

FINDS Fellowships 2025

Call for Applications Opens: 28 October 2025

Deadline: 9 December 2025, 23:59pm

Total Funding Pool: £300,000, to fund 3-4 projects.

Eligible Sectors: Academia, Policy Think Tanks, Research Institutes

Are you a researcher in academia, a policy institute, or a think tank with an interest in economic, social, or health-related dynamics? The FINDS Fellowships offer a unique chance to access cutting-edge deidentified financial data and secure competitive funding for policy-relevant research.

What is FINDS?

FINDS is the Financial Data Service, funded via UKRI's Smart Data Research UK programme. One of six data services, FINDS provides the UK research community with free access to FINDS data and enables research that can transform our understanding of how economic shocks and policy interventions affect different communities, helping policymakers design more targeted and effective responses to economic challenges.

FINDS is a collaboration between Smart Data Foundry and the University of Edinburgh.

What is the FINDS Fellowship?

The FINDS Fellowship will provide funding to support innovative, data-driven research projects that use our secure, deidentified financial datasets to explore key societal challenges. The FINDS Fellowship is open to researchers across universities, think tanks, and other research organisations including those in industry. Projects may run for up to 18 months and start no later than 2nd July 2026.

Who can apply?

This funding opportunity is open to researchers at and beyond UK Higher Education Institutions and [UKRI approved research institutions](#), including but not limited to research foundations, think tanks, and charities.

This funding opportunity is open to researchers at all career stages. Applications from early career researchers are encouraged, though they should also highlight experience and clear mentorship from more senior colleagues.

Due to the nature of the data, we recommend that researchers have at least some degree of experience with manipulating large, sensitive data sets in secure research environments. However, for the right proposal FINDS will offer a degree of guidance on the use and manipulation of their proprietary datasets.

We encourage a minimum time commitment of 0.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) for the fellowship, although we will accept fellowship proposals below this suggested time commitment, or where co-leads reach this commitment. Applicants on part-time contracts should commit FTE at a proportionate level.

Applicants from organisations not recognised as research institutions by UKRI will be required to complete a due diligence checklist to confirm eligibility to receive funding. Further information on this is available in the 'How To Apply' section.

Who is ineligible?

- Applicants from non-UK organisations; you must be based within an eligible (i.e. in accordance with the above criteria) UK organisation for the duration of this fellowship.
- Researchers who are named leads and co-leads with more than 0.2FTE on SDR UK Data Service grants.

We commit to ensuring dedication to our missions and social good. Whilst researchers in the private sector are still eligible to apply, it is unlikely we will progress applications from organisations whose primary motive is profit, or private research institutions with low levels of transparency over their other funding sources.

Resubmissions

We will not accept resubmissions of projects that have been submitted to UKRI.

The exception to this lies where proposals have been made to the Smart Data Research UK (SDR UK) Fellowships Fund, where applicants will be permitted to cross-apply, but on the basis they can only be successful from one funding source. Should researchers be successful in applying to the SDR UK Fellowships Fund they will not be eligible for funding under this FINDS Fellowship fund, their application will be removed from consideration by FINDS.

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

FINDS is committed to achieving equality of opportunity for all funding applicants in line with UKRI standards. We encourage applications from a diverse range of researchers.

Remit

If you are unsure whether your proposed research falls within the remit of this opportunity, please contact research@smartdatafoundry.com for guidance.

What we're looking for

Scope

FINDS invites applications for fellowships to conduct research using FINDS financial data assets to address real-world challenges. FINDS invites fellowship applications that either focus on one large research project, or several smaller interrelated projects.

What data do FINDS hold?

FINDS make available both consumer and business financial data from industry partners. This is considered 'Smart Data'; data produced by interactions with the digital world such as card payments, digital transactions or cloud accounting.

You must use FINDS' data in your research, though you may augment this with other data (for instance, health, administrative, or traditional survey-based data).

FINDS' flagship datasets include consumer current account banking data for 5m individuals GB-wide. This data is available from 2019 to present. We also hold cloud accounting data for roughly 100k small and medium enterprise (SME) businesses, with information on details such as cashflow and financial resilience.

Prospective researchers can access the FINDS data catalogue [here](#).

Additional datasets will be made available soon, while subject to change they can be viewed [here](#).

Objectives

We are looking for proposals that meet the following objectives:

- 1. Advance impactful novel financial data research**
 - a. Conduct original, high-impact research that heavily utilises financial data to demonstrate its potential in solving pertinent real-world issues, such as economic inequalities, economic growth, poverty, social determinants of health, etc.
- 2. Create a portfolio of high-quality, cross-sector outputs**
 - a. Create a number of outputs over the fellowship duration that speak to different groups, including other researchers, policymakers, and the public.
 - b. This could include data stories, blog posts, research articles, policy briefs or participation in public engagement activities.
 - c. Highlight impactful and innovative linking of administrative and private sector financial data to bridge gaps in government statistics.
- 3. Build collaborative data-focused partnerships**
 - a. Evidence cross-sector use cases and demand for the use of smart data in answering high impact questions.

