

GUIDANCE NOTE

BRAID FLEXIBLE IMPACT FUND (2026) Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council

Key information

This document contains key information about the BRAID Flexible Impact Fund (FI Fund).

n.b. Funding is available only to previously and currently funded BRAID researchers and practitioners as outlined in ‘Section 2: Eligibility’ below.

How to Apply	The forms are available here .
Key dates	<p><u>Intention to submit:</u> deadline 5pm (GMT) on Wednesday, 15 April 2026. This short mandatory form helps us plan resources and panel capacity. Completing it doesn’t mean you must submit a later application.</p> <p><u>Application:</u> deadline 5pm (GMT) on Wednesday, 6 May 2026. For university-based researchers, please contact your research/knowledge exchange office as soon as possible for support with costing and application administration. The office will set any internal deadlines necessary to enable completion of the application by the due date.</p>
Contact	If you have any queries about the Flexible Impact Fund or require application documents in a different format, please email braid@ed.ac.uk . The team will aim to respond within 1 to 3 working days.

About the call

Over the past three years, BRAID has brought together a large community of researchers and stakeholders through scoping projects, research fellowships, and creative commissions. The Flexible Impact Fund (FI Fund) supports the next stage of this work by enabling follow-on activity to maximise the ‘real world’ impact of projects. Our aim through to 2028 is to amplify the collective achievements of our community and its impact on AI research and development.

The FI Fund is designed to strengthen the responsible AI ecosystem, enhance strategic engagement with publics and stakeholders, and drive the practical, solutions-focused impact of arts and humanities expertise in responsible AI.

The call is designed to be fast, flexible and impact-led. It is funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council and managed by BRAID with support from the Edinburgh Research Office, ECA’s Knowledge Exchange & Impact team, and Edinburgh Innovations. Our approach is informed by UKRI’s Translation: Proof of Concept principles and UKRI’s Impact Accelerator Accounts.

What we are looking for

Projects must:

- a) directly follow on from previous BRAID-funded research or activity (no new primary research; no duplication of already-funded activity),
- b) be delivered in active partnership with one or more non-academic stakeholder (NAS) with a clear, evidenced need and defined beneficiaries,
- c) deliver lasting impact and benefits with a credible pathway to influence/adoption/uptake (e.g., policy/standards contributions, skills/literacy, tools/guidance, prototypes/MVPs, licensing/spin-out or social enterprise exploration), and
- d) align with BRAID's mission to embed the arts and humanities within the responsible AI ecosystem and to bridge sector divides. We welcome your ideas and approaches as well as proposals that speak to our own core delivery themes:
 - o community and capability
 - e) recourse and repair, and
 - f) public media and democracy.

A NAS can include any public, private, or third-sector organisations with a demonstrable stake in the AI ecosystem (from community groups to startups to large companies).

All projects must respond to an identified need or opportunity and show how the project will contribute to addressing it. We encourage approaches that:

- adopt/translate responsible AI tools and practices into specific contexts (e.g., audits, impact/risk assessments, red-teaming, documentation practices, participatory methods, governance/ethics boards),
- develop/adapt research-informed products, services, or guidance for real-world use, including Creative R&D and compelling public/policy demonstrations,
- embrace cross-sector, interdisciplinary collaborations that pragmatically embed sociotechnical expertise within technical settings, and
- build skills, literacy, and capability in responsible AI for defined user groups and priority/underrepresented publics. E.g. co-designed training, toolkits, train-the-trainer models, curricula/micro-credentials, and accessible delivery (e.g., BSL/captioning, childcare, travel bursaries, paid participation).

For additional context when preparing submissions, BRAID's mission aims to achieve the following benefits:

1. **New communities:** a larger, more diverse and better-connected AI ecosystem, linking research, industry, third sector and policy stakeholders, will have greater awareness of and engagement with responsible AI,

2. **New communication channels/partnerships:** new communication channels/partnerships will be established between actors in the AI ecosystem and existing partnerships substantially strengthened,
3. **Regulation and self-regulation:** are supported and incentivised across the AI lifecycle
4. **Public confidence/engagement:** evidence of increased public confidence in engaging with AI conversations and the inclusion of individuals and groups currently underrepresented in AI conversations, and
5. **Value of AH research in responsible AI:** increased recognition of the value that arts and humanities research can contribute to advancing the UK's world-leading position in responsible AI.

