HRB Secondary Data Analysis Projects (SDAP) 2025

Frequently Asked Questions

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1. General

- **How do I apply for a HRB Secondary Data Analysis Projects 2025?**

All applications must be made using the HRB online Grant E-Management System GEMS.
Applicants are strongly advised to carefully read the Guidance Notes prior to application.
The Lead Applicant must create the application, but it can then be jointly completed with the named Co-Applicants.
Once the Lead Applicant starts the application, they will be asked to go through a check list of mandatory 'Yes/No' questions prior to completing the form. In order to continue with the application, the Lead Applicant must satisfy the conditions of the check list on GEMS.

- **Submission process using GEMS**

Prior to final submission to the HRB, all applications must first be reviewed and approved within GEMS by the signatory approver at the research office (or equivalent) at the Host Institution (see Appendix II of Guidance Notes). It is critical therefore that Lead Applicant Researcher leaves sufficient time in the process for the Research Office (or equivalent) in their nominated Host Institution to review, seek clarifications and approve applications prior to the final submission date. This may involve being aware of and complying with any internal Host Institution deadlines for review and approval, distinct from the HRB deadline.

- **What is the closing date for submission of applications?**

Please note that this is a rolling call and as such there will be one call with two separate opening and closing dates with staggered deadlines and distinct rounds of peer and panel review. Applicants should only apply to one cycle in 2025. Applicants that have submitted a proposal for Cycle 1 will not be able to submit the same* proposal for Cycle 2. They will be able to submit a different proposal but should do so only in the event that they will be able fulfil commitments to both research proposals should both be successful.

* Cycle 2 applications that were unsuccessful in Cycle 1 will only be accepted where there have been significant **substantive changes** incorporating previous peer and panel review feedback.

The deadlines for submission of complete applications are:
Cycle 1 deadline: 30 May 2025 @ 13:00
Cycle 2 deadline: 05 January 2026 @ 13:00

Note: You can start an application for Cycle 2 at any time. If you want to apply for Cycle 2 and you have an application saved on the system with a status of 'Unsubmitted' on the first deadline (15th December 2022), it will not be included in Cycle 1 and will automatically be available for submission to Cycle 2.
Please remember to save your application regularly as you work on it to avoid losing content.

2. Datasets

- **I have unused data from a previous study; will this qualify as a dataset?**

A dataset is any collection of health and social care data, including administrative sources, censuses, surveys, longitudinal studies and national patient registries. Randomised controlled trials (RCTs) generally seek to answer one specific question under certain conditions, with limited scope outside the specific trial parameters. Data from RCTs are not appropriate when seeking to make more generalised policy and practice decisions and should ideally be avoided as dataset sources without specific justification. Datasets should comply with the HIQA Information Management Standards for Health and Social Care Data Collections. (https://www.hiqa.ie/sites/default/files/2017-02/Information-management-standards-for-national-health-and-social-care-data-collections.pdf).

- **Can I use international datasets in this call?**

Yes, proposals must include at least one existing Irish or International dataset in order to be eligible for this call. Applications may be related to, but must be distinct from, the specific aims of the original data collection. Datasets should comply with the HIQA Information Management Standards for Health and Social Care Data Collections (https://www.hiqa.ie/sites/default/files/2017-02/Information-management-standards-for-national-health-and-social-care-data-collections.pdf).

- **Can I undertake new data collection as part of this call?**

No. The scheme will not fund projects involving additional primary data collection. Please check the call scope outlined in section 4 of the Guidance Notes.

- **Is stakeholder /user group engagements considered primary data collection?**

Stakeholder /user group engagements are typically not considered as primary data collection so long as this comprises a minor part of the project and is used to optimise utility and implementation.

- **The dataset I would like to use is held by the CSO and it is unlikely that I will have approval to access this data in time for the Cycle 1 deadline – can I apply?**

The HRB will accept a 'letter of comfort' provided by the CSO stating that an Applicant has approached the CSO to request access to a dataset and that the Applicant is aware of the procedure they need to go through. Applicants who have been successful in the HRB selection process will need to complete the CSO access process. They will need to document to the HRB that they have been granted access as a condition before an award contract will be issued.

- **The data set is publicly available, is a letter of support required from the data controller?**

Where a dataset is publicly available, details must be included in the application. A separate letter of support from the data controller is not required.

- **Access to the data set is only allowed once research funding has been secured, is a letter of support required from the data controller?**

Yes, where the process to allow access to data only commences once research funding has been secured, correspondence from the data controller that the data is available for access will be required at time of HRB application submission. Confirmation of access will be required at contracting for successful awards.

