

# National Research Centre on Privacy, Harm Reduction and Adversarial Influence Online (REPHRAIN)

## Strategic Funding Call 4 – 24 July 2023

**Closing date: 01 September 2023**

REPHRAIN is an EPSRC funded research centre that forms part of the wider UKRI investment focusing on protecting citizens online. REPHRAIN explores how to keep people safe online while allowing them to fully participate in digital technologies and the contributions they make to innovative, inclusive and healthy economy and society.

REPHRAIN involves researchers in Computer Science, International Relations, Law, Psychology, Management, Design, Digital Humanities, Public Policy, Political Science, Criminology and Sociology. It leads the UK's world-leading interdisciplinary community on protecting citizens online and provide a clear single front door to engage and build capacity with government, industry and citizens.

Since its start in October 2020, the REPHRAIN centre now has a critical mass of over 100 internationally leading experts at 16 UK institutions working across 45 different and diverse research projects. The centre also collaborates with the new UKRI/EPSC Protecting Citizens Online complementary projects based at the University of Surrey, Sheffield Hallam University, Heriot-Watt University and Newcastle University. Further details can be found here <https://www.rephrain.ac.uk/>.

### **Call details**

This is the fourth REPHRAIN funding call and aims to highlight research questions and challenges that are not currently being addressed by active REPHRAIN projects. A scoping workshop involving REPHRAIN members was undertaken to help identify and formalise the call topics listed below.

The total funding for this call is £340,000 (at 100% FEC), of which 80% will be funded by REPHRAIN. We expect to fund multiple proposals from this fund and will consider larger proposals that address more than one topic area. All funded projects must be completed, with all deliverables, by **31 August 2024**. Proposals should be submitted by **4pm on 01 September 2023** at <https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=rephrainsfc4>. The Strategic Funding decision panel will meet **w/c 09 October 2023** and decisions expected to be communicated **w/c 16 October 2023**.

### **Call topics**

This strategic funding call is for projects that relate to [REPHRAIN's missions and research challenges](#). In addition, we particularly encourage proposals that focus on the following topics:

#### **Remediation of data breaches in terms of privacy and harmful impacts on citizens**

When organisations suffer data breaches, there is a significant cost to citizens not only in terms of privacy and data loss but also effort expended to trace and mitigate the impacts from such breaches. What is the empirical evidence that particular mitigation measures (e.g., use of tools or tracing mechanisms provided by credit agencies or services that monitor darknet markets for stolen data and credentials being sold)? How can organisations which are breached better support those impacted? Are effective solutions technical, sociotechnical, legal or regulatory or is "local" remediation a better option with local law enforcement, citizen support organisations and informal support networks being involved?

## **Regulation, transparency and governance for Generative AI with regards to privacy and online harms**

With the growth and rapid developments of Generative AI, how this technology is regulated and the transparency of its governance is under scrutiny. What are different stakeholders' understanding of privacy and online harms resulting from Generative AI? In particular, what are citizens' concerns in this regard? What new types of online harms emerge and which existing harms can be scaled up? Research across different disciplines is required to inform approaches to regulation, transparency and governance of Generative AI in this regard. *Note: the focus of any projects should be on privacy and online harms and not on Generative AI in general.*

## **Research methods and data sources "toolkits" for studying online harms**

There is a need for sharing of best practices on studying online harms as well as validation and transparency of research instruments, methods and data sources (especially where data is drawn from online sources). We welcome projects that consider how research instruments and data sources can be made more transparent and available to researchers. Consideration could be given to how research methods used for studying online harms are validated and what is the research evidence on which they are based.

The above are indicative topics and we welcome proposals on additional related topics within the scope of REPHRAIN's missions.