1. Funding and duration of projects

Total budget and indicative number of awards per strand

We have a total of £350,000 in funding to award. Two funding strands are available:

Strand A: KEI/public engagement £2,000 to ~£10,000 per project

Strand B: impact £5,000 to ~£30,000 per project

We aim to fund in the vicinity of 10 to 15 projects. The above caps are indicative only and there to guide requests. Please choose the strand that best delivers your outcomes.

Value for money forms a core assessment criterion and project budgets must be justified, reasonable and necessary to deliver intended impact. Proposals may be built around a single project or a portfolio of smaller, linked activities.

Matched resource

We welcome and encourage financial and/or in-kind contributions from NAS partners. These contributions work to strengthen stakeholder commitment, ensure appropriate acknowledgement of value generated, and demonstrate good value for money for the funder.

Where feasible, aim to match your BRAID request with financial and/or in-kind contributions from NAS partners. In-kind contributions may include partner staff time or other direct costs such as data/compute, facilities, event costs, and travel. Financial contributions include funding provided to your host institution towards project costs including salary costs. Such contributions can significantly help stretch project scope and duration.

Where infeasible, we can accept reduced or no matched resource where a case is made as to why this represents the most attainable outcome. An example might be if you are working with charities/SMEs or community partners without available resource. In all cases, proposals must evidence genuine partner demand and commitment. Please contact braid@ed.ac.uk if you have any queries in relation to matched resourcing.

Project duration

Projects must start on or before **1 September 2026** and be completed by **31 December 2027**. Start dates should plan at least 60 days' lead in time for contracts/approvals and mobilisation.

Budget categories

Given that creative practitioners and university-based researchers cost projects differently, the following rules apply:

- **university-based researchers must have their research office prepare costings, and attach these to the application.** Please note that awards cover Directly Incurred (DI) costs at 100%. A list of eligible cost categories is included below. There is one exception to this: mentor support is treated as a Directly Allocated cost. Do not include any estates/indirect costs except where explicitly permitted in the case of mentor support.
- **creative practitioners must submit a project budget together with budget justification** explaining how each line item has been calculated. Please note that no general overheads and indirects are allowed and grants are cash-limited. This means that the **budget must cover all eligible items of expenditure, including any VAT for VAT registered applicants.**

Please note that this call operates on a non-fEC, DI-only basis (i.e. estates and indirect costs are ineligible), with an exception for mentoring costs as set out below.

The following costs are eligible:

- **Salary costs/practitioner fee, DI at 100%**
 - including applicable oncosts (NI, pension etc) excluding all estates and indirects
 - including VAT for VAT-registered practitioners
- **Travel and subsistence, DI at 100%**
 - in compliance with standard university travel policies (e.g. most economical option available, rail for domestic travel, standard rates for meal/accommodation costs)
- **Other costs, DI at 100%**
 - e.g. project assistance, venue hire, materials, AV/IT equipment hires, technical support, design/production services, community facilitation. Capital purchases not eligible. Including VAT for VAT registered subcontractors/suppliers.
- **Accessibility costs, as required, DI at 100%**
 - BSL/interpretation, live captioning, audio description, accessible formats, access support workers, specialist transport, childcare/carer support
- **Mentor salary of one (1) hour per month plus estates and indirects, if applicable, DA at fEC**
 - for creative practitioners, only the base hourly rate of a freelance mentor is eligible.

Salary costs

Salary costs are eligible where time for work:

- (a) is not covered by existing contracts, and
- (b) is directly needed to enable delivery of impact.

The funding of new research is out of scope and in all cases salary costs must be proportionate to the award size and well justified. Researchers and their schools should determine how best to manage available resource to maximise the delivery of impact, and cost and present proposals accordingly. In some cases, contract researchers without underlying employment will require all their time on the project to be covered. In other cases, limited time buy-out or backfill costs (i.e. costs for the reasonable, project-specific expenses of hiring temporary teaching or administrative cover to release you from existing duties) may be eligible if justified (e.g. time-critical/fixed-date delivery windows). The panel may reduce or remove insufficiently justified requests. Time for short-term project staff is also allowed but again this cannot be for new research and must be justified.

Please note that you cannot claim both buy-out and backfill for the same hours and you cannot receive additional pay or consultancy fees from this award. Head of School confirmation is required for buy-out or backfill costs.

Budget overview

While funding can be sought for a range of activities, the fund does not aim to support new academic research. Also, the scheme is not intended to fund impact evidence collection or the evaluation of existing work. Projects might however, for example, request a level of funding for a project assistant to identify and trace existing impact for the purpose of strategically directing or enhancing the planned impact activities under this award. In all cases, the intended impact must arise out of previously funded BRAID activity.

