Rethinking public dialogue:

A UKRI experimentation fund

UK Research and Innovation

About UKRI

UKRI brings together the seven disciplinary research councils, Research England, which is responsible for supporting research and knowledge exchange at higher education institutions in England, and the UK's innovation agency, Innovate UK.

Our nine councils work together in innovative ways to deliver an ambitious agenda, drawing on our great depth and breadth of expertise and the enormous diversity of our portfolio.

UKRI's vision is for an outstanding research and innovation system in the UK that gives everyone the opportunity to contribute and to benefit, enriching lives locally, nationally and internationally. Our mission is to convene, catalyse and invest in close collaboration with others to build a thriving, inclusive research and innovation system that connects discovery to prosperity and public good.

RSA

About the RSA

The RSA are committed to a future that works for everyone. A future where we can all participate in its creation.

This means that across the systems that surround us we want to promote conversation, connection and participation in formal and informal spaces. As research and innovation pulls us towards the future, it is critical that these principles are part of the sector's work.

That's why we're working with UKRI to pilot innovative approaches and learn from them to influence others.

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Overview of fund

The shared ambition of UKRI and the RSA with this fund is to provide an opportunity to look at cutting edge approaches to public dialogue and assess their merits to inform future public engagement activity. UKRI is committed to listening to and acting on diverse views to shape research and innovation priorities, and to co-creating a responsive and inclusive research and innovation system. The RSA is committed to a future where all can participate in its creation.

In practice, UKRI will fund experimental approaches to public dialogue, and test tools and methods that challenge, stretch, and modify traditional conceptions of how dialogue is conducted and what it can be used for.

UKRI will fund up to eight new pilot projects which test new approaches to bringing public perspectives into research and innovation on topics that align with **UKRI's five strategic themes**.

UKRI will fund pilots that deploy innovative and creative techniques to **extend reach**, facilitate '**bottom-up**', '**informal**' and '**inclusive**' engagement, and explore novel approaches to **understanding online debate**.

Pilots will work with the RSA to capture and share learning from their work and with the other funded pilots to grow understanding and encourage experimentation across the sector. UKRI will use this learning to develop and promote new types of engagement to research funders, policy-makers and public engagement practitioners.

The total value for this fund is £480,000 across all pilots. We envisage funding of up to £60,000 per pilot project, to include all costs associated with delivering pilot activity as well as engagement with the learning and dissemination commitments of the fund. Pilots are anticipated to last no longer than 9 months and should be concluded by early summer 2023.

What do we mean by public dialogue?

Definitions of public dialogue vary widely. We are using it as an umbrella term which describes a range of methods and tools with the shared purpose of helping people to connect to each other (digitally or face-to-face, synchronously or asynchronously) to exchange ideas and perspectives and engage with research and innovation topics.

A central feature of traditional public dialogue is deliberation, which allows time for participants to become informed, reflect on their own and others' views, uncover issues in depth with other people and come to a viewpoint. This fund has a more expanded scope.

It will pilot experimental approaches to public dialogue, and test tools and methods that go beyond tweaking at the margins, and instead challenge, stretch and modify traditional conceptions of how dialogue is conducted and what it can be used for. Further detail on the parameters the grant applicants will be expected to use when applying for the fund can be found in 'Pilot Scope'.

1. https://sciencewise.org.uk/about-dialogue/what-is-public-dialogue/
2. For further information see page 18 of https://www.involve.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/120727RCUKReview.pdf

Background to the fund

In the R&D People and Culture strategy[3] UKRI committed to pilot experimental approaches to public dialogue.