Research Focus

Proposals must be aligned to FINDS' focus areas:

- 1. Economic Behaviour and Trends**
 - a. This could include macro- or microeconomic analyses on how varying economic conditions affect spending and financial resilience, either for consumers or businesses.
- 2. Public Health and Wellbeing**
 - a. This could include viewing health concerns on a small-area level to see how they interrelate with aspects of financial health, addressing topics such as economic inactivity or winter illnesses.
- 3. Social Science and Demographic Dynamics**
 - a. This could include linking to qualitative analyses to better understand what affects peoples' financial behaviours and their risks of financial vulnerability.

4. Income and Expenditure Patterns

- a. This could include a focus on FINDS' Income and Spend Dynamics datasets, taking a holistic view of changing financial behaviours.

Research should also be in keeping with the FINDS missions to unlock the power of financial data for reducing poverty and inequality and improving economic wellbeing.

We expect researchers to clearly articulate a problem statement(s).

Impact

FINDS aligns to the UKRI definition of 'research impact' as the demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy (broadly defined as delivering public benefit).

While FINDS understands that due to the timescales of research and policy change it is unlikely for direct impact to be assessed throughout the project, we expect clear communication strategies to be evidenced in providing insights to relevant stakeholders and changemakers. We therefore would like to see how your project either:

1. **Provides an evidence base to serve the public interest through any combination of [potential / likely] benefits to the following:**
 - a. Public sector decision making
 - b. Public service delivery
2. **Decisions which are likely to significantly benefit the economy, society, or quality of life for people in the UK, UK nationals, or people born in the UK now living abroad**
3. **Or, directly seeks to serve the public interest through any combination of the following:**
 - a. Replicating, validating, challenging or reviewing existing research and proposed research publications, including official statistics;
 - b. Extending understanding of social or economic trends or events by improving knowledge or challenging widely accepted analyses;
 - c. Improving the quality, coverage or presentation of existing research, including official or national statistics

FINDS also expects researchers to consider potential adverse environmental, social, and innovation-related impacts of your research proposal and how these will be mitigated.

Duration

The duration of this award is up to 18 months.

Projects must start by 2 July 2026, though this date is subject to requisite checks and contracts being in place. Projects must end by 31st January 2028; no funding will be made available beyond this point.

Funding Available

The total budget available for funding is up to £300,000 to fund at least 3 projects. All proposals should seek to justify clear value for money.

FINDS will fund:

- Salary costs for the fellow and associated team at 100%
- Reasonable costs for software (i.e. Stata), essential travel, and other consumables at 100%
- Research related expenses at 100%
- Accessibility costs, if applicable, at 100%

FINDS is unable to fund:

- Overhead and estate costs

Through not funding overheads FINDS intends to ensure parity of opportunity for university- and non-university affiliated researchers (who may not typically be able to recover overheads and estates).

Data Requirements

FINDS recognises the importance of data quality and provenance. Information relating to FINDS-held data can be made available to researchers working within the FINDS environment on request, subject to the discretion of the data owners.

All data access and use must comply with FINDS information security, disclosure control, and data protection policies, including UK GDPR. Therefore, where relevant details on data management and sharing should be provided in the Data Management section of the application. See the [importance of managing and sharing data](#) and [content for inclusion in a data management plan](#) on the UK Data Service (UKDS) website for further guidance.

Due to the sensitive nature of FINDS data, it is typically not appropriate to deposit this data within the UKDS. Therefore, for the purposes of reproducibility and maximising the potential of future research, we recommend that relevant code and methodological detail is deposited instead.

Research Ethics

FINDS requires that research it supports is designed and conducted in a way that meets ethical principles and is subject to proper professional and organisational oversight in terms of its research governance. We recommend that you align your work with the [UKRI Framework for Research Ethics](#), as well as the [ICO's guidance on data protection harms](#).

Further information on what we're looking for with regards to ethics can be found in the Ethics, Research and Responsible Innovation, and Impact section of the application. For those unable to undertake an institutional ethics assessment, we will be able to offer an ethics assessment as part of our researcher onboarding process.

Terms and Conditions

FINDS is funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and as such applications are made subject to the [terms and conditions set out by UKRI](#).

How to Apply

The following guidance details what you will be asked to provide when completing this application.