3. Applicant/Eligibility

- **Can Applicants submit more than one application?**

No, only one application per Lead Applicant will be considered in this round. However, the Lead Applicants can be a Co-Applicant or Collaborator in another application provided they have the time commitment to fulfil both roles, should the applications be successful.

- **Can applicants that have submitted a proposal for peer review Cycle 1, submit the same proposal for peer review Cycle 2?**

Applicants that have submitted a proposal for Cycle 1 will not be able to submit the same proposal for the Cycle 2. Applications that are unsuccessful in Cycle 1 will only be accepted to Cycle 2 where there have been significant substantive changes incorporating previous peer/panel review feedback.

- **Do you need a Knowledge User on the team in order to apply?**

Yes, a Knowledge User needs to be included along with a researcher as either Lead Applicant and Co-Applicant. This is an eligibility requirement of the scheme.

- **What is a Knowledge User?**

A Knowledge User is defined as one in a position of authority to influence and/or make decisions about health policy or the delivery of services and can act to ensure that the findings of the research will be translated to influence decision making and change within their (or other) organisations. This is typically a health-system manager, policy-maker, health professional or clinician who is in a position to make significant changes to policy or practice. Knowledge User organisations may be Government departments, agencies, hospitals, local government, voluntary organisations, research charities, patient/consumer groups or other organisations involved in making decisions regarding the management, structuring and/or delivery of practice or policy in the Irish health and social care system.

- **Who needs to be part of the Applicant Team?**

Applications should be made on behalf of a team made up of Researchers, Knowledge Users and ideally Data Controllers. PPI Contributors should be included as part of the team where appropriate and considered within the proposal. Exclusion of PPI in the proposal will need justification.
The applicant team must demonstrate clearly that the appropriate and relevant partners are involved in order to achieve the objectives set out in the research proposal and in a manner that aligns well with the sections included in the application on relevance, knowledge translation plan and impact.

- **Can a Data Controller be included as Collaborator instead of Co-Applicant?**

Data controllers from data provider organisations should ideally be included either as Co-Applicants or Collaborators, depending on their level of involvement. At a minimum, the data controller of the organisation providing access to the dataset/s must agree to provide access to the dataset.

- **Do you need a statistician on the team in order to apply?**

Statistical expertise would ideally be within the applicant team, rather than outsourced. Statistical expertise is ideally required at the outset to engage with the data providers to assess the variables, quality and strengths and limitations of the available data for answering the research questions posed, to ensure the study is adequately powered and to support the development of the data analysis and management plan to be detailed in the application.

This round of SDAP now encourages education and upskilling of team members in areas that enhance capacity for future secondary data analysis; this would include in statistics.

- **Will the project support/facilitate exchange or placement opportunities between partner organisations for funded personnel during the award?**

Yes, in considering the broader skillsets needed to deliver SDAP projects such as working across diverse knowledge user and academic settings, applicants may wish to facilitate exchange or placement opportunities between partner organisations for funded personnel during the award. Both national and international placements could be considered for this purpose

- **Does the proposed research need to be related to documented evidence needs of the knowledge user organisation?**

Yes, the proposed research should be explicitly linked to the documented evidence needs of the knowledge user organisation/s. It is your responsibility as Lead Applicant to clearly define what these are. The question/s must be able to be answered by the research partnership and the application should include a clear and concise knowledge translation plan that will highlight how the research findings will be applied by the knowledge user organisation/s.

- **Does a Lead Applicant need to have last author publications?**

A Lead Applicant must have at least three or more peer reviewed original research publications.

- **Does a Lead Applicant have to have previous peer reviewed funding?**

Yes, the Lead Applicant must demonstrate research independence through securing at least **one** peer-reviewed research grant for a research project/s as the Lead Applicant or Co-Applicant. Funding received for travel to seminars/conferences and/or small personal bursaries will not be considered in this regard.

- **Can a Lead Applicant in a tenured academic post request a salary?**

No, the salary or benefits of academic staff within research institutions (including buy out from teaching time etc.) that are already in receipt of salary or benefits will not be funded. If a Lead Applicant who is in an academic post requests salary the application will be deemed ineligible.

- **Can a contract researcher be a Lead Applicant and apply for their own salary?**

Yes, a contract researcher acting as Lead Applicant can apply for their salary. A Host Institution Letter of Support is required for all contract researchers acting as Lead Applicant.

- **Can I be Lead Applicant on one application and Co-Applicant on another?**

Yes, it is worth bearing in mind however that should both applications reach review Panel stage the amount of time you are spending on both will be scrutinised so this should be realistic.

