



Arts and  
Humanities  
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RICHeS

RESEARCH  
INFRASTRUCTURE FOR  
CONSERVATION AND  
HERITAGE SCIENCE



Heritage Science  
Data Service

## Heritage Science Data Service Cascading Grants

Develop Virtual Research Environments

### Contents

Contact details	2
<b>Section 1: About the Funding</b>	<b>3</b>
What is Heritage Science?	3
What is the Heritage Science Data Service?	3
What can I apply for funding to do?	3
Can I use this funding to digitise data currently in paper format?	5
What types of datasets are eligible for funding?	5
Where can I find out about past projects that have been funded?	5
Information for existing RICHeS Facility and Collection grant holders	5
Licensing requirements	6
Available funding	6
Duration of funding	7
Who can apply?	7
Key dates for this call	7
Eligible costs	8
Ineligible costs	8

How applications will be assessed	8
Notification of outcomes and arrangements for successful awards	11
Reporting requirements	11
Privacy notice	11
<b>Section 2: How to apply</b>	<b>12</b>
Use of generative AI	12
How to complete the online application	12
Submitting your application	19
Help applying	19

### 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	21.5.26	-

### Contact details

If you have any questions relating to this guidance or the Heritage Science Data Service Cascading Grants Programme, please contact the Programme Administrator, Lydia Mayfield.

Heritage Science Data Service, The Guildhall, York, YO1 6GA

Email: [applications@hsds.ac.uk](mailto:applications@hsds.ac.uk)

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

## **Section 1: About the Funding**

### **What is Heritage Science?**

Heritage Science provides a bridge between science and technology and the wider cultural heritage sector. It's the practice of using scientific tools and techniques to learn more about our heritage, protect it for future generations, and share more informative and engaging stories with our audiences.

Examples of heritage science and conservation datasets might include radiocarbon dates, human osteological or archaeobotanical databases, thin sections, paint samples, X-ray scans, geophysical surveys, marine surveys, drone footage, 3D models and many more.

### **What is the Heritage Science Data Service?**

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 has been entrusted to provide a secure archive to preserve and share heritage science and conservation data.

The HSDS is managed by the Archaeology Data Service (ADS), based at the University of York, where we have 30 years' experience managing and preserving data and making it freely available for re-use.

### **What is a Virtual Research Environment?**

A Virtual Research Environment (VRE) is a secure, custom-built online platform that acts as a central digital workbench for researchers and teams. It provides high power computing accessed through your browser, and combines highly capable processing power, accelerated desktop graphics for an interactive user experience, and massive data storage; you can do

work on the VRE that you typically can't do on your local laptop or workstation. A VRE can be single use and/or collaborative, and can therefore allow specialists or teams from single or multiple institutions to seamlessly analyse, share, and visualise their work making complex, collaborative research more efficient.

### **Example: How Virtual Research Environments can solve problems faced by heritage professionals**

A VRE might be built to help a team of structural engineers, conservation scientists, and art historians to study the degradation of a historic building. The VRE hosts the high-resolution 3D models (created via laser scanning or photogrammetry) along with all the analytical data (e.g. environmental monitoring, materials analysis reports, stress simulations). These data might be drawn from different sources, or include data that are just too large to manipulate efficiently using standard desktop or laptop computers. Using the VRE, researchers can enter a virtual space to examine the object or site together in real-time. They can overlay different data layers (like temperature maps, decay rates, or structural diagrams) onto the 3D model, allowing them to pinpoint problem areas and plan an intervention. End-users will be able to customize their own research environment with their own end-user applications and configurations.

You can see further examples of VREs we've funded through [previous grants awarded under this scheme](#).

### **What can I apply for funding to do?**

Do you have an idea for a software application that would be useful for lots of users, but lack the programming skills to write the code? Do you have manual workflows that are time-consuming, or need access to software that will only run on high-end computers? A Virtual Research Environment could be the answer!