In 2020 Ipsos MORI called for practitioners to reimagine dialogue and deliberation in ways that incorporate the unique advantages that digital, online, and creative processes have to offer. It called for more piloting and evaluation of these approaches to give dialogue practitioners and commissioners more confidence using them.[4]
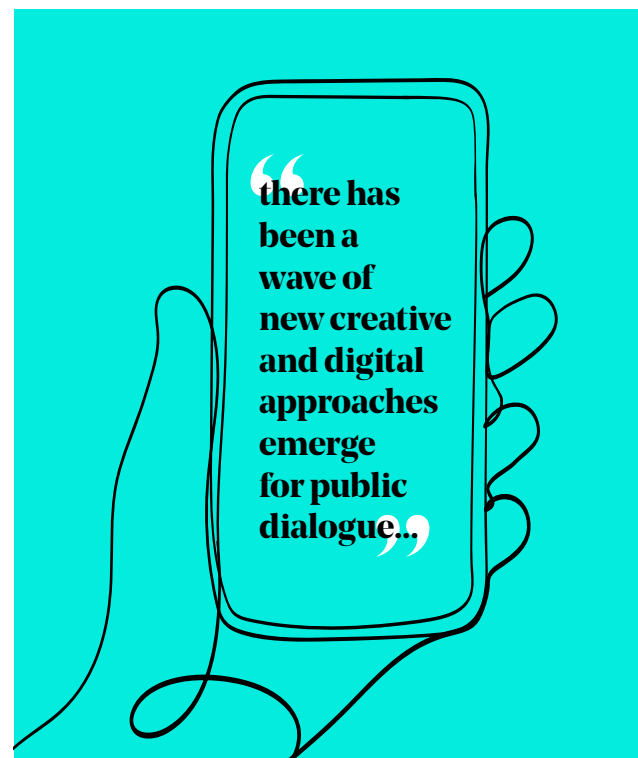
In the same year, the School of International Futures conducted a review of the **UKRI Sciencewise** programme. It recommended that the programme would benefit from greater methodological flexibility.[5] Previous Sciencewise evaluations have shown that innovation tends to be a bolt-on rather than part of the core approach.

Since then, there has been a wave of new creative and digital approaches emerge for public dialogue, accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic. However, as we look to embedding these innovations more widely, a lack of evidence risks limiting the potential to integrate them into, or use instead of, traditional forms of public dialogue.

In this fund, we want to uncover and explore exciting possibilities for digital and creative innovation. We want to pilot experimental approaches, and test tools and methods at the cutting edge; pilots that go beyond tweaking at the margins, and instead explore genuinely new and expansive possibilities and prospects for public dialogue.

By funding pilots explicitly focused on testing and evaluating new possibilities for conversation, connection, and cooperation, we hope to capture new evidence about their effectiveness that can help encourage the adoption of these approaches for policy-makers, research funders, and public engagement practitioners.

> " there has been a wave of new creative and digital approaches emerge for public dialogue… "

3. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1004685/r_d-people-culture-strategy.pdf
4. https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/towards-innovation-online-public-deliberation
5. https://sciencewise.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/SOIF-Report.pdf
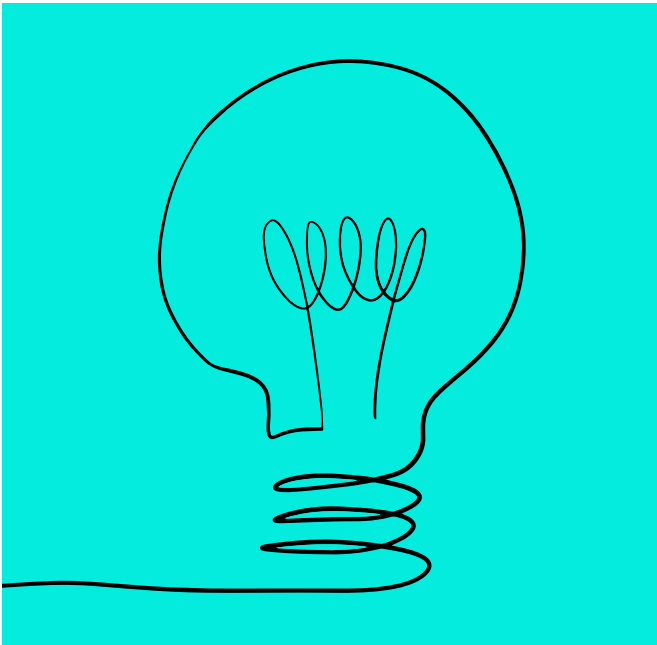
A supported approach to learning

Throughout pilot delivery the RSA will work closely with successful projects to capture, embed and share learning and evidence emerging from their new approaches. The RSA will remain in close conversation with all pilots to ensure they are on track to deliver activities outlined in their proposals and understand any additional support required to do so.

The RSA will hold structured learning spaces for pilots as individual initiatives and in cohort with each other. This includes tailored workshops, shared spaces across the cohort for peer support and feedback, and support for pilots to produce useful learning.

Successful pilots will produce their own outputs to share their learnings. This will include a report detailing their findings, which will be published at the end of the project, and working with the RSA to support dissemination through participating in events at the end of the pilot periods.

The RSA will bring together learnings from across the cohort in an interim and final synthesis report.

Pilot scope

UKRI and RSA is looking for innovative public dialogue pilots which address at least one of UKRI's priority themes and which align to at least one of the innovation strands.

