



# Strategic Fund call for applications

July 2019

The Nuffield Foundation invites applications from 1 October 2019 to our £15m Strategic Fund. Between 2020 and 2022 we will fund a small number of ambitious, interdisciplinary projects that will address key issues affecting UK society and shaping the public policy agenda over the next decade.

## Context

In our [Strategy](#), we set out our ambition to increase the scale, scope and influence of the research projects we fund, and to engage with a broader range of applicants. Since publishing the Strategy, we have launched several landmark projects across our core domains of Education, Welfare and Justice.

We now want to encourage applicants from research communities, across universities, research institutes, think tanks and voluntary organisations, to come forward with ideas for our Strategic Fund.

We have earmarked £15m to fund a small number of projects between 2020 and 2022. These will need to be framed as specific questions amenable to rigorous research methods, but they must also have the ambition to address the most significant themes and developments that will shape the UK public policy agenda and our society over the next decade and beyond.

## Themes and questions

The Strategic Fund is additional to our regular research grants in Education, Welfare and Justice. We expect Strategic Fund projects to be of a scale and scope not normally funded through our standard process. In particular, we want Strategic Fund projects to bring a broad, multi-disciplinary approach to addressing the questions and issues they examine. Successful applications will take account, in some regard, of the cross-cutting themes, set out in our [Strategy](#).

- How do digital technologies and digital communications alleviate, exacerbate and shift vulnerability, and affect concepts of trust, evidence, and authority?
- In what ways do factors such as socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity, community, and geography affect the vulnerability of people to different types of risk, and how can this be mitigated?
- What interventions might promote opportunity and reduce adversity through different life stages, and promote social inclusion between and across generations?
- What are the social and economic implications of physical and mental disability and chronic illness?
- How can social policy institutions make better use of research, evidence, and data in order to understand better the needs of those they serve, and improve services and outcomes?

Additionally, at the recent [Tri-Nuffield Conference](#), the following topics featured prominently in discussions:

- The impact of the fourth industrial revolution on social and economic inclusion.
- The future of education in a digitally driven society and its relationship to employment.
- The decline of trust in the legitimacy of public institutions, including the justice system.
- The conditions in which communities can be successful and enable effective social policy interventions.

Some snapshot videos of conference speakers are available on the conference [playlist](#).

As an independent Foundation, we want to give applicants the freedom to frame distinctive questions for themselves and to enable new thinking that might otherwise not be supported. We are sure that applicants will themselves identify many other themes and we encourage them to submit original and challenging proposals on topics they think are the most important questions facing society now and in coming years.

## Our approach

We expect to fund a small number of projects of varying size - we envisage in the range of £1m to £3m. We will consider collaborative applications from more than one institution. We will also consider co-funded projects.

Applications for the Strategic Fund should:

- Demonstrate a rigorous approach to research whilst at the same time articulating the distinctive and significant questions for society that will connect with a range of potential audiences.
- Open up possibilities for fresh interdisciplinary approaches and encourage the use of innovative methods.
- Give opportunities to a new generation of the best research talent as well as encouraging the best ideas.
- Show how the proposed work would involve not only academics but those in policy, practice, the voluntary sector, and wider civic society.
- Set out the intended impact of the project and how that might be achieved.
- Set out an ambitious communications and dissemination strategy and be prepared to work closely with the Nuffield Foundation in developing and implementing it.

While projects must directly concern UK issues and society, projects involving international comparisons are encouraged.

## How the Strategic Fund will work

The application process will be deliberately flexible. This is intended to prevent long delays in considering applications that are ready for scrutiny and, conversely, avoid the risk of

considering prematurely ideas that require further development. Applicants will therefore be able to submit outline proposals at any time from 1 October 2019; before and after that date we will also be open to preliminary conversations on plans for proposals. However, to ensure fairness and coherence, there will be set dates over the next two years when we will review outline proposals in a gathered field, the first in December 2019.

Our aim is to fund flexibly over time, committing the £15m fund gradually over the course of 2020- 2022. The funding will be phased so it will not all be spent in the first rounds of applications.

## **The application process**

Full details of the application process for the Strategic Fund will be available in the Strategic Fund Guide for Applicants, which will be available in September 2019. In summary, the application process will be:

1. Submission of an outline application that provides a clear and compelling account of the proposal, how it meets the criteria for our Strategic Fund, and the impact it is expected to achieve.
2. Invitation to submit a full application (where an outline application has been shortlisted).
3. Review of full applications, after which applicants will be invited to respond to reviewers' comments.
4. Final funding decisions made by Nuffield Foundation Trustees, informed by a recommendation from Foundation staff.

We welcome discussions during both the development of applications and the application process, to give each application the best chance of success.

Outlines can be submitted at any time after 1 October 2019. The first gathered field deadline for applications will be 9 December 2019, for a decision on funding for the first batch of shortlisted projects in July 2020. There will be further dates for future gathered fields across 2020 and 2021 – the precise dates will be announced in September 2019, but are planned for spring/summer and late autumn of 2020, and in the first half of 2021. We may encourage some outlines that we regard as promising but requiring more work to be further developed for a later round. Similarly, where applicants are shortlisted to submit full applications that show promise but are assessed as not yet ready for a decision on funding, we may ask them to re-work their bid for consideration at a later Trustees' meeting.

## **Developing bids: seed corn funding**

We would like to encourage applicants' original thinking around ideas and methods, and to enable them to explore these (as well as collaborative, multi-disciplinary approaches) before submitting outline proposals. We recognise this may require an approach and level of preparation beyond that required of an application to our regular research grants.

Accordingly, we are giving applicants the opportunity to apply for seed corn grants to support the development of ideas for Strategic Fund applications and which might be used to convene those from relevant different disciplines to explore them. We do not expect every Strategic Fund outline application to require seed corn funding, and the award of such funding is not a prerequisite for submitting an outline application to the Strategic Fund.

The seed corn application process will be straightforward - a short form setting out the nature of the proposed work and how it relates to your initial thinking around a Strategic Fund bid. The sums available will vary depending on the nature of each request, but we anticipate awarding grants of around £5,000. The application process for seed corn funding is separate from applying to the Strategic Fund.

Seed corn funding will be available on an ongoing basis from September 2019. We will make a decision on seed corn applications quickly: all funding decisions will be made within 20 working days of submission, but we will aim to respond to the majority of applicants within 10 working days. The process will be:

1. Applicants submit seed corn applications via the online portal (from 20 August).
2. From 2 September, Nuffield Foundation staff assess applications and make decisions on funding (contacting applicants for queries or clarification where needed).
3. Applicants are informed of the outcome (there will be no further feedback).
4. Successful applicants receive funding (normally within two weeks of the decision).
5. After the completion of the work, seed corn grant holders submit a short report to the Nuffield Foundation.

## Next steps

The Nuffield Foundation Strategic Fund represents a major new funding opportunity. We are keen to see applications to the Fund addressing the key issues affecting UK society now and in the coming decade.

We will publish full guidance for applicants in September 2019, and outline applications can be submitted any time from 1 October 2019. The deadline for the first gathered field for outline applications will be 9 December 2019, for shortlisting and final funding decisions by July 2020. Further deadlines for the review of outline applications will occur later in 2020 and 2021 (details to be announced). Applications for seed corn funding to assist with the development of outline applications will open on 20 August, with funding awarded from September 2019.

We encourage potential applicants and others who might be interested in the Fund to [register for updates](#). We will notify you by email when the guidance for applicants is published, and keep you informed of all future dates and information.