Tell us about the challenge you face and your ideas for how a Virtual Research Environment could help to solve them. Successful applicants will then work with the software engineering team at the Science and Technology Facility Council's Hartree Centre to develop a bespoke VRE. No technical knowledge is required - the Hartree team will provide all the expertise needed whether that's research software engineering, data engineering, data science, AI and machine learning or high-performance computing.

**Important** - HSDS is also offering funding to generate datasets. If you are applying to generate a dataset, please see our separate Guide for Applicants available from the call information web-page.

### **Available funding**

Grants are available for up to **£15,000** and we welcome projects both small and large. These funds only need to pay for your time to contribute to the project. All the staff time and resources for the Hartree team will be met separately by HSDS.

For organisations operating under the Full Economic Cost model (usually Higher Education Institutions), please use FEC to submit your budget. HSDS will fund 100% of the FEC.

For other organisations, essential overheads such as estate and indirect costs are eligible. Please see further details below.

### **Duration of funding**

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

### **Who can apply?**

We welcome applications from a broad range of organisations. Eligible organisation include, but are not limited to:

- Galleries, libraries, museums and archives
- Academic organisations and educational establishments (such as schools, colleges, and universities)
- Registered charitable bodies and social enterprises
- Commercial companies or freelance specialists working in collaboration with eligible partner organisations

All applicants must be based in the UK, and all funded work must be undertaken in the UK. Please note: Individuals who are involved in delivering the Heritage Science Data Service **cannot apply** for grants under this programme. This includes Co-Investigators at partner organisations and any staff whose salary is paid by the HSDS grant.

There are no other restrictions on who may act as Main or Co-Applicant provided they have the support of the submitting organisation.

If you have any questions about your eligibility, please contact us at [applications@hsds.ac.uk](mailto:applications@hsds.ac.uk).

### **Key dates for this call**

Call opens: **8 June 2026**

Deadline for applications: **5pm GMT, 30 September 2026**

Notification of shortlisting: We aim to notify shortlisted applicants by **30 November 2026**

Feasibility review with STFC: **1 December 2026 – 8 January 2027**

Communication of final results to Main Applicants: We aim to notify successful applicants by **31 January 2027**

Earliest indicative project start date: **1 April 2027** (projects must commence no later than 1 August 2027)

## **Eligible costs**

The following costs are eligible:

- Staff salary costs for all staff involved in delivering the project (e.g. Project Main Applicant, Project Co-Applicant(s), archival, technical or other specialist staff necessary to complete the work). It is anticipated that this cost category will comprise the majority of the requested budget. These may be costs to buy-out the time of existing staff or to recruit and appoint new staff for the duration of the project.
- Reasonable essential and sustainable travel and subsistence costs necessary to deliver the project.
- Costs for necessary consumables or equipment.
- Essential estates and indirects.

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

## **Ineligible costs**

- Student fees are not eligible (e.g. PhD, DBA, EdD, LLD, etc)

## **How applications will be assessed**

This is a two-stage application process.

### **Stage 1**

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 shortlisting recommendation.

Our panel of experts has been carefully chosen to ensure diverse representation, including non-academic reviewers and we provide 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.

## **Stage 2**

Shortlisted applicants will be notified by email. All shortlisted applicants will be contacted by the Hartree team to undertake a feasibility assessment. This will enable the Hartree team to delve deeper into the proposed project and apply their expert knowledge to determine its suitability for funding.

On completion of the feasibility assessment, the Hartree team will recommend which shortlisted proposals should be considered for funding. The expert review panel will make the final funding decision.

## **Evaluation criteria**

The following are the criteria our panel of reviewers will use to evaluate proposals.

