Heritage Science Data Service Small Grants Programme

Funding Stream 2: Work with the Hartree software engineering and technical teams to develop tailored Virtual Research Environment applications and workflows.

Contents

Version control

The latest changes made to this guide will be recorded here. Please ensure you have the latest version of the Guide for Applicants.

Version	Date	Changes
1.0	1.9.25	–

Contact

If you have any questions relating to this guidance or the Heritage Science Data Service Small Grants Programme, please contact the Programme Administrator:

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Alternatively, please see our Frequently Asked Questions available on the call information web-page.

Introduction & objectives of the funding

The [Heritage Science Data Service](#) (HSDS) is funded by the [Arts and Humanities Research Council](#) (AHRC), part of [United Kingdom Research and Innovation](#) (UKRI). Through AHRC's [Research Infrastructure for Conservation and Heritage Science](#) (RICHeS) programme, HSDS provides core digital research services that will transform heritage science and conservation research within the UK.
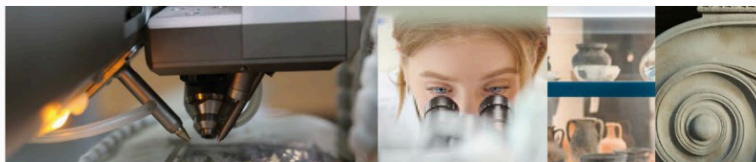
[The AHRC defines heritage science as](#) "the application of scientific techniques and technologies to improve our understanding, conservation, management and engagement with cultural heritage. It ensures that heritage assets remain safe to view, display, handle and study, and is therefore critical to the continued economic viability of the heritage sector. Put more simply, heritage science is the use of scientific techniques to answer questions about our cultural heritage … Heritage science is strongly inter-disciplinary, and covers disciplines including: archaeology, conservation, materials science, art history, physics, robotics and computer science."

The HSDS Small Grants Programme provides funding to unlock potential for innovation in heritage science and conservation research. With funding generously provided from UKRI through AHRC's RICHeS initiative, the programme operates under two streams:

- **Funding Stream 1** focuses on the deposition of new heritage science and conservation research datasets with the HSDS.
- **Funding Stream 2** will enable successful awardees to work with the STFC Hartree Centre's software engineering and technical teams to develop tailored Virtual Research Environment applications and workflows for heritage science and conservation research data.

Important - This Guide for Applicants refers only to applications under Funding Stream 2: Work with the Hartree software engineering team to develop tailored Virtual Research Environment applications. Please see our separate Guide for Applicants to Funding Stream 1 available from the call information web-page.

The HSDS Small Grants Programme for Funding Stream 2 is delivered in collaboration with the STFC Hartree Centre which provides expertise in research software engineering, data engineering, data science, AI and machine learning (AI&ML), and high-performance computing (HPC). Applications under this funding stream are invited to develop ideas for new Virtual Research Environments (VREs) applications and workflows.

Example proposals could include, but are not limited to:
- technical feasibility studies and design thinking workshops
- proof of concept (software) application/tool/service builds
- creation of data processing pipelines and automation workflows to reduce the overhead of tedious or computationally expensive tasks
- customisation and extension of open-source tools to better address your specific use-case
- applied AI/ML to integrate AI into your application workflow.

Over the course of the project you will work closely with our colleagues at the STFC Hartree Centre to build the capability of the Virtual Research Environment.

What types of data can I apply to work with?

Geographic remit

The primary geographical remit of the HSDS is the UK but applicants are welcome to propose Virtual Research Environment applications that work with data from outside the UK where there is a meaningful association to the UK (e.g. from UK-based researchers working outside the UK).

Chronological remit

The HSDS does not define a chronological range and welcomes ideas to work with data from all periods of human history, from earliest hominids to the recent past.

File formats

The HSDS accepts a variety of heritage science and conservation data types in accordance with the [Accepted File Formats](#) published by the Archaeology Data Service. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list and the HSDS is open to discussing applications that use new and innovative techniques and datasets using alternative file types. Applicants proposing alternative formats should contact us before submitting an application to discuss (applications@hsds.ac.uk).

For more information on the types of data we work with, please see our [Collections Policy](#).

Available funding

The full economic cost (FEC) of each project can be up to £15,000. HSDS will fund 100% of the FEC.

Full economic costing (FEC) is a cost which, if recovered across an organisation's full programme, would recover the total cost (direct, indirect and total overhead) including an adequate recurring investment in the organisation's infrastructure. Applicants based at UK Higher Education

Institutions should use the Transparent Approach to Costing (TRAC) to calculate full economic costs.

Duration of funding

Funding is available for projects of up to a duration of 12 months.

Eligibility criteria

Eligible organisations

- To be considered for funding, organisations must be based in the UK and must meet the eligibility criteria set out in Appendix A. Due diligence checks will be undertaken on all organisations prior to the release of funds.

Eligible individuals

- Project Leads and Project Co-Leads (where applicable) must have a contract of employment with the submitting organisation that will continue for the full duration of the grant.
- Project Leads may act as Lead on one application to this scheme but may be included as Co-Leads on others without restriction.
- Individuals currently named on the HSDS application **cannot apply** for grants under this programme. This restriction also applies to individuals who are due to be named on the HSDS grant, for example, as new members of staff to be appointed to the team.