The following costs will usually be within scope:

- lead researcher/practitioner time for work not covered by existing contracts (as above)
- short-term assistants, facilitators, technical contractors, user-researchers
- stakeholder fees and stipends
- participant incentives, honoraria, recruitment costs
- fabrication, workshop access, 3D printing
- hire of technical equipment and tools outside of normal lab costs
- software licences for development and testing
- data acquisition for testing where justified
- venue hire and event costs (e.g. light catering (no-alcohol) and security)
- AV/tech hire, staging, insurance for public pilots/demonstrations
- design, print and digital content creation
- professional photography/filming for impact documentation (where justified)
- light-touch early commercialisation of IP activity – market/user discovery, market validation, prototyping, initial testing
- accommodation and reasonable travel in the UK – where justified
- external facilitator or fees
- speaker travel expenses – where justified
- workshop materials
- relevant software or hardware, e.g. online surveys
- development costs for websites or blogs
- costs related to enabling participation for EDI, and
- other consumables.

The following costs will usually be considered out of scope:

- salaries of researchers whose time is already funded by their school, unless necessary to buy-out research or teaching time for impact activity (as above)
- fees for activities and events which are already offered by BRAID
- equipment, software, or projects that your institution/organisation would normally be expected to provide or fund
- capital purchases
- the purchase of alcoholic beverages, which is prohibited
- long-term subscriptions or licenses
- projects that have already been externally funded to 100%; retrospective costs or double-funding
- individual conference attendance not integral to piloting or impact delivery
- co-organising academic conferences (though we encourage practical or skills-based workshops)
- editing a special issue of an academic journal
- activity already budgeted for in previous BRAID grants, and
- large contingency budget line items.

2. Eligibility

The fund is open to the following UK-based researchers and creative practitioners who have previously received an award/grant under the BRAID programme:

- **named lead or delegated co-investigator on scoping projects (maximum of one submission per project)**
- **BRAID research fellows (excluding fellows on costed-extensions)**
- **BRAID/BA innovation fellows**
- **DCMS fellows or delegated co-investigator (maximum of one submission per fellowship)**
- **recipients of creative commissions including artist commissions**

Academic researchers need to be employed by a UK research organisation eligible to receive AHRC funding for the duration of the project. There is no eligibility rule based on whether the employment is for a permanent position or on a fixed term basis.

Arts and humanities

Projects must arise out of ongoing or completed arts and humanities research funded by the BRAID programme, including our artists commissions. For academics, any underpinning research does not need to be published work but should be of publishable quality and of direct relevance to the proposed project. While interdisciplinary work is welcome, at least 51% of the underpinning research must be within [AHRC's remit](#).

Early career researchers, mentoring and support

As always, we encourage application from our early career researchers and researchers who are currently underrepresented in responsible AI research. Appropriate support and mentoring should be put in place to ensure professional and career development opportunities can be realised. For early career researchers, this will ordinarily include finding a mentor at your research organisation

to support project delivery. This mentor can be included in the resources and cost justification section of the application form.

For mentoring costs, an hour per month of the mentor's time can be built into the budget as a Directly Allocated expense (at 80% FEC), with associated estates and indirects included. We encourage your institution to provide additional mentoring support alongside other forms of leadership or career development support. Applicants at other stages of their career can also include mentorship in the application if you feel it would support the project and benefit the delivery of impact.

We will also provide cohort support meetings every other month as well as other collegiate activities to build a community around the programme and in the field of responsible AI. Please email braid@ed.ac.uk if you would like to discuss your needs.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

BRAID is committed to equality of opportunity. We seek to locate and amplify under-represented voices and perspectives on responsible AI and work to promote a positive culture, one that celebrates difference, challenges prejudice and ensures fairness and respect. Please embed consideration of EDI within your project plan and project budget. Should you require any personal support for you or your team, BRAID's [Accessibility Fund](#) is a dedicated fund designed to enable equitable participation in BRAID activities. The fund is open to existing BRAID award-holders, and to those applying for BRAID schemes. Requests are considered on a case-by-case basis. Examples of what may be considered can be found at the link above.

Applicants are also encouraged to email our operations and engagement manager Tina.Donnelly@ed.ac.uk to discuss your needs. You can also find more information about equality, diversity and inclusion at the UKRI by visiting [this site](#) and at the University of Edinburgh by visiting [this site](#).