- **Can there be more than one Knowledge User organisation involved in the proposed research?**

Yes, there may be one or more Knowledge User organisations involved in the proposed research.

- **How do we represent a large network of Knowledge Users?**

While there may be a lot of Knowledge Users across different institutions, the Knowledge Users on the research team should be in a position of authority to influence and/or make decisions about health policy or the delivery of services and can act to ensure that the findings of the research will be translated to influence decision making and change within their (or other) organisations. It will be up to the Lead Applicant to select the best team and then to use the activities under the knowledge translation plan to connect with a wider network of Knowledge Users.

4. Co-Applicants and Collaborators

- **Can a Researcher Co-Applicant receive payment for their role in the project?**

Researcher Co-Applicants can request their own salary, depending on their role and percentage of time dedicated to the research for the duration of the award if they are contract/independent investigators. A Host Institution Letter of Support is required for Co-Applicants in contract positions and are seeking their own salary. Please note the HRB does not fund the salary or benefits of academic staff within research institutions (including buy out from teaching time etc.) A Co-Applicant may also receive funding for items such as running costs and personnel.

- **Does a Co-Applicant's contract have to cover the duration of the award?**

There are no requirements for the duration of a Co-Applicant's contract. However, where a Co-Applicant is applying for salary, their contract must cover the duration of the award or the Host Institution must be willing to issue/extend a contract should the award be successful; this should be contained in the Co-Applicants letter of support.

- **How many Co-Applicants can I have?**

The maximum number of Co-Applicants allowed is 10. It is not mandatory to have 10 Co-Applicants, but this is to allow for flexibility should this seem appropriate.

- **Is there a limit to how many of the Co-Applicants should be Researcher/Knowledge User/other Co-Applicants?**

No. It will be up to the Lead Applicants to decide on the balance of members that will make up the research team.

- **Do Co-Applicants need to have support letters?**

Host Institution letters of support are only required where Researcher Co-Applicants are contract researchers applying for their own salary.

- **Can a Co-Applicant/Collaborator be from outside Ireland?**

Yes, Co-Applicants/Collaborators from outside Ireland are welcome where the nature of the research renders this necessary and is appropriately justified in terms of added value for the project.

- **Will the HRB pay for visits from or to Co-Applicants/Collaborators?**

Yes, visits to or from Co-Applicants/Collaborators where justified may be included under running costs.

- **Is a Collaborator agreement form needed?**

Yes, a Collaborator Agreement Form must be signed by each Collaborator and uploaded with your application. You can download the form on GEMS.

- **Can a Collaborator be from private enterprise?**

Yes, a Collaborator may be from private enterprise. Applications from a private enterprise are encouraged where they add value to the project for example in terms of access to expertise or technologies. The HRB does not have the capacity to broker these arrangements. The terms of the collaboration should be determined early, and relevant agreements must be in place by the onset of the project. Consideration should be given to issues such as relative responsibilities, governance arrangements, ownership and copyright, access and sharing of data/materials etc when working up Partnership proposals.

- **Can a Collaborator receive payment for their role in the project?**

Yes, Collaborators are eligible to receive funding from the award when properly detailed and justified in the application.

- **What is a Data Controller?**

A ‘controller’ refers to a person, company, or other body that decides how and why a data subject’s personal data are processed. If two or more persons or entities decide how and why personal data are processed, they may be ‘joint controllers’, and they would both share responsibility for the data processing obligations.

- **What is a Data Processor?**

A ‘processor’ refers to a person, company, or other body which processes personal data on behalf of a controller. They don’t decide how or why processing takes place, but instead carry out processing on the orders of a controller.

- **What is Public and Patient and Carer Involvement (PPI)?**

PPI represents an active partnership between members of the public, patients and carers and researchers in the research process. This can include, for example, involvement in the choice of research topics, assisting in the design, advising throughout or at particular decision points of the research project, or in carrying out the research.

- **Will PPI play a large role in this grant call?**

In the application, you are asked to describe any public/patient involvement in your research throughout the various stages of identifying and prioritising the research question, the research design, conduct, analysis, and dissemination. Depending on the role in delivering the research activities, PPI contributors can be included as Co-Applicants or Collaborators.
We strongly advise that you consult with your Host Institution who may be able to provide guidance and support on PPI in research. The SDAP scheme encourages PPI and proposals where it is deemed appropriate to exclude PPI will need to include sufficient justification for this decision.