<b>Excellence &amp; Impact</b> Weighting:	The project's expected contribution to the advancement, understanding, preservation, and management of tangible
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<p>40%</p>	<p>heritage. In particular, reviewers will be looking for evidence that the proposed project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Is timely, given current trends and context.</li> <li>● Meets the evidenced needs of clearly identified user groups.</li> <li>● Will have a measurable impact beyond the immediate team.</li> <li>● Will enhance and complement the existing landscape and does not duplicate existing services.</li> <li>● Will enable high quality and important research.</li> <li>● Will meet the strategic aims of the RICHeS programme.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Feasibility</b> Weighting: 40%</p>	<p>Reviewers will be looking for evidence that the proposed project is feasible within the proposed duration of the grant. In particular, reviewers will be looking for evidence that the proposed project:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Can be hosted on the VRE platform for re-use and wider adoption by Heritage Science communities.</li> <li>● May include workloads/workflows including but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Development of end-user tools installed on Windows or Linux desktops, or tools hosted as dedicated online services.</li> <li>○ Tedious workflows that could be automated.</li> <li>○ New graphical user interfaces to improve user experience and adoption (UX).</li> <li>○ Highly graphical and interactive desktop workloads that would benefit from GPU acceleration.</li> <li>○ Workloads that require parallelisation or optimisation (e.g. High Performance Computing AI/ML model training workloads).</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Is technically feasible.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Value for money</b> Weighting: 20%</p>	<p>Reviewers will be looking for evidence that the project represents good value for money. In particular, reviewers will be looking for evidence that the proposed budget and justification:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provides a breakdown of staff time, explaining how much time will be dedicated by each member of staff involved in the project.</li> <li>● Explains what each member of staff contributes to the project (e.g. project oversight, technical input etc).</li> <li>● Where travel and subsistence costs are requested, explains clearly who will travel, where they will go, how they will travel, how long for and why the trip is essential to the project.</li> <li>● Explains clearly what equipment is necessary, why this cannot be provided from other sources and what will happen to the equipment after the grant end date.</li> </ul>
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### **Notification of outcomes and arrangements for successful awards**

We will notify the Main Applicant with the final 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 requirements**

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

We'll also ask you to deposit any dataset arising from the VRE with HSDS or one of its [approved alternative repositories](#) before the project end date. Any dataset deposited with HSDS will be shared under an agreed open licence (see below).

## **Licensing requirements**

The HSDS is an open access archive and our intention is to share data openly wherever possible, but access can be restricted where necessary. Creative Commons [CC-BY](#) is our preferred licence option which enables your data to be re-used in most circumstances, provided attribution is given to the original data creator. If this doesn't work for you, we can offer alternative licences, such as [CC-BY-NC](#), which restricts data usage to only non-commercial ventures.

We'll discuss all of this with you before your data is released and we'll ask you to confirm your choice by signing an agreement confirming that you either own the copyright to the data or have the copyright holder's permission to make them available with us. You can find out more about our [Deposit Agreement](#) on our website but please get in touch if you have any questions ([applications@hsds.ac.uk](mailto:applications@hsds.ac.uk)).

## **Privacy notice**

For further information on how we collect, manage and safeguard personal information as part of this grant scheme, please see our [Privacy Policy](#).

## Section 2: How to apply

Applications must be submitted via our submission system. 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 cannot be considered.

To begin your application, please visit our [HSDS Cascading Grants Call Information web-page](#) to access the submission system.

You can navigate away from your application at any point and return to it later. We have also provided a Word version of the application form should you wish to prepare your application offline but please note that **only applications submitted via our online submission system will be accepted**. If you submit broadly the same application multiple times, we will consider only the latest version submitted.

### Use of generative AI

In line with current sector good practice, applicants and applications are expected to be transparent where they have used generative AI tools in the development of an application. You will be asked to declare this in your application form but please note that this information will not affect the assessment process.

### How to complete the online application

This section provides a step-by-step guide to the application form, telling you what reviewers will be looking for from each section.