3. What we mean by impact

Impact happens when a demonstrable change in the world occurs for defined beneficiaries and that change directly follows on from BRAID activity. It is more than dissemination and arises from the adoption, use or influence of your work beyond academia. For additional guidance, you can refer UKRI's information [here](#) and [here](#).

The scale of intended impact and clarity around how that impact will be sustained should increase with the amount of BRAID funding requested. In a similar manner, the greater amount of BRAID funding requested, the greater the need for strong partner relationships and demonstrable partner demand.

Strand A projects are more directed towards knowledge exchange and engagement-focussed work involving early-stage impact that moves from research interest towards real world changes. Activities may involve workshops, discovery, co-design, and scoping pilots with clear next steps. The need to evidence impact is lighter and sustainability planning helpful but not mandatory at this stage.

Strand B projects centre more heavily on creating sustained impact and can involve the acceleration towards adoption/use or the turning of research into embedded practice. Activities may involve a minimum viable product or method rollouts, the updating of organisational practice and procedures, the establishing of standards/policy, and targeted upskilling programmes. We expect a stronger impact case with tangible outcomes, partner commitments and credible sustainability planning.

4. Application process and key dates

Intentions to Submit close	5pm (GMT) on Wednesday, 15 April 2026
Applications Close	5pm (GMT) on Wednesday, 6 May 2026 (n.b. internal school deadlines will be earlier)
Notification of Decision	by 29 May 2026
Project Start	by 1 September 2026

Ethics approval is required for all academic projects, and most projects will require collaboration agreements between participating organisations. These can take weeks/months to put in place as does the hiring of any RA or project assistant. Likewise if your project involves leveraged funding and/or elements of commercialisation, including intellectual property for the development of technologies or material to be licensed, you should seek relevant advice from your HEI's commercialisation office (for academics) or other source of IP advice (for creative practitioners) prior to completing the application. Please factor these matters into your timelines.

Submissions require:

- completed intention to submit and application form
- 2 page CV for project lead (can be narrative CV)
- research office costings (university-led) / budget (practitioner-led)
- letter of support from partner organisation(s) confirming involvement and contribution
- letter from head of school confirming any buy-out or backfill costings, and (university-led, if applicable).

5. Assessment process

Selection criteria

The panel will assess each application according to the following general assessment criteria:

- **Links to BRAID:** strength and quality of connection to BRAID programme and its aims
- **Pathways to and strength of impact:** extent to which proposed activity will meet identified need/demand and lead to desired outcomes plus significance and likelihood of impact outcomes. Are there robust impact measures/plans for evidence gathering?
- **Quality of collaboration:** commitment of partner organisations expressed through letter/s of support and matched resource (where possible)
- **Communicating impact:** clear evaluation pathways for capturing and measuring/demonstrating impact
- **EDI/RRI measures:** extent to which project speaks to equality, diversity and inclusion as well as responsible research and innovation measures

- **Value for money:** strength of justification of resources to demonstrate cost-effective budgets and best use of available resource
- **Feasibility:** realistic timelines, necessary contingency planning, and appropriate approach to data sharing/IP/transferring, ethics and risk assessment.

Panel process

The assessment process is being managed by the BRAID team, who will recruit a panel of academic and professional services staff from the University of Edinburgh as well as from partner organisations such as the AHRC and BBC. All panelists will understand the BRAID programme and have expertise supporting research impact activity in the arts and humanities.

Following eligibility checks, each application will be reviewed by a panel convened to make funding recommendations. Panelists who are involved in any application or otherwise have a conflict of interest will be required to declare the conflict and will be recused from decision-making.

To support the programme's aims, BRAID, in consultation with the AHRC, reserves the right to use the funding recommendations to create a balanced portfolio of projects across the ecosystem, considering the diversity of disciplines, backgrounds, and researchers, research themes and objectives, and the geographical scope of projects. Decisions are final and cannot be appealed and the university reserves the right to amend the application process at any time. If you would like to know details on who is on the panel, please contact braid@ac.ed.ac.uk.

6. Responsibilities and compliance

Across all BRAID projects there are expectations that our researchers will design activities to be inclusive and accessible from the outset by budgeting for reasonable adjustments and ensure fair payment practices for community and third-sector partners. Applicants should ensure that ethics/safeguarding, risk assessments, and data protection guidelines such as GDPR are complied with. Arrangements for the handling of intellectual property, copyright and licensing and the apportionment of rights should be managed prior to start date between the project lead, host institution (if applicable) and NAS/s. Environmental responsibility should inform all travel and production-related activity.