- **Does the Data Controller have to include a letter of support granting access to the data set and approval of the proposed project?**

Where the Lead Applicant is not the Data Controller of the data set, the application should include a letter of support from the Data Controller or Joint Data Controller granting access to the data set and approval of the proposed project. For Collaborators this information will be captured in the Collaborator Agreement Form.

- Exceptions for the need for a letter of support granting access to the dataset are:
  - Where a dataset is publicly available, details must be included in the application. A separate letter of support from the data controller is not required.
  - For datasets held by the CSO where permission to access data is under review, a 'letter of comfort' indicating access has been applied for is sufficient at application stage. Confirmation of access will be required at contracting for successful awards.
  - Where the process to allow access to data only commences once research funding has been secured, correspondence from the data controller that the data is available for access will be required at time of HRB application submission. Confirmation of access will be required at contracting for successful awards.

5. Scope

- **What sort of applications does this call support?**

The awards will support proposals typically between 36-42 months duration where the findings from the research will have direct relevance to policy and/or practice in the Irish health and social care system. This should involve close collaboration of researchers with relevant stakeholders including decision makers and data custodians/controllers. The proposed research should be explicitly linked to the documented evidence needs of the Knowledge User organisation.
We recognise that some data sets are not currently in an accessible format. Therefore, proposals are welcome for projects that include some aspect of development or improvement by the data provider/s in order to make datasets more accessible for research purposes in accordance with international best practice and ensures that the privacy, confidentiality and data protection rights of

data subjects is preserved in line with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Health Research Regulations of the 2018 Data Protection Act (e.g., through the creation of a published data dictionary, use of encryption on de-identification techniques). In these cases, the duration of the award may be up to 42 months, with up to 6 months dedicated to the development of such protocols and tools.
Proposals must include at least one existing Irish or International dataset in order to be eligible for this call. Applications may be related to, but must be distinct from, the specific aims of the original data collection.

- **How many years does the funding cover?**

Awards will have a typical duration of between 36-42 months. Up to 42 months may be requested for awards that include the development of improved protocols and tools that make the datasets more accessible for research purposes, and in accordance with best practice appropriate safeguards.

- **I'm unsure as to what is meant by 'documented needs'. Can you be more specific?**

Documented needs relate to the research priorities or needs of the Knowledge User. The proposed research should be explicitly linked to the documented evidence needs of the knowledge user organisation/s and this should be made clear in the application. It is the responsibility of the Lead Applicant to clearly define what these are.

6. Funding

- **How much can I apply for?**

The maximum amount that can be requested from the HRB per application is €350,000 (inclusive of overheads).

- **Is a co-funding from the knowledge user organisation(s) required?**

Co-funding from the Knowledge User organisation is not a mandatory requirement to apply.

- **Where a co-funding contribution is being made where should the co-funding contribution be added in the GEMS budget section?**

Where a co-funding contribution is being made as part of the application, this should be added under the co-funding budget heading only. The other budget headings including overheads are only for the breakdown of the HRB contribution.

- **How do I determine what gross salary to pay?**

Applicants should use the IUA website scales for the most up-to-date recommended salary scales for academic researchers (**http://www.iua.ie/research-innovation/researcher-salary-scales/**). Pay scale used and the level and point on the scale must be stated and justified. For appointment of Research Fellows or Senior Research Fellows evidence of position must be provided at point of award. For employees who are not academic researchers the relevant pay scales should be used for their profession. Please note employee pension contribution of 5% has already been incorporated into the IUA gross salary figure.

- **Does the HRB pay pension contributions?**

Pension provision up to a maximum of 20% of gross salary will be paid to the Host Institution to enable compliance with the Employment Control Framework (an additional 5% employee contribution is part of the salary). The level of employer contribution should be in accordance with the model adopted by the Host Institution.
If applicable, state the amount of employer contribution based on the pro rata salary and note the % of pro rata salary used to calculate this for reference.
Exceptions apply where Circular letter 6/2007 applies. Circular Letter 6/2007 states that the pensions contribution of all Public Health Service employees who, on or after 1 June 2007, are granted secondments or periods of special leave with pay to enable them take up appointments with other organisations, including other Public Health Sector organisations, will be increased to 25% of gross pensionable pay. The rate of 25% of gross pensionable pay referred to in this context is the pension contributions to be paid by the body to which the employee is seconded – it does not include any pension contributions which employees make themselves. Where no such arrangements are in place, the HRB will not be liable for costs.

- **Are overheads included within the €350,000 threshold?**

Yes, overheads are included within these limits.