We want to see projects which take on bold and creative new approaches and which will learn openly with each other and alongside the RSA.

Innovation strands

Each application must make clear what kind of innovation is being tested through their pilot and how their enquiry will contribute to, build upon, or address current gaps in, the wider evidence on what works in public dialogue.

We expect that applicants will likely design their pilots around one or more of the innovation strands listed below. However, please note that the fund is not limited to these five strands. We welcome additional ideas for experimental pilots in addition to, or instead of, the strands identified below, if a convincing case can be made based on a gap in the evidence.

1 Scaled engagement

New tools that offer ways to scale engagement to encompass a wider range of ideas, perspectives and lived experience. For this strand we want to test new possibilities that involve large numbers of people from diverse backgrounds connecting, cooperating and exchanging viewpoints on research and innovation.

Innovation strands continued

2 Informal engagement

For this strand we are looking for innovative techniques and tools that take conversations into new spaces (virtual, online or physical). We want to explore informal or unstructured forms of engagement that take place in wider public arenas beyond formal institutions, reach new audiences and help capture and represent people's views in new and useful ways.

3 Bottom-up engagement

For this strand we are looking for pilots that challenge the ways engagements involving the public are often activated (i.e. administered top-down according to a pre-determined scope and remit). We are seeking pilots that give people more influence in setting the agenda, are sensitive to power imbalances, and are conscious of not imposing framings or ways of thinking onto participants.

4 Inclusive engagement

Pilots in this strand should actively test new ways to improve inclusion and build participation among people from different backgrounds, needs, and abilities. There is evidence that many existing methods and tools favour those with specific skills or resources, and do not take active steps to mitigate against pre-existing inequalities.

5 Novel approaches to understanding online debate

This strand will capture and analyse people's online behaviour (e.g. online search) and online discussions (e.g. on social media and online forums). Pilots should consider how this could be combined with more traditional engagement methods, to make them more responsive to public views.

UKRI priority themes

While the focus of this project is method experimentation, each pilot must generate insight on how the public think and feel about research and innovation. Applicants to the fund will be asked to propose a topic/issues to align with the following UKRI programmes and priorities.[6]

These are:

Building a green future

Helping to improve the health of our environment and deliver net zero, securing prosperity across the whole of the UK. Our whole systems solutions will secure business growth, jobs, skills and increased productivity, ensuring a green future for all, addressing environmental and net-zero challenges in all sectors of the economy.

Securing better health, ageing and wellbeing

Advancing people's health and promoting wellbeing to maintain prosperous, productive and resilient communities throughout the UK and globally, supporting the UK Life Sciences Vision by addressing challenges around ageing, living with multiple conditions, mental health and health inequalities.

Tackling infections

Protecting and enhancing health, our food supply and our natural capital by building knowledge and capabilities to detect and disrupt the emergence and spread of human, animal and plant diseases, accelerate new vaccines and therapeutics, and halt the 'slow motion pandemic' of antimicrobial resistance.

Building a secure and resilient world

Strengthening social and economic resilience, and enhancing national security across virtual and physical spaces, by improving awareness of risks and threats, preparedness, decision-making and response, and allowing change to be understood as a force for good.

Creating opportunities, improving outcomes

Understanding the causes and effects of place-based disparities and finding empowering new solutions that promote prosperity and improve outcomes for people and communities across the UK.

Eligibility and requirements

We are anticipating public engagement practitioners, and experts in technology, design, creative arts, entertainment, communications, and digital to be a good match for this fund, but welcome other types of organisations.

As a registered charity in the UK, the RSA can only fund projects for exclusively charitable purposes as defined by the UK Charity Commission.

To satisfy this, you **do not need to be a charity** (see eligible organisation types below), but your project must:

- Benefit the public in general, or a sufficient section of the public – what is a 'sufficient section of the public' varies from purpose to purpose;

- Not give rise to more than incidental personal benefit (to an individual or organisation) – personal benefit is 'incidental' where (having regard both to its nature and to its amount) it is a necessary result or by-product of carrying out the purpose.

For more information on what is considered charitable, please see the **UK Charity Commission's pages on charitable purpose and public benefit.**

We also require that the lead organisation in the application be registered in the UK, but we are open to consortia or partnerships which involve organisations in other countries.

We can only award funding to organisations that are registered with the relevant body (e.g. Companies House or the Charity Commission):

- Non-profits/charitable organisations.

- Community Interest Companies (CICs).