## Equality, diversity and inclusion monitoring

As part of your application you will be asked to provide answers to a number of equality, diversity and monitoring questions. We are asking for this information because to do so is a condition of our funding. In every instance there is an opportunity to select 'prefer not to say'. Please be assured that these data are for monitoring purposes only and will be treated as strictly confidential. They will not be used in any way that allows individuals to be identified and will not be linked to funding applications nor will they be seen by anyone involved in the review processes, funding decision-making, or by any other third parties. All personal information will be stored in a Google Drive that is accessible only to core members of the HSDS and saved in one of Google's globally spread data centres as agreed with the University of York contract undertaken with Google. You can request that your information be removed from our database at any time. If you have any questions please contact us by emailing the team at [help@hsds.ac.uk](mailto:help@hsds.ac.uk).

## Applicant details

Here we ask you to tell us the name of the Main and up to two Co-Applicants. The Main Applicant and Co-Applicant(s) may be from the same organisation or from different organisations. See above for "Who can apply?"

**Main Applicant:** Please complete the application form with the requested information (title, first name, surname, organisation name and department, where relevant, job title and email address). The Main Applicant takes overall responsibility for the project and will be the person with whom HSDS will communicate.

**Co-Applicant(s):** You may add up to two Co-Applicants. Co-Applicants share the responsibility to deliver the project.

## Basic project details

**Project title:** Please provide a short project title. The title does not need to be snappy and does not require an acronym. It should just reflect the project's purpose.

**Project start date:** Please tell us the proposed start date for your project. This must be no earlier than 1 April 2027 and no later than 1 August 2027. Please bear in mind any time you might need between receiving notification of your award and starting the project to complete any additional tasks, such as signing the grant agreement or recruiting temporary staff.

**Project end date:** Please tell us the proposed end date for your project. This must be no later than 12 months after the proposed start date and cannot be later than 31 July 2028.

**Project summary:** Please provide a brief summary of the proposed project, suitable for a lay audience. Project summaries are most helpful when they describe the challenge the project addresses, the aims and objectives and the potential applications and benefits.

Please note that if your application is successful, the project summary, or an edited version thereof, will be published on the HSDS website and may be used by HSDS in other promotional contexts.

Max 1,650 characters.

## Full project description

**What would you like funding to do?** Please use this section to tell us what you plan to do if the funding is awarded. What is the problem the VRE seeks to address? How might the problem be tackled? Will this be a completely new

tool, or will it re-use or build on existing tools and workflows? What data types will your VRE be for, and what scale/size of data will it need to work with ? All datasets deposited with the HSDS will need to be made available under an open licence so it's important that you tell us if there are any restrictions on sharing the resulting dataset.

If you will involve any other team members apart from the Main Applicant and any Co-Applicant(s) identified above, please tell us who they are and what they will do.

Max 6,500 characters including any necessary references but please note that references are not essential or expected.

**Excellence and impact:** Please tell us *why* this project is important. Why should it be funded? Why is now the right time for this project? The reviewers will look for evidence of the following so feel free to use these as sub-headings:

- **Timeliness:** How is the project timely, given current trends and context?
- **Meeting the needs of users:** Who will want to use the VRE? How will it help users and what evidence is there to demonstrate the need?
- **Impact:** How will this work have a measurable impact beyond the immediate team?
- **Enhancing and complementing the existing landscape:** How does the proposed VRE fit in the wider landscape? Reviewers will look for evidence that the proposed VRE doesn't duplicate existing services so tell us if there is already something similar and explain how the VRE differs or complements existing services.
- **Re-use:** How might this VRE support future high quality work/research or inform future heritage management or curatorial strategies?
- **Supporting the aims of the RICHeS programme:** Our funding is provided by the [RICHeS programme](#) so it's important that you tell us

how your proposed project fits into the aims and objectives of this investment.

Max. 4,500 characters.

**Visual supplementary material:** If you wish, you may upload up to three images to help the review panel to visualise your application, for example, screenshots of desktop software tools in action or diagrams of current workflows.

