Summary

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) is pleased to announce the fourth round of the ESRC Transformative Research Call, which aims to provide a stimulus for genuinely transformative research ideas at the frontiers of the social sciences, enabling research which challenges current thinking to be supported and developed.

We intend to support approximately 10-12 transformative awards (depending on the quality of the proposals received), each supporting up to £250,000 (at 100% full economic costs (FEC)) for projects up to 24 months in duration.

We invite proposals from UK-based research organisations (ROs) eligible for Research Council funding and from any area of the social sciences. We welcome interdisciplinary proposals on the proviso that these must be at least 50% social science in disciplinary focus. This includes the focus of the research, the principal investigator, and other personnel involved.
All applicants should consult the ESRC Research Funding Guide, available from the ESRC website: (www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-funding-guide/), which sets out the rules and regulations governing funding.

Proposals must be submitted by 16:00 on 31 October 2017 using the Joint electronic Submission (Je-S) system https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk/

**Background and scope**

We are committed to fostering and promoting greater transformative innovation and risk in the research that we support. This call is central to that ambition, and will support the development of exciting research projects that have the potential to make a substantial contribution towards social science.

For the purpose of this call, the ESRC broadly defines transformative research as involving pioneering theoretical and methodological innovation, engaging unusual disciplinary and/or interdisciplinary perspectives, challenging conventional academic thinking and/or involving the novel application of theory and methods in new contexts. The expectation is that the transformative research call will provide a major stimulus to novel developments of social science enquiry which will lead to having transformative impact on society. The ESRC recognises that research will attract an element of risk, which we expect will be conducive to high reward.

Some of the possible characteristics of transformative research include:

- results that will radically change accepted thinking in the social sciences or that could lead to a paradigm shift in its field
- research that is ethically sound, but which is likely to involve an unusually high degree of risk for the researcher and/ or participants, with the expectation of it producing high rewards
- research that engages unusual disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives and/or methodologies
- research that challenges widespread methodological and theoretical assumptions of typical social scientific enquiry
- research that is carried out with the expectation that it will produce a broad base of knowledge and new thinking/insights which will lead to having transformative impact on society.

**Call details**

This call specifically encourages applicants to design a research question(s) that is both highly ambitious and creative. Applicants should also consider the potential scientific impact of their research proposal and the potential economic and societal impact. More information can be found on the ESRC Impact Toolkit at: www.esrc.ac.uk/research/impact-toolkit/

**Funding and duration**

Grants supported under this call will be funded for up to 24 months in duration and must start no later than 30 September 2018.

The value of the award shall not exceed £250,000 (at 100% fEC). The ESRC will fund 80% of this cost, and the balance must be covered by the host research organisation. We expect to
fund 10-12 transformative grants in this call. The final decision on how many grants will be
funded will depend primarily on the quality of the proposals, on their potential to transform
conventional academic thinking, transforming research methods, and/or their potential to
have transformative impact on society.

Eligibility

All UK-based research organisations (ROs) that are eligible for Research Council funding
will be eligible to submit a maximum of two proposals to this call. As this is a highly
competitive call, all ROs must internally decide on the final number of proposals to be
submitted. Proposals submitted to this call will count towards demand management
statistics.

ROs are expected to identify which proposals to submit through the process they consider
most appropriate. In previous rounds some ROs have followed an anonymous peer-review
assessment process; some have had a mock ‘Pitch to Peers’ workshop; and some have taken
into consideration a mix of researchers at various stages of their career or aimed for gender
and age balance.

Although ROs are responsible for determining the internal selection process they use, we
require all ROs to provide details outlining this by completing the ‘RO Process Proforma’
found at Annex I. The completed proforma must be included as an attachment to the
proposal at the moment of submission.

Resubmissions of unsuccessful proposals from previous rounds of the Transformative
Research Call are not permitted on this call. However, in exception to normal ESRC rules,
it has been agreed that proposals previously unsuccessful in other ESRC competitions can
be resubmitted under this call providing they meet the call criteria. In a further exception to
ESRC’s normal resubmission rules, unsuccessful proposals submitted through the
Transformative Research Call, may apply for funding to any other ESRC scheme (unless
otherwise stated) providing they meet the call criteria.

Principal investigators and collaboration

The proposal must be led by one principal investigator (PI). There is no restriction on who
can be a PI (see ESRC Research Funding Guide (www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-
applicants/research-funding-guide/), as long as they are based at an eligible research
organisation. The research organisation must agree to support the applicants for at least the
duration of the project. We welcome proposals from researchers at any stage of their
career, and are particularly keen to encourage proposals from early career researchers.

The PI is responsible for the drafting and submission of the proposal, and for leading the
grant if it is funded. The PI must also be available to attend the ‘Pitch to Peers’ workshop in
mid-April, if their proposal is shortlisted, in order to present and defend their proposal.
This cannot be delegated to any other individual.

Co-investigators (Co-Is) are also welcomed on proposals. Applicants are also invited to
consider linkages with relevant policymakers and practitioners if appropriate to their
proposed research activity.
How to apply

Applicants must be registered with Je-S to submit a proposal and should refer to the attached detailed guidance for submitting Je-S proposals. In particular, please note the non-standard format and permitted length of the Case for Support document requested, the institutional letter of support and the RO Process Proforma, all of which are mandatory attachments.

Applicants accessing the Je-S system for the first time must check with their central administration on the status of their organisation’s Je-S registration before creating an account through the Je-S system. Please note that it is essential to allow sufficient time for registration, as no extensions to the deadline will be permitted.