- Companies Limited by Guarantee where there is a lock-in clause requiring that profits go to a charitable purpose, and where assets cannot be divested.

- We will consider other governance structures on a case-by-case basis, but due to the fund being distributed as grant funding, cannot consider Companies Limited by Shares under any circumstances.

Other requirements

Successful pilots will need to fulfil the following requirements:

• Pilots must be delivered within, at most, a nine month period, from September 2022.

• Pilots will be required to participate in learning activities.

  This will consist of:

  - Supported by RSA, projects will develop a plan for collecting data to assess outcomes against the pilot hypotheses.

  - Activities convened by the RSA, taking the form of a mix of individual sessions and spaces shared with other pilots. These will be held approximately every other month during the pilots and are expected to be online.

  - Contributing to or leading outputs to share learnings, including a final report and participation in events that aim to disseminate learnings.

• Pilots must notify the RSA of any changes to the project as described in the application, or of any challenges that will have an impact on the project as described in the application.

Criteria

Applications will be assessed according to five criteria. For each criteria there is information that must be provided – either at the Expression of Interest or full application stage – and sub-criteria which they will be scored against. These are:

Criteria 1	Innovation
	Applicants must clearly identify an area of innovation that aligns to at least one of the innovation strands of this fund and/or contributes to, builds upon or addresses gaps in the wider evidence on innovative participation.
Bidder guidance	**Expressions of Interest** will be scored on how well they demonstrate potential of bringing something genuinely novel to public dialogue practice.
Scoring criteria	Scoring shall be based on 0-100 scoring methodology. MAXIMUM MARK = 20%

Criteria 2	Learning
	Applicants must include a clear and compelling rationale for their pilot and a robust plan for how they will assess their pilot.
Bidder guidance	**Full applications** will be scored on how achievable within the parameters of the fund their learning ambitions are.
Scoring criteria	Scoring shall be based on 0-100 scoring methodology. MAXIMUM MARK = 20%

Continued

Criteria continued

Criteria	3	Methodology
		Applicants must include details of how innovative and workable their methodology is.
Bidder guidance		Expressions of Interest and full applications will be scored on how innovative and workable their methodology is.
Scoring criteria		Scoring shall be based on 0-100 scoring methodology. MAXIMUM MARK = 20%

Criteria	4	Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
		Applicants must include due consideration to embedding equity, diversity and inclusion.
Bidder guidance		Full applications will be scored on the extent to which their equity, diversity and inclusion plans are appropriate to and commensurate with the aims of the project.
Scoring criteria		Scoring shall be based on 0-100 scoring methodology. MAXIMUM MARK = 20%

Criteria	5	Co-ordination and assurance
		Applicants must show they can successfully deliver the proposed pilot within the defined timeframe.
Bidder guidance		Expressions of Interest will be scored on how well they demonstrate experience, capacity and capability to deliver. Full applications will be scored on how well they have considered potential risks and put in place mitigations. Full applications will be scored on how realistic their timings and budgets are for delivery and completion.
Scoring criteria		Scoring shall be based on 0-100 scoring methodology. MAXIMUM MARK = 20%

Assessment process

The fund has a three-step application process. Dates for each step and decisions are included in the next section.

1

Submit an Expression of Interest (EOI)

This is a short form open to anybody who meets the eligibility criteria and is seeking to pilot an innovative approach to public dialogue that is aligned with the fund. As well as collecting some basic information about applicants, the EOI will include questions on:

- The innovation strand and focus area your project will address.
- A summary of your project: the approach and the intended outcomes.
- The gap in existing evidence and/or practice your project is addressing.
- Your project methodology.
- Your experience delivering similar projects.

2

Submit a full application

After screening and selection based on EOIs, we will invite a smaller number of applicants to submit a full application as part of step two. This application form will offer the opportunity for applicants to provide more detail and will take longer to complete. This will include questions on:

- Further elaboration of what you outline in your EOI.
- A detailed project plan and budget.
- Your evaluation approach.
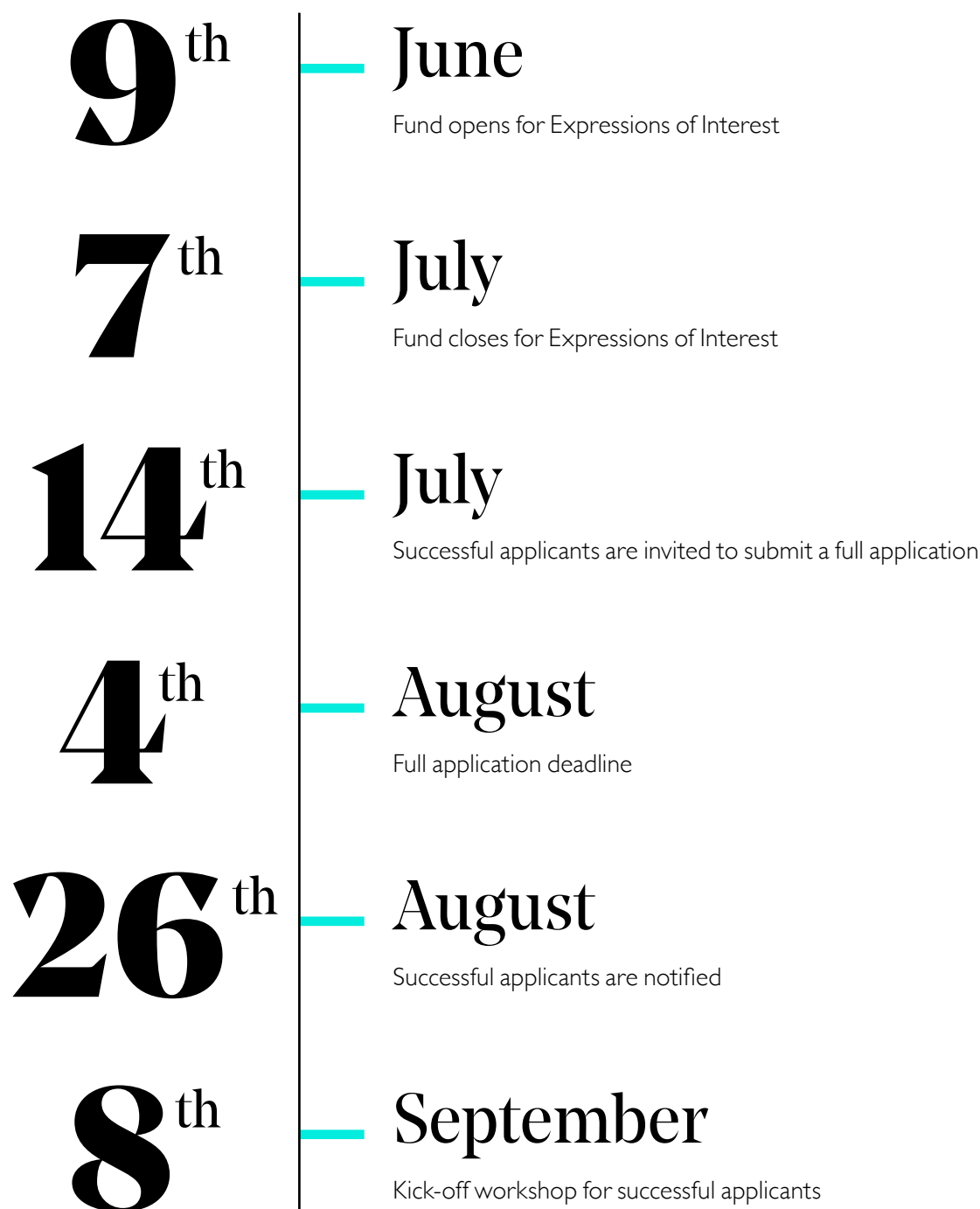- The risks associated with your project and a mitigation plan.

3

Application review

These applications will be reviewed by a panel of experts from the UKRI, RSA and further afield, with up to eight pilots being selected for funding. The criteria used at all stages of the application process can be found in the 'Criteria' section of this application pack.

Timeline of key dates

There are a number of key dates to be aware of for this fund. To ensure you are able to meet deadlines, please consider the entire timeline – from fund opening to the kick-off workshops – before applying.

9th — June

Fund opens for Expressions of Interest

7th — July

Fund closes for Expressions of Interest

14th — July

Successful applicants are invited to submit a full application

4th — August

Full application deadline

26th — August

Successful applicants are notified

8th — September

Kick-off workshop for successful applicants

In the event the timeline changes for any reason, we will notify applicants as soon as possible.

How to apply

You can submit an expression of interest for this fund through our **application portal.**

If you have any questions relating to the contents of this pack, or any questions at any stage of the application process, please contact **publicdialogue@rsa.org.uk** and we will respond as soon as possible.

Contact the public dialogue team

You can reach the public dialogue team by
email at **publicdialogue@rsa.org.uk**
or by phone on 0800 211 8009