

National Research Centre on Privacy, Harm Reduction and Adversarial Influence Online (REPHRAIN)

Strategic Funding Call 2 – 06 December 2021

Closing date: 28 January 2022

REPHRAIN is an EPSRC funded research centre that forms part of the wider UKRI investment focusing on protecting citizens online. REPHRAIN explores how to keep people safe online while allowing them to fully participate in digital technologies and the contributions they make to innovative, inclusive and healthy economy and society.

REPHRAIN involves researchers in Computer Science, International Relations, Law, Psychology, Management, Design, Digital Humanities, Public Policy, Political Science, Criminology and Sociology. It will build and lead the UK's world-leading interdisciplinary community on protecting citizens online and provide a clear single front door to engage and build capacity with government, industry and citizens.

REPHRAIN was launched in October 2020 with funding from the EPSRC and is a consortium of five academic institutions: the University of Bristol, University of Bath, University of Edinburgh, University College London and King's College London. Further details can be found here <https://www.rephrain.ac.uk/>.

Call details

This is the second REPHRAIN funding call and aims to highlight research questions and challenges that are not currently being addressed by active REPHRAIN projects. A scoping workshop involving REPHRAIN members was undertaken to help identify and formalise the call topics listed below.

The total funding for this call is £500,000 (at 100% FEC), of which 80% will be funded by REPHRAIN. We expect to fund multiple proposals from this fund and will consider larger proposals that address more than one topic area. All funded projects must be completed, with all deliverables, by **30 April 2023**. Proposals should be submitted by **4pm on 28 January 2022** at <https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=rephrainafc2>. The Strategic Funding decision panel will meet **w/c 14 March 2022** and decisions will be communicated **w/c 21 March 2022**.

Call topics

This strategic funding call is for projects that relate to [REPHRAIN's missions and research challenges](#). In addition, we particularly encourage proposals that focus on the following topics (which draw upon the [Royal Society report on PETs](#)):

Giving public sector organisations expertise and assurance

- Approaches to systematise engagement between the research community and the public sector with regards to privacy, online harms and adversarial influence – in order to move away from the current piecemeal and transient way which can significantly limit the benefits of research.
- Research to identify appropriate intermediaries between the academic community and the public sector in terms of knowledge exchange and knowledge management. This can include studies of current stakeholders with responsibility as well as identification of additional or new stakeholders.

Promoting innovative data governance through use of Privacy Enhancing Technologies (PETs)

- Developing alternative mechanisms to confirm user consent on how their data is stored and used – going beyond the standard T&Cs of the app/platform/tool. This must include critical engagement and discourse with users to determine and understand what is needed.
- New forms of data governance that are human/behaviour driven and not solely driven by legal requirements.
- New mechanisms to easily and simply show users how their data is going to be used, including novel approaches for explainability and data governance labelling that is easy to comprehend by users.
- Case studies on the use of PETs in data governance that highlight the benefits of using PETs to promote and incentivise organisations.

Supporting organisations to become intelligent users of PETs

- Development of privacy starter packs (or other novel mechanisms) for organisations in order to enumerate the threats specific to them rather than a broad taxonomy of threats. This can be specific to particular sectors and may feed into identification of suitable privacy metrics.
- Studies contrasting small and large organisations and the challenges of utilising PETs, including but not limited to concerns about cost of technology and resources.
- Investigation of PETs as-a-service as a means to support organisations in becoming intelligent users of PETs.

Building privacy into infrastructures

- Mapping of current mechanisms that may support building privacy into infrastructures, including their strengths and limitations as well as their potential for integration to deliver infrastructures that address a range of privacy considerations such as confidentiality, control, transparency and explainability.
- Developing research platforms to engage a large number of citizens in pro-actively engaging in testing the privacy properties of components to build privacy into infrastructures from – thus engaging diverse perspectives in the design and evolution of such systems. Such research platforms may themselves form interesting basis to evaluate the potential of large-scale citizen engagement activities in a privacy-preserving manner.
- Approaches to build privacy into the very core of new large-scale initiatives such as the concept of the meta-verse.

