team should have relevant expertise and experience in delivering rigorous, policy-relevant research or evidence translation.
	Demonstrates capacity to engage with stakeholders and deliver high-quality, usable outputs.

Delivery & Grant Conditions

Project Delivery Requirements

» **No extensions will be granted:** All projects must be completed within the agreed timeline. Applicants should plan accordingly to ensure delivery by the stated end date.

» **Staff must be in place at project start:** Recruitment of key personnel during the project period is not permitted. All necessary staff must be identified, contracted, and ready to begin on day one.

» **Final invoices deadline:** All project-related invoices must be submitted by 30 September 2026. Costs submitted after this date will not be reimbursed.

Terms and Conditions

Successful applicants will receive a Grant Award Letter which includes the terms and conditions for this call set out in the IRC Disbursement Agreement. Applicants are advised to get these terms reviewed and approved by their university legal/contracts teams first before applying since these terms are non-negotiable and cannot be changed once an award is made. Once the award is made no negotiations or changes to the Disbursement Agreement will be accepted.

The IRC will only make successful awards to those applicants that indicate their acceptance of the template Disbursement Agreement at the date of application. Additionally, if any applicant considers the template Disbursement Agreement to be binding and in

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circumstances where the applicant cannot agree to the terms of the Disbursement Agreement then no bid for a research award should be made.

A copy of these terms and conditions is available here.

Eligibility

This competition will be carried out in accordance with UKRI Eligibility requirements; ESRC funding rules and Principles of full economic costing.

» The Principal Investigator must be a member of the IRC Network.

» Any UK organisation that is eligible to receive UKRI funding. Before applying for funding, check the eligibility of your organisation.

» Every funded project shall have a named Lead University/Lead Research Organisation. This organisation may apply independently or may include other Project Partners in its application.

» Funding shall be awarded only to the Lead University/Lead Research Organisation. Oxford Brookes will contract with the Lead University/Lead Research Organisation only. Any subsequent distribution of funding to Project Partners shall be the responsibility of the Lead University /Lead Research Organisation.

» Each project shall have a named Principal Investigator (PI). The PI shall be employed continuously by the Lead University (i.e., their post will outlast the project). The PI shall be considered the key contact for the award, taking responsibility for delivery, budget, and reporting. The PI must be from the organisation that will administer the grant. The PI will take intellectual leadership of the project and manage the research. All named investigators are responsible for ensuring that successful proposals are undertaken and completed in the manner specified.

» An individual as Principal Investigator can lead on only one bid at any one time. You may support others as a co-investigator, if you have the capacity to do so without detriment to the project you lead.

» Early career researchers (ECR), (including post-doctoral researchers and new/probationary lecturers) are eligible to participate and are encouraged to do so and may act in role of PI. Where an ECR is the primary actor, it is requested that a senior individual is also included in the project to help oversee.

» Non-academic partners are welcomed and encouraged as part of submitted proposals. Please see the following links for further information:
  ο Check if you are eligible for research and innovation funding
  ο ESRC research funding guide

» Postgraduate students are not eligible to apply for funded projects.

We are committed to achieving equality of opportunity for all funding applicants. We encourage applications from a diverse range of researchers.

We support people to work in a way that suits their personal circumstances. This includes:

- » career breaks
- » support for people with caring responsibilities
- » flexible working and alternative working patterns

Eligible Costs

Costings for this competition should be in accordance with ESRC funding rules and Principles of full economic costing.

Applicants should ensure that their request is appropriate for the scope, ambition and expected impact, and can viably be spent within project timeline.

- » **Directly Allocated staff:** Investigators
- » **Directly Incurred staff:** Researchers
- » **Travel and Subsistence**
- » **Other Directly Incurred costs:** project specific consumables, consultancy fees, and equipment costs
- » **Estate and Indirect costs**

Funding for the flexible fund will be made at 80% full economic cost. If successful, applicants will receive 80% funding by the IRC on proposals submitted. The organisation in receipt of the devolved funding must make up the remaining 20%.

Where non-academic or international organisations are the recipients of an IRC flexible fund grant, they are eligible for funding at 100% full economic cost. However, the combined costs for applicants eligible for 100% full economic cost should not exceed 30% of the full economic cost of the grant.

Ineligible Costs

The following may not be requested under this Call:

- » Associated studentships

Submissions

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