It is the applicants’ responsibility to ensure that they are eligible to apply for ESRC funding. A list of independent research organisations (IROs) recognised by the ESRC as being eligible to receive funding can be found at: www.rcuk.ac.uk/funding/eligibilityforrcs/

All applicants must comply with the ESRC Framework for Research Ethics, which can be found using the following link: www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-applicants/research-ethics/

Proposals must be submitted by 16:00 on 31 October 2017 and must be made through the Joint electronic Submission (Je-S) system https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk/. Any proposal received after this deadline will not be considered further. Proposals must be approved by the relevant institutional authority before submission and this should be indicated in the institutional letter of support.

Costing of proposals

Proposals will need to show 100% of full economic cost of the proposed research. The ESRC will meet 80% of the full economic costs on proposals submitted and the host research organisation must cover the remaining 20%.

In addition to the principal investigator and co-investigator’s time, applicants can also request justified costings, where required, for:

- Research assistant support
- Technical and clerical support
- Travel, fieldwork and necessary data collection equipment
- Indirect and estates costs
- Other items normally allowed on ESRC grants.

It is recommended that a minimum of 10% of the overall budget should be dedicated to delivering the activities outlined in the impact summary. The development of a clear impact strategy will be important to ensuring research impact is achieved. When completing the impact summary section of the form, applicants may find it helpful to refer to ESRC guidance on developing an impact strategy (www.esrc.ac.uk/research/evaluation-and-impact/developing-an-impact-strategy/)
Associated studentships are not permitted on proposals submitted under this call.

Assessment of proposals

Assessment process
There are three phases to the assessment process:

1. Shortlisting
For proposals that are deemed eligible, the anonymous two-page Case for Support document submitted as part of the proposal will be assessed by an expert Commissioning Panel against the selection criteria detailed below. The panel will then decide which proposals will be shortlisted and invited to the next phase.

2. ‘Pitch to Peers’ assessment workshop
Shortlisted applicants will be invited to attend a two-day ‘Pitch to Peers’ workshop in mid-April 2018. Principal investigators must attend the whole duration of this workshop. At this event each shortlisted applicant will be asked to present their transformative proposal, which will be assessed by the Commissioning Panel as well as by other shortlisted applicants. The Commissioning Panel will make the final funding recommendations.

Proposals where the PI is unable to attend the ‘Pitch to Peers’ workshop will not be considered and therefore should not be submitted.

What is the ‘Pitch to Peers’ workshop?
Shortlisted applicants will be invited to a two-day ‘Pitch to Peers’ assessment workshop. At the workshop applicants will be divided into two or three groups depending on the number and disciplinary spread of applications. Applicants will present their proposal to their group and the Commissioning Panel, all of whom will assess and grade each proposal. Once all applicants have presented and received a grade for their proposed research, the scores will be analysed by the Commissioning Panel, which will make the final funding recommendations. Funding decisions will be made immediately following the workshop and communicated to applicants shortly after the workshop. All participants will receive constructive feedback on their proposal.

3. Costings and Pathways to Impact
Applicants recommended for funding following the ‘Pitch to Peers’ workshop will then have the ‘Justification of Resources’ and the ‘Pathway to Impact’ documents assessed by the Commissioning Panel prior to the grant being awarded. Successful applicants may be requested to submit additional documents providing further detail on their proposal, for example further costs' break down. If this is required, instructions will follow at the time.
**Assessment criteria**
Eligible proposals will be assessed against the following criteria:

- fit with social science remit
- transformative nature of the research
- creativity and appropriateness of the methodology and feasibility of the transformative research proposal (in terms of the transformative research idea and the associated programme of work)
- ability of the applicant to undertake the transformative research (this criterion will be considered once anonymity of the PI has been lifted at the ‘Pitch to Peers’ workshop)
- creativity and appropriateness of stakeholder engagement, dissemination and communication activities (this criterion will also be assessed through the Pathways to Impact document if the proposal is selected for funding).

**Timetable**

- Call launch: 11 July 2017
- Call close: 31 October 2017
- Sift Panel meeting: w/c 26 February 2018
- Invitation of shortlisted applicants to Pitch to Peers workshop: w/c 5 March 2018
- Pitch to Peers workshop: Mid-April 2018
- Communicate funding decisions: Two days after the ‘Pitch to Peers’ workshop
- Grant begins: July-September 2018

**Further information**
If you have any questions or would like further information about the call, please contact: transformative1@esrc.ac.uk

- Andrea Bond  
  Telephone: 01793 413145
- Lauren Swain  
  Telephone: 01793 413126
Annex 1

ESRC Transformative Research Call 2017-18
RO Internal Selection Process Proforma

Section 1 – Breakdown of applications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of proposals received to internal selection process</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Break down by gender of PIs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of early career PIs (0-5 years’ academic career, post Ph-D completion)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of mid-career PIs (6-15 years’ academic career)</td>
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<td>Number of advanced career PIs (16 and more years’ academic career)</td>
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Section 2 – Process

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<th>Was this a university-wide process or department-led?</th>
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<td>Who could apply?</td>
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<td>Was a particular group of researchers particularly encouraged to apply? If so, who was this and why were they selected?</td>
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<td>Were individuals approached to apply?</td>
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<td>Question</td>
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<tr>
<td>What call criteria were used in assessment?</td>
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<td>Were previous successful applicants involved in the process? If so, please describe how.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Were any ESRC peer review college/GAP/committee members involved in the process? If so, please describe how.</td>
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<td>Was a proposal required?</td>
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<td>Were proposals anonymous?</td>
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<td>How many stages did your process have?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What proposal review method was used at each stage?</td>
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<tr>
<td>If multi-stage, please describe the shortlisting approaches used at each stage.</td>
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