As data generated during the lifetime of a research project may be required to support future funding applications, IP, legal agreements, regulatory applications or commercial due diligence, it is important to ensure implementation of good data management practices. You are responsible for ensuring consistency and quality in data capture, storage, management and protection in adherence to your research organisation and UKRI policy. The UKRI's [Data Sharing Policy](#) contains useful guidance. Further information and advice can be obtained through research organisations. For example, see the University of Edinburgh's [Research Data Service](#) and the [University Research Data Management Policy](#).

Intellectual property

For university-led projects, IP created by university employees in the course of the project will normally vest in the university. In line with AHRC expectations, project outputs should be shared openly wherever possible (e.g., via an appropriate Creative Commons licence). Background IP

stays with the originating party. Where outputs are cocreated with partners, the default is University ownership with partners granted a nonexclusive licence for agreed purposes. If outputs are commercially sensitive or require protection (e.g., for future licensing), ownership, licence scope, revenue sharing (if any) and any embargoes must be agreed with partners before work starts. You commercialisation office can guide you in these discussions.

Creative practitioner projects will normally retain copyright in the new works they create. As a condition of funding, the practitioner will grant the University a nonexclusive, royalty free, worldwide licence to use, reproduce and communicate the work for research, teaching, noncommercial impact, evaluation and publicity, with proper credit and respect for moral rights. Any partner's use will be covered by a similar nonexclusive licence set out in the short form collaboration agreement prepared by University of Edinburgh. Commercial exploitation by the artist remains with the artist unless otherwise agreed in writing.

Please contact gavin.leuzzi@ei.ed.ac.uk if you have queries.

Funder acknowledgement

Acknowledgement of BRAID and AHRC as the source of funding (with logos where possible) is required across all comms and outputs, and approvals for press/media releases should be submitted to BRAID before publication.

Further details will be provided in the award letter.

7. Award conditions and post-award

All awards are cash-limited, meaning that expenditure must not exceed the amount of the grant. Extensions are generally not available. However, in exceptional circumstances, no-cost extensions of up to 6 months may be approved by BRAID in advance of project end date if adequately justified in writing. Likewise, virements between budget categories of more than 5% must obtain prior-BRAID approval and be adequately justified in writing.

Ownership and use of new outputs must follow university IP policy, with clear respect to third-party rights and moral rights. Licences and assignments must be put in place with partners where needed. If you require support with partner agreements, subcontracts and due diligence, please contact gavin.leuzzi@ei.ed.ac.uk.

Reporting and programme engagement

Reporting will be kept to a minimum and completed through report gathering and online meetings. An informal online review meeting will take place at a suitable midpoint. An end of project report will be due one month after completion of the project along with an end of project meeting between BRAID, the AHRC, and your NAS and mentor (if requested).

Reporting requirements are intended to encourage open discussion and explore opportunities for BRAID to strengthen and support efforts by connecting your activities within the wider collective efforts of the BRAID community.

You will also be invited to actively participate in regular cohort support sessions with the BRAID programme throughout the project to help us build, strengthen and sustain our community.

Project leads will be expected to keep BRAID up to date on progress and any significant changes to the submitted proposal. They are also responsible for keeping track of spend throughout the project. You may also be asked to provide brief updates on spend against budget from time to time.

Audit and record-keeping

Award holders must keep accurate, complete and contemporaneous records sufficient to demonstrate that all costs are eligible, reasonable, and incurred within the award period, and that activities complied with university policies.

8. Privacy and data protection

Your personal data will always be processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018, the General Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), in line with [the University of Edinburgh's data protection policy](#). Our privacy notice can be found [here](#).

How we will use your personal data

We will need to collect some personal information to manage the application process and for monitoring and reporting purposes. We are using this information because by applying you initiate steps to have your research proposal considered for funding and if awarded, personal information will be used to enter into a contract with the University. For successful applications, we will hold the personal data you provide to us for as long as the AHRC requires us to. Unsuccessful applications will be kept for 5 years from the programme's closing date. We do not use profiling or automated decision-making processes.

Successful projects will be required to work with BRAID's project team, who will:

- connect the funded projects with each other as appropriate
- enable access to the programme's network and activities, and
- provide funded applicants with opportunities for networking.

The following details of the successful projects may be shared with the wider BRAID network for the above purposes:

- project name and contact email
- project lead's name and contact email
- a contact name and email for partner/s, and
- project summary and case for support.