Wherever possible we ask that you grant HSDS permission to use the images provided, with appropriate credit, in any publicity material if your application is awarded. Space is provided in the application form for you to confirm whether or not permission is granted and to provide relevant credit information.

Providing images is not mandatory and your application will not be penalised if you do not provide any.

## Ethics

This section should explain any ethical or responsible research implications or issues relating to the proposed work. If you're unsure of any potential implications, please just tell us and if your project is successful we'll work with you to ensure anything relevant is considered.

Max. 2,500 characters.

## The budget

**Funding requested:** Please tell us what you will need to deliver your proposed work and how much it will cost.

If you are requesting **costs for staff time**, you should say whose time this covers, how much of their time you are asking to pay for and what they will do as part of the project (e.g. project management, technical input etc).

*E.g. £X,XXX is requested to pay for 2 hours per week of project Main Applicant to undertake overall project management, supervise all team members and liaise with the team at STFC's Hartree Centre.*

If you are requesting **travel costs**, please tell us who is travelling, where they are going and how they will travel (e.g. train, bus), for how long and why the travel is essential for the project.

*E.g. £XXX is requested to pay for 2 day-return rail tickets from York to Daresbury for the project Main Applicant and Co-Applicant to meet with STFC Hartree colleagues in person.*

If you are requesting **other costs**, please tell us what these are for and why they are essential for the project.

You do not need to justify the inclusion of estates or indirect costs provided these are calculated in accordance with your normal organisational policy.

Max. 2,500 characters.

**Will any organisation provide additional in-kind or cash contributions?**

Please tell us if any other organisation will provide any in-kind or cash contributions to help you to deliver your project. This might include, for example, help you might receive from volunteers, or any cost-sharing to be provided by your own organisation.

**Please explain the in-kind or cash contributions from other sources:** If any other organisation will provide any in-kind or cash contributions to help to deliver your project, please tell us how much will be provided, whether this is

in-kind or cash, or a combination, and which organisations will provide these additional contributions.

### **Funding table**

Please provide the totals you are requesting from HSDS for each of the budget lines provided. Please ensure that these match the costs you have included above. Please do not include any in kind contributions or funding you will receive from other sources, **only include the budget you are requesting from HSDS**. The budget lines we ask you to use are:

**Project Applicant/Co-Applicant costs:** all costs for the salaries of the Main Applicant and any Co-Applicant(s). These should reflect the real cost to the organisation of paying those salaries, including any organisational on-costs, such as employer's pension and National Insurance contributions.

**Other staff costs:** all costs for the salaries of any other team members who will work on the project, excluding the Main Applicant and any Co-Applicant(s). These should reflect the real cost to the organisation of paying those salaries, including any organisational on-costs, such as employer's pension and National Insurance contributions.

**Travel costs:** all costs associated with travel and subsistence, e.g. rail fares and costs of lunches/drinks necessary to be purchased if the member of staff is away from the office for an extended period.

**Other costs:** all other costs necessary to the successful completion of the project, e.g. necessary subcontracting.

**Estates costs:** may include building and premises costs, basic services and utilities and equipment maintenance not already included under other cost headings.

**Indirect costs:** include non-specific costs charged across all projects based on estimates that are not otherwise included under other cost headings. They may include the costs of the organisation's administration such as personnel, finance, or IT services.

### **Generative AI**

In line with current sector good practice, applicants and applications are expected to be transparent where they have used generative AI tools in the development of an application. Answers to this question will not affect the assessment process.

### **Submitting your application**

Once you have completed your form in our online submission system you will be able to submit your application. Once submitted, you will have an opportunity to download a copy of your completed application for your records.

You will receive an email acknowledgement of your submission. If you do not receive an email acknowledgement, your application may not have been received so please contact us at [applications@hsds.ac.uk](mailto:applications@hsds.ac.uk) to check.

### **Help applying**

If you have any questions about your application or require any further assistance, please don't hesitate to contact us at [applications@hsds.ac.uk](mailto:applications@hsds.ac.uk).