- **How is the overhead contribution calculated?**

The overhead payment is 30% of Total Direct Modified Costs (TDMC excludes student fees, equipment and capital building costs) for laboratory or clinically based research and 25% of Total Direct Modified Costs if desk-based research excluding student fees, equipment and capital building costs.
Note: Overheads will only be paid on the costs requested from the HRB only.

- **What costs are included in the overhead contribution?**

The following items are included in the overhead contribution: recruitment costs, bench fees, office space, software, contribution to gases, bacteriological media preparation fees, waste fees, bioinformatics access. A copy of the HRB overheads policy can be found at the following link: **Health Research Board: Use of Research Overheads**

- **Can I hire a consultant to carry out part of the project?**

Yes, this cost should be included under running costs.

- **Can Co-Applicants who are based in another institute/organisation receive part of the budget/overheads**

The HRB will pay the award directly to the Host Institution. The Host Institution may provide running costs/overheads to a Co-Applicant's institute and the arrangements for this should be agreed between the two institutes.

- **Does HRB support costs related to FAIR Data Management?**

Yes, you should include costs related to data-related and data management activities in line with best practice of data management and stewardship and the FAIR principles incurred during the lifetime of the project.

- **What type of FAIR Data Management costs can be included?**

The HRB will support costs with:

- People – staff time per hour for data collection, anonymisation, management/ stewardship support, training, etc.
- Storage and computation – cloud storage, domain hosting charge
- Data access – secondary data access, costs for preparing data for sharing (e.g. anonymisation)
- Deposition and reuse – costs for depositing research data and metadata in an open access data repository, defining semantic models, making data linkable, choosing the licence, defining metadata for dataset, deploying/publishing
- Others – when properly justified

Note that the HRB is currently not covering the cost of long-term preservation of data, and that this list is not exhaustive and aims to provide examples only of eligible costs.

7. Personnel

- **Can I hire more than one person to carry out this project?**

Yes, please note the type and number of research personnel hired should be the most appropriate to successfully carry out the proposed project.

8. Supporting Documents

- **What documents should be uploaded with my application form?**

You must upload the following documents:

- Host Institution Letters of Support (if applicable; see next question)
- Data Controller Letter of Access (if required)
- Co-Funding Commitment Letter (if applicable)
- Collaborator Agreement Forms (if applicable; required for all Collaborators)
- Objectives and Deliverables Gantt Chart (required)

You may also upload an attachment to support your Project Description. A maximum of 5 figures which can be a combination of images, graphs, tables, scales, instruments or surveys may be uploaded as a **single document** on HRB GEMS.

- **Who needs to provide Host Institution Letters of Support?**

Host Institution Letters of Support need to be provided for (1) Lead Applicant in a contract position and (2) Researcher Co-Applicants in a contract position who are seeking their own salary.

- **Do Co-Applicants have to sign-off the application?**

Each Co-Applicant is invited to view the application form online and approve content prior to submission however this is not a requirement, and the Lead Applicant can submit the application on behalf of the team.

- **Do I need to contact the Dean of Research to sign off on my application?**

As part of the online application process, you will be asked to select the **Dean of Research or equivalent person** authorised to endorse research grant applications for your Host Institution. Their approval is necessary to allow the application to be submitted to the HRB. **Please note that as part of the online system the Host Institutions will approve and submit each application on behalf of the Applicant.**

When the application is submitted for approval online, emails are sent to the selected signatory informing them that their approval is requested. If a signatory rejects the application the Lead Applicant will be notified, along with any feedback the signatory has supplied. The application can then be amended and re-submitted; it will be returned to the signatory who made the rejection and continues through the approval process as before.

When signatories approve the application, it will be sent automatically to the HRB to be considered for funding, a grant application number will be assigned to the application and a confirmation email will be sent to the Lead Applicant.

9. Submission

- **How will I know that my application has been successfully submitted?**

Once the HI endorses your application it will be sent automatically to the HRB to be considered for funding, a grant application number will be assigned to the application, and you will receive a confirmation email.

- **I have submitted my application but have just realised I have amendments to make; can I amend the application?**

No. Once you have submitted your application, you cannot edit or unsubmit it.

10. Review Process

- **Will public review be part of the review process?**

Yes, public reviewers will be included to assess the quality of PPI in the proposal. They will provide comments and a rating but not a score. For short-listed applications the public review comments and rating will be shared with the review panel for discussion. PPI will not be a standalone assessment criterion, but the review panel will be asked to consider PPI as relates to any of the assessment criteria and justification for exclusion of PPI will be reviewed.