Timeline / Key Dates of Call 1 and communication of application outcomes

Call opens: **1 October 2025**

Deadline for applications: **5pm GMT, 28 November 2025**

Communication of results to applicants: we aim to notify successful applicants by **23 February 2026**

Earliest indicative project start date: **1 May 2026** (projects must commence no later than 1 September 2026).

It is anticipated that a second call for HSDS Small Grants will be opened in 2026-27.

Eligible costs

Small grants will be awarded at 100% full economic costs. As such, the following costs are eligible:

- Project Lead / Project Co-Lead staff costs.
- Other necessary staff costs such as the costs for archival, technical or other specialist staff who will contribute to the project.
- Reasonable essential and sustainable travel and subsistence costs. (Travel and subsistence should be in line with the submitting organisation's usual policy. Where no such policy exists, HSDS will collaborate with award holders to agree on a suitable framework.)
- Costs for necessary consumables.
- Essential estates and indirects in line with UKRI's full economic costing model.

Budgets **do not** need to include costs for STFC staff time as this will be paid by the HSDS.

Ineligible costs

- Funding for project studentships (funding Doctoral study, noting that such qualifications can include PhD, DBA, EdD, LLD, etc.) are not eligible.

How applications will be assessed

Applications received by the published deadline will be checked for eligibility by the HSDS team. Applicants whose submissions are rejected at this stage will be notified by email.

Applications meeting the eligibility criteria set out in this guidance will be assessed by an expert panel against the evaluation criteria, and each will be graded and ranked alongside other applications after which the panel will make a funding recommendation.

HSDS's panel of experts has been carefully chosen to ensure diverse representation, including non-academic reviewers and AHRC representation. HSDS provides clear guidance to members of the panel in advance of assessment being carried out. As part of this, we take steps to manage conflicts of interest. Members of the panel with an actual or perceived conflict of interest are instructed to declare the potential conflict of interest. In considering whether a conflict of interest exists, we ask panellists to adhere to the [UKRI Declaration of Interest Policy](#).

Panellists are not permitted to use generative AI tools in their assessment as using these tools can potentially compromise the confidentiality of the ideas that applicants have entrusted to HSDS to safeguard.

We reserve the right to modify the assessment process as needed.

Evaluation criteria

Excellence Weighting: 40%	The project's expected contribution to the advancement, understanding, preservation, and management of tangible heritage. In particular, reviewers will be looking for evidence that the proposed project: - is timely, given current trends and context; - meets the evidenced needs of clearly identified user groups;

	● will have a measurable impact beyond the immediate team; ● will enhance and complement the existing landscape; ● will enable high quality and important research; ● will meet the strategic aims of the RICHeS programme.
Feasibility Weighting: 40%	Reviewers will be looking for evidence that the proposed project is feasible within the proposed duration of the grant.
Value for money Weighting: 20%	Reviewers will be looking for evidence that the project represents good value for money.

How to apply

Applications must be submitted via HSDS's submission system. This uses a Google form to capture equality, diversity and inclusion monitoring information and requires applicants to upload a PDF of the application form.

The Google form cannot be saved for later so applicants should ensure that they have their application form ready to upload before starting the submission.

The proposal must be submitted in English and the application form must be completed in full with all required information provided in the relevant sections. The proposal must be submitted before the specified call deadline. Late applications will not be considered.

To begin your application, please visit the HSDS Small Grants Call Information web-page to download the application form and access the submission system.

Notification of outcomes and arrangements for successful awards

Project Leads will be notified of the outcome of their application by email. Successful awardees will receive a grant agreement which will set out the terms and conditions of the funding. Grant agreements must be fully signed before the grant can commence.

Reporting

A short monitoring report will be required within 30 days of the grant end date.

Privacy notice

Please see HSDS's Privacy Policy for how we collect, manage and safeguard personal information.

Appendix A: Eligibility criteria for submitting organisations

All organisations in receipt of HSDS Small Grants must:
- Demonstrate sufficient internal capacity, including qualified personnel and appropriate infrastructure, to deliver high-quality research aligned with the HSDS Small Grants funding model.
- Evidence of a commitment to maximising the economic, cultural, and social impact of its research.
- Uphold open access principles (where appropriate).
- Have systems in place to track and report outputs in a manner consistent with HSDS's monitoring and evaluation framework.
- Demonstrate strong leadership and institutional support for staff engaged in the funded project.

Governance, Risk Management, and Controls
All organisations in receipt of HSDS Small Grants must:
- Maintain effective governance structures and internal controls for identifying and mitigating financial, operational, and compliance risks.
- Operate clear procedures for preventing, detecting, and responding to instances of fraud, bribery, slavery, or corruption.
- Meet all applicable research integrity and ethics standards, including managing allegations of misconduct.
- Be subject to regular and independent external audit.
- Demonstrate robust data management policies for secure and ethical collection, analysis, and dissemination of project data.

Financial Management and Assurance
All organisations in receipt of HSDS Small Grants must:
- Demonstrate financial stability and appropriate stewardship of public funds.

- Hold a UK bank account in its legal name, reconcilable with its financial systems.
- Operate reliable financial systems capable of tracking transactions, recording income and expenditure, and storing supporting evidence.
- Implement proper reimbursement processes for travel and subsistence claims, including advance payments and verification of receipts.