[The application form can be found here](#). Please note that there is no ability to edit and save applications to later return to them, so we recommend completing your application in a separate document then copying and pasting in your answers when you come to submit. The application form does not support the use of visual elements in your response.

The deadline for this application is 23:59 on Tuesday, 9th December, 2025.

Summary (250 words)

Please write a plain English summary of what you plan to achieve over the course of the fellowship programme. Include:

- The wider context of the work
- The challenge(s) the work addresses
- Aims, objectives, and intended outputs
 - Intended outputs should include a range of traditional and/or non-traditional formats, such as journals, blog posts, or even podcasts etc.
- Impact including potential applications and benefits

Note that this summary may be viewed by a range of audiences across different sectors and the public.

Core Team

Please list the details of the proposed fellow as well as additional members of the team.

Please specify if any of these individuals have had access to the FINDS Trusted Research Environment (this has no bearing on your application).

Challenge and Vision (500 words)

What are you hoping to achieve with your proposed work? Note that for this call, we are expecting a portfolio approach, either through a number of interrelated projects or one larger project, either of which should propose a number of outputs and publications beyond traditional academic outputs.

In this section we expect you to highlight how your project will use FINDS data in an innovative way to address a clearly articulated problem statement.

You should also explain how your project fits within one or both of SDF's mission themes:

- Reducing Poverty and Inequality
- Improving Economic Well-Being

Detail how your project meets the following objectives:

- Advance impactful novel financial data research
- Create a portfolio of high-quality, cross-sector outputs
- Build collaborative data-focused partnerships

And describe how your project aligns with one or more of our strategic themes:

- Economic Behaviour and Trends
- Public Health and Wellbeing
- Social Science and Demographic Dynamics
- Income and Expenditure Patterns

This section is intended to give you an opportunity to explain how your work will be of excellent quality or importance within its field. We are looking for projects that evidence potential in addressing current understanding of subject areas, or addressing new knowledge in their fields.

Approach (1650 words)

How do you plan on achieving your proposed work? Please:

- Clearly detail your methodology. This is an opportunity to illustrate how your proposed project design will be appropriate and effective in achieving project objectives. We are looking for projects that show deep consideration over what FINDS data can and cannot reasonably achieve, and/or that seek novel ways to overcome its limitations
- Summarise previous work (either your own or other researchers') and describe how you will progress this work
- Highlight how this work is interdisciplinary, OR has outputs that will provide opportunities to a range of researchers/policymakers beyond your typical subject area
- Provide an overview of the dataset(s) you plan to utilise and why (expand further in the following question)
- Demonstrate that you have a good understanding of the datasets you will use
- Provide a project plan (i.e. a GANTT Chart) with key project milestones and the overall project timeline
- Detail key risks and how they will be mitigated
- Illustrate an impact plan taking into account the variety of outputs to be created, as well as different activities and how they involve key stakeholders (please relate this to activities, as impact through creating an evidence base/and or improving knowledge should be listed in the appropriate section of this application).

Data Fields and Justifications (no word limit)

If you are applying to do multiple projects, please complete this for each project.

- **FIELDS:** List required data fields as they are titled in the relevant data catalogue entry or entries.
- **SCOPES:** List the time period, sample size, and geographic coverage required of the data.
- Explain how both fields and scopes will help to answer the research questions. Please bear in mind strict data minimisation requirements, and that all fields require justification to be issued.
- Also list any ancillary datasets you expect to access in tandem with FINDS data, and if these will need to be ingressed into our Trusted Research Environment.
 - Where necessary, please evidence that agreement to access ancillary datasets has been obtained, either in this or the project partners section.

As an extension to your approach, in this section we are looking for further evidence of the appropriateness of the requested data to tackle the research questions you are proposing.

Ethics, Responsible Research Innovation (RRI) and Impact (1000 words)

What are the ethical or RRI implications and issues relating to the proposed work?

Highlight how your research has taken into consideration specific [data protection harms](#), as described by the [Information Commissioner's Office](#). While we understand that long-term impact can be less tangibly understood over relatively short project timeframes, we are looking for clear understanding of how potential harms will be mitigated, and pathways to eventual impact from the work, as below.

Justify how your project will serve the public interest through either creating an evidence base or improving knowledge for the following:

- Public policy decision making and public service delivery
- Decisions which are likely to significantly benefit the economy, society, or quality of life for people in the UK, UK nationals, or people born in the UK now living abroad
- Improving the quality, coverage or presentation of existing research or statistics, including official or national
- Extending understanding of social or economic trends or events by improving knowledge or challenging widely accepted analyses

Applicant Capability and Development (750 words)

Why are you the right individual/group to successfully deliver the proposed work?