The above are indicative topics and we welcome proposals on additional related topics.

Funding

The total amount available for this Call will be up to £500,000 at 100% full Economic Cost (fEC), of which 80% fEC (i.e., up to £400,000) will be made available to successful applicants. In practical terms this means that UK HEI researchers should cost their projects using the same process as they would cost a UKRI grant. All costs should be inclusive of VAT and/or any other applicable tax. The duration of work proposed under this Call should not last more than 12 months and should run between **01 May 2022** and **30 April 2023**. REPHRAIN will not reimburse costs associated with the development or submission of a proposal.

Proposals should be costed and approved by the applicant's organisation before submission.

Submission

Please submit the proposal as a single PDF by **4pm on the 28 January 2022** using the form and upload system at: <https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=rephrainsfc2>. If you do not already have an EasyChair account you will need to set one up [here](#). If you already have an account, you should be able to access the REPHRAIN SFC 2 submission page using your current credentials. Please ensure you select the role of author before submitting your proposal.

Submissions should not exceed five pages plus short CVs, comprising:

- 1) The research challenge to be addressed and its alignment with REPHRAIN's missions and RIEI (Responsible Inclusive Ethical Innovation) approach (1 page max)
- 2) Interdisciplinarity objectives (1/2 page max)
- 3) Proposed methodology including clearly defined milestones (1 ½ page max)
- 4) Proposed outcomes and potential for integration with the REPHRAIN toolbox (1 page max)
- 5) Financial summary (divided into directly incurred and allocated staff costs, travel, subsistence and other costs, estates and indirect costs. (1 page max). The costs should be in sufficient detail to allow for value for money judgements to be made.

Please attach short (2 page) CVs for all applicants and named researchers at the end of the proposal. Please ensure the proposal and CVs are merged as one single PDF. A [submission template](#) can be found on the REPHRAIN website.

All documents must be completed in single-spaced typescript in Arial pt 11 or other sans serif typeface of equivalent size, with margins of at least 2cm. Arial narrow and Calibri are not allowable font types and page limits must not be exceeded. Each section listed above (1-5) should be clearly labelled.

Eligibility

The Call is open to Higher Education Institutions who can demonstrate a capability to deliver a high-quality programme of research. We strongly encourage applications from researchers in all disciplines and encourage proposals that are interdisciplinary and involve strong engagement and partnerships with non-academic stakeholders. This call will follow the [standard EPSRC eligibility criteria](#).

Assessment

All proposals will be reviewed by at least two expert peer reviewers, and then evaluated by a Strategic Fund decision panel. Applications that are not submitted in the format requested in above, or that are outside of the scope of this call, may be rejected without recourse to peer review.

Criteria

Submissions will be scored by peer reviews across the following domains:

- 1) Understanding of the challenge and its national importance
- 2) Quality and rigour of methodology
- 3) Responsible innovation
- 4) Potential impact and integration with the REPHRAIN toolbox
- 5) Value for money and deliverability
- 6) Team track record, particularly interdisciplinarity of team

Grant conditions

Successful applicants will receive an offer letter that will outline the terms of the sub-contract with REPHRAIN. These are standard UKRI terms and conditions, but with some minor amendments related to the source of funding and relationship with the REPHRAIN research centre.

Applicants should share these terms with their organisation research contracts team to ensure these terms are acceptable before applying for funding. The terms are non-negotiable and no amendments will be accepted. Copies of the terms and conditions are available [here](#).

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The long-term strength of the UK research base depends on harnessing all the available talent and the Research Councils together developed the ambitious UKRI Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan. In line with the [UKRI's policies on equality, diversity and inclusion](#), we expect that equality, diversity, and inclusion are embedded at all levels and in all aspects of applicants' research proposals.

We are committed to supporting the research community in the diverse ways a research career can be built. Therefore, we welcome applications from researchers who job share, have a part-time contract, need flexible working arrangements or those currently committed to other longer, large existing grants.