## **Funding**

The total amount available for this Call will be up to £340,000 at 100% full Economic Cost (fEC), of which 80% fEC (i.e., up to £272,000) will be made available to successful applicants. In practical terms this means that UK HEI researchers should cost their projects using the same process as they would cost a UKRI grant. All costs should be inclusive of VAT and/or any other applicable tax. The duration of work proposed under this Call should not last more than 10 months and should run between **01 November 2023** and **31 August 2024**. REPHRAIN will not reimburse costs associated with the development or submission of a proposal.

## **Proposals should be costed and approved by the applicant's organisation before submission.**

## **Submission**

Please submit the proposal as a single PDF by **4pm on the 01 September 2023** using the form and upload system at: <https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=rephrainsfc4>. If you do not already have an EasyChair account you will need to set one up [here](#). If you already have an account, you should be able to access the REPHRAIN SFC 4 submission page using your current credentials. Please ensure you select the role of author before submitting your proposal.

Submissions should not exceed five pages plus short CVs, comprising:

- 1) The research challenge to be addressed and its alignment with REPHRAIN's missions and RIEI (Responsible Inclusive Ethical Innovation) approach (1 page max)
- 2) Interdisciplinarity objectives (1/2 page max)
- 3) Proposed methodology including clearly defined milestones (1 ½ page max)
- 4) Proposed outcomes and potential for integration with the REPHRAIN toolbox (1 page max)
- 5) Financial summary (divided into directly incurred and allocated staff costs, travel, subsistence and other costs, estates and indirect costs. (1 page max). The costs should be in sufficient detail to allow for value for money judgements to be made.

Please attach short (2 page) CVs for all applicants and named researchers at the end of the proposal. Please ensure the proposal and CVs are merged as one single PDF. A [submission template](#) can be found on the REPHRAIN website.

***All documents must be completed in single-spaced typescript in Arial pt 11 or other sans serif typeface of equivalent size, with margins of at least 2cm. Arial narrow and Calibri are not allowable font types and page limits must not be exceeded. Each section listed above (1-5) should be clearly labelled.***

### **Eligibility**

The Call is open to Higher Education Institutions who can demonstrate a capability to deliver a high-quality programme of research. We strongly encourage applications from researchers in all disciplines and encourage proposals that are interdisciplinary and involve strong engagement and partnerships with non-academic stakeholders. This call will follow the [standard EPSRC eligibility criteria](#).

### **Assessment**

All proposals will be reviewed by at least two expert peer reviewers, and then evaluated by a Strategic Fund decision panel. Applications that are not submitted in the format requested in above, or that are outside of the scope of this call, may be rejected without recourse to peer review.

### **Criteria**

Submissions will be scored by peer reviews across the following domains:

- 1) Understanding of the challenge and its national importance
- 2) Quality and rigour of methodology
- 3) Responsible innovation
- 4) Potential impact and integration with the REPHRAIN toolbox
- 5) Value for money and deliverability
- 6) Team track record, particularly interdisciplinarity of team

### **Grant conditions**

Successful applicants will receive an offer letter that will outline the terms of the sub-contract with REPHRAIN. These are standard UKRI terms and conditions, but with some minor amendments related to the source of funding and relationship with the REPHRAIN research centre.

Please note that all research successfully funded via the REPHRAIN Strategic Funding Calls will be required to receive REPHRAIN ethics approval as well as institutional ethics approval before commencing work.

**Applicants should share these terms with their organisation research contracts team to ensure these terms are acceptable before applying for funding. The terms are non-negotiable and no amendments will be accepted. Copies of the draft [terms and conditions](#) are available on the REPHRAIN website.**

### **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**

The long-term strength of the UK research base depends on harnessing all the available talent and the Research Councils together developed the ambitious UKRI Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan. In line with the [UKRI's policies on equality, diversity and inclusion](#), we expect that

equality, diversity, and inclusion are embedded at all levels and in all aspects of applicants' research proposals.

We are committed to supporting the research community in the diverse ways a research career can be built. Therefore, we welcome applications from researchers who job share, have a part-time contract, need flexible working arrangements or those currently committed to other longer, large existing grants.