How will this fellowship develop your career and/or how will you use it to benefit others?

Also give an overview of your team's skills to date in dealing with large sensitive datasets and secure research environments. Evidence of knowledge of unix basic command line and programming languages (specifically R and Python) should be given, as these are typically the base for working in the FINDS TRE.

Resources and Cost Justification (1000 words)

What will you need to deliver your proposed work and how much will it cost?

Please breakdown costs by labour, non-staff costs, and by role type with an estimated number of hours given.

You will be asked to complete [this template](#) for costings and upload it under this question.

Project Partners and Letters of Support (250 words)

Please list any proposed partners to the project(s) and their expected contributions (whether direct or in-kind).

Data Management and Sharing (500 words)

How will you approach the management and sharing of code and output data outside our Trusted Research Environment?

If you have completed a data management plan (DMP) or Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) for the proposed work, please upload this as a separate file.

References

Detail any references given throughout your application in this section, breaking down by the relevant section and order of citation.

Applications should otherwise be self-contained, and hyperlinks should only be used to provide links directly to reference information. To ensure the information's integrity is maintained, persistent identifiers such as digital object identifiers should be used where possible. Assessors will not be required to access links to carry out assessment or recommend a funding decision.

You must not include links to web resources to extend your application.

Due Diligence

While this opportunity is open to a wide variety of organisations, it is indirectly funded via the Economic and Social Research Council. Therefore, we must undertake detailed due diligence checks to understand full eligibility for funding. The following will provide FINDS an overview; further checks will be required if you are successful further on in the assessment process.

You will be asked to confirm that you have no conflicts of interest that may relate to the carrying out of research under the remit of this fellowship.

You will be asked to confirm whether you can provide the following if successful in the application process, either as a full policy or narrative/description of the relevant processes.

Document	Comments
Evidence of legal status	
Organogram	
Anti-fraud, corruption & bribery policy	
Travel & subsistence policy	
Conflict of interest policy	
Safeguarding/Preventing Harm policy	
Health and Safety Policy	
Risk Management Policy	
Ethics Policy	
Recruitment and Selection Policy	
Financial Procedures incl: • Audited financial reports • Authorisation for fund dispersal • Public liability insurance that covers externally funded research • Professional indemnity insurance	
Research Integrity/ Misconduct Policy	
Modern slavery act Policy?	

Assessment Process

FINDS will follow a 4-part assessment process to ensure both alignment with our strategic aims and broader research excellence. This will entail:

1. FINDS eligibility screening
2. FINDS strategic alignment review
3. Expert peer review
4. Moderating expert panel

Due to resource constraints, FINDS is unable to provide full feedback for unsuccessful applicants.

Principles of assessment

We support the [San Francisco declaration on research assessment](#) and recognise the relationship between research assessment and research integrity.

Additional Information

Informational Webinars

FINDS hosted an informational webinar on the 23rd October, of which a recording can be [found here](#).

A further webinar, delving into the data that FINDS can make available, will be held on the 4th November. [Sign up here](#).

Personal Data

FINDS, as part of Smart Data Foundry, itself a wholly owned subsidiary of the University of Edinburgh, will need to collect some personal information to manage your application. We will handle personal data in line with UK data protection legislation and manage it securely.

Sensitive Information

If you or a core team member need to tell us something you wish to remain confidential, please email research@smartdatafoundry.com. Include in the subject line reference to the FINDS fellowship and 'sensitive information'.

Types of confidential information may include:

- Unavailability of individuals (for example due to parental leave)
- Declaration of interest, or conflict of interest for FINDS to consider in reviewer selection
- Additional information about eligibility that would not be appropriately shared in the 'Applicant Capability and Development' section

Further information on how FINDS handles personal data can be found in our [privacy statement](#).

Use of Generative AI

Use of generative AI tools to prepare funding applications is permitted, however, caution should be applied.

Reviewers and panellists are not permitted to use generative AI tools to develop their assessment, in line with the [UKRI policy on the use of generative AI](#).

Matched Funding

There is no requirement nor expectation for matched funding from the organisations hosting the project leads, co-leads, or any other staff employed on the application. We will advise reviewers to not consider the level of matched funding as a factor on which to base funding recommendations.

Research disruption due to COVID-19

We recognise that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused major interruptions and disruptions across the UK and international research communities. We are committed to ensuring that individual applicants and their wider team, including partners and networks, are not penalised for disruptions to their career resulting from the pandemic.

Reviewers will be advised to consider the unequal impacts that COVID-19 related disruption might have had on the capability to deliver and career development of the individuals included in applications.

Where disruptions have occurred, you can highlight this within your application if you wish, but there is no requirement to detail the specific circumstances that caused the disruption.