

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

Strategic Funding Call (Safer Streets Rapid Pilots) – 15 September 2025

Closing date: 10 October 2025

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 an innovative, inclusive and healthy economy and society.

Since its start in October 2020, the REPHRAIN centre now has a critical mass of over 150 internationally leading experts at 25 UK institutions who have worked across 50 different and diverse research projects. The centre also collaborates with the UKRI/EPSRC Protecting Citizens Online complementary projects based at the University of Surrey, Sheffield Hallam University, Heriot-Watt University and Newcastle University. Further details can be found here <https://www.rephrain.ac.uk/>.

Call details

This Strategic Funding Call is focused specifically on research funded as part of the [UKRI's Safer Streets R&D mission](#); *REPHRAIN Safer Streets: A Blueprint for Integrated Data Systems Linking Online Harms and Street Crime*. Research will be undertaken into the intersection between online and offline behaviours and harms to develop and pilot new capabilities for detection, tracking and prediction of the locations where crime concentrates, specifically addressing violence against women and girls (VAWG), anti-social behaviour (ASB) and knife crime. REPHRAIN will develop and pilot new capabilities for predicting where online harm manifests as offline crime.

The research will focus on REPHRAIN's mission on privacy and online harms and addressing the tensions that arise. It builds on work that has explored that, in many contexts, the attacker is not always remote. As with previous REPHRAIN activity this will be an interdisciplinary endeavour and will involve working in partnership and co-creation with at-risk populations. This may include collaboration with local communities where street crime is a major challenge; with third sector organisations who aim to support victims/survivors; and local law enforcement.

The total funding for this call is £100,000 (at 100% FEC), of which 80% will be funded by REPHRAIN. We expect to fund between 3-6 proposals from this fund each with an individual budget of £15k-£30k. All funded projects must start before or by **01 December 2025** and be completed, with all deliverables accepted, by **28 February 2026**. Proposals should be submitted by **4pm on 10 October 2025** to rephrain-centre@bristol.ac.uk. The Strategic Funding decision panel will meet **w/c 27 October 2025** and decisions expected to be communicated **w/c 03 November 2025**.

Call topics

This strategic funding call is for pilot studies that relate to the REPHRAIN Safer Streets research programme primarily focusing on the following interlinking core research strands:

1. Understanding crime-related issues locally and potential for targeted prevention led by [REPHRAIN](#) (University of Bristol)
2. Using online data to support local policing efforts led by [CENTRIC](#) (Sheffield Hallam University)
3. Linking digital data to individual and group characteristics for prediction led by [The Institute for Digital Security and Behaviour](#) (University of Bath)

Pilot studies should evaluate what approaches can be deployed and scaled up in other locations, providing evidence on: what scales, how and why; place-based factors that act as drivers and barriers; and pathways to address the scalability issues in order to deliver an over-arching national Safer Streets capability by 2030. The studies should be linked to one strand only and not try to cover cross-strand research.

Pilots will receive support from the core research team at Bristol, Bath and Sheffield depending on which strand the study relates to. The strategic funding will support pilots in other parts of the UK. **Pilot studies are required to submit a short report at the end of the funded period providing actionable insights**, for which a template will be provided.

Strand 1 – Understanding crime-related issues locally and potential for targeted prevention

The research work will be an adaptation of REPHRAINs existing model of Privacy Clinics to collect data to understand how online and offline interactions interplay and lead to VAWG, ASB and knife crime and to co-design materials to raise awareness of how victims/survivors could report issues and seek help. Support will be provided for up to two pilot studies with each study delivering three clinics in their own locality. The clinics must have a community focus and work in partnership with at-risk populations.

Pilot studies aligned with this strand must have collaboration/buy in from relevant community organisations to ensure that the clinic pilots can be conducted.

The expected deliverables, supplementing the aforementioned report, include provision of the raw data collected as part of the pilot, as well as the subsequent analysed data and code book. One of the core researchers at Bristol will provide training, clinic materials and also attend clinics to provide on-the-day support. The pilot team can be added to the existing University of Bristol and REPHRAIN ethics application if this is acceptable by their home institution.

Strand 2 – Using online data to support local policing efforts

The focus of this strand is to map current knowledge, as well as knowledge and data gaps within local policing organisations on the use of online data towards the three Safer Streets priorities (knife crime, VAWG, ASB). The pilot studies can focus on one or more of the three priority areas and are invited to use specific, current or past, cases to guide their investigation. Of special interest are pilot studies about under-researched communities or specific platforms (e.g., gaming).

Pilot studies aligned with this strand must have collaboration/buy in from a local law enforcement organisation to ensure the planned activities can be conducted in the timeframe of the funding.

The expected deliverable is a report detailing (1) current usage of online data supporting local policing efforts towards (one or more) Safer Streets priorities, including type of data and any best practices that may be found locally; (2) a list of factors identified that support or hinder the effective use of online data for the chosen Safer Street priorit(y)ies (e.g., policies/regulations, lack of resources, knowledge, data access, technologies, ...); (3) a list of recommendations for new capabilities (technical and non-technical such as knowledge) and policies that may help identification/usage of online data in local policing efforts; (4) detailed description of the methodology (including data collection instruments).

Support will be provided by the core team at CENTRIC by sharing insights from ongoing work and retrospective use case analyses. It is expected that the pilot team will have access to their own data as well as being able to access data from CENTRIC. Sensible restrictions for data sharing may be applied for policing data and operational details.

Strand 3 – Linking digital data to individual and group characteristics for prediction

This strand will explore how digital and socio-demographic data can be integrated to support area-level crime prediction and prevention by investigating current gaps and challenges with regards to data synthesis and sharing across stakeholders. We are interested in funding pilot projects that help establish an evidence base that connects online social media activity with offline VAWG, knife crime or anti-social behaviour. We are interested in theoretically grounded pilots that explore the interactions between social media activity and offline crime and safety.

The expected deliverable is a report detailing: (1) the relationship between specific social media variables and specific crime outcomes; (2) detailed description of the methodology (including data collection instruments). We would welcome deliverables that identify data sources and predictive algorithms, or that draw on qualitative data to hypothesize predictive relationships that we might be able to test using our developing data sets. We would also be interested in data archives and links to openly accessible data sources that we can release to the wider community.

Support from the core team at Bath will be provided by sharing information and insights from on-going research with regards to the data ecosystem and by facilitating introductions with stakeholders.

Funding

The total amount available for this call will be up to £100,000 at 100% full Economic Cost (fEC), of which 80% fEC (i.e., up to £80,000) 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 to 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 run between (or before) **01 December 2025** and **28 February 2026**. 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 10 October 2025** to rephrain-centre@bristol.ac.uk.

Submissions should not exceed two pages and include short CVs (CVs are not included in the two page limit), comprising:

- 1) Using the checkbox, a clear indication of the Strand the pilot study relates to.
- 2) An overview of the study to be undertaken clearly detailing the work being proposed, objectives, methodology and outcome expected.
- 3) Financial summary with a short justification of resources.
- 4) 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.

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 evaluated by a Strategic Fund decision panel. Applications that are not submitted in the format requested above, or that are outside of the scope of this call, may be rejected without recourse to evaluation.

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.

Please note that all research successfully funded via the REPHRAIN Strategic Funding Calls will be required to receive [REPHRAIN ethics approval](#) as well as institutional ethics approval before commencing work.

Applicants should share these terms with their organisation's 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 draft [terms and conditions](#) are available on the REPHRAIN website.

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.