Access Fund (Second Call): Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

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Key facts at a glance:

Award size	Up to £20,000, including eligible costs for the applicants and Service Providers
Call closes	Tuesday 15 December 2026 (Annual fund will reopen)
Apply through	Citizen Space
Contact	RICHeS@ahrc.ukri.org
Full Supporting Guidance Available	Applicant Supporting Guidance

Scope and what the call funds

Q1. What is the RICHeS Access Fund?
The RICHeS Access Fund helps heritage professionals, researchers and organisations gain access to expertise, nationally significant reference collections and cutting-edge equipment including mobile units. This is an annual fund.

Q2. What is an Access Fund grant for?
These grants cover costs associated with enabling access to specialist research infrastructure for both applicants and Service Providers. The RICHeS Access Fund is not designed to fund wider project activities that take place before, after, or outside the proposed infrastructure access.

Applicant eligibility

Q3. Am I eligible?
The RICHeS Access Fund is designed to support a broad range of individuals and organisations. Detailed guidance on eligibility is provided in the Applicant Supporting Guidance. Please contact RICHeS IHQ with any outstanding queries after reviewing this guidance.

Q4. Do applicants need to be based in the UK?
Yes, for Access Fund grants lead applicants must be based in the UK and work must be undertaken in the UK. Please contact RICHeS Service Providers to explore wider opportunities for international collaboration.

Q5. Is my commercial company eligible?
Commercial companies can engage with the RICHeS Access Fund when working in collaboration with an eligible partner organisation (excluding chosen Service Providers), such as a gallery, library, museum, archive, charitable or educational body, or any other UKRI eligible organisation. This excludes cases where institutions are subcontracting to a commercial company or entity, as this would be a commercial relationship. Please contact RICHeS Service Providers to explore wider opportunities for commercial collaboration.

Q6. Are RICHeS Service Provider partners eligible?
Individuals who are named on, or directly funded through, a RICHeS investment may apply to the RICHeS Access Fund only if their application is for a different RICHeS Service Provider from the one(s) with which they are formally associated. This restriction applies specifically to individuals and named partners. It is possible for someone else, not the named Project Partner lead(s), in a partnered organisation to apply for an Access Fund grant to enable access to your organisation. Please note: Not all 'partners' listed in an original application may technically meet the AHRC definition of 'Project Partner,' so please refer to the definition in the AHRC Research Funding Guide.

Selecting Service Providers

Q7. Can I only apply to access Service Providers listed on the HSDS Catalogue of Services?
Yes. Providers eligible for the RICHeS Access Fund on the HSDS Catalogue of Services feature an 'Apply for RICHeS access' button.

Q8. Can I apply to only access a collection and not a facility?
Yes. You can access any eligible Provider, including the reference collections. RICHeS invests in both cutting-edge facilities and nationally significant reference collections.

Q9. Do I have to work with my local Service Provider?
RICHeS is a distributed infrastructure to support collaborations across the UK, but no, you can work with any Provider. Applicants' travel and courier costs are eligible costs.

Q10. Can I access more than one Service Provider (such as multiple reference collections)?
Yes. You can apply to access multiple Service Providers, and you can select multiple on the application form. The total cost for the overall application remains up to £20,000. We strongly advise engaging with each Provider of interest, as they will be able to advise on potential flows between services.

Building your application

Q11. Can I apply to research just one or several objects?
Yes, there is no minimum or maximum number of potential subjects of study for an Access Fund grant. Your conversations with Service Providers will establish what is feasible.

Q12. Is staff time for applicants an eligible cost?
No, applicants cannot claim staff salary costs for the applicant or other employees of the applicant's organisation (including during the funded work or its preparation). Details on eligible costs are provided in the supporting guidance.

Q13. If, to complete the work, an additional piece of equipment was needed and could be rented, could that cost be covered by the Access Fund?
Any associated costs must be included in the application budget at the point of submission, as additional funding cannot be provided after an award has been made. Equipment hire may be eligible where the equipment is owned by an Access Fund Service Provider, the Provider is satisfied that it can be operated safely and effectively, and its use is required to deliver the proposed access activity. Applicants are encouraged to discuss their requirements with Service Providers when developing their proposal. Equipment requests not necessary for the access activity proposed are not eligible.

Q14. If we have an existing research grant funded by AHRC or UKRI, can we apply to the Access Fund to extend the scope of the project?
Existing AHRC or UKRI grant holders are eligible to apply, where they meet the eligibility requirements outlined in the Applicant Supporting Guidance. However, the Access Fund cannot be used to fund activities or costs that are already supported through another award. Where the proposed access activity builds on an existing AHRC or UKRI-funded project, applicants may be asked to provide the relevant grant reference number and explain how the requested access represents additional activity beyond the scope of the original award. This information may be used by RICHeS IHQ to ensure there is no duplication of funding.

Q15. Does a lead applicant need to be employed for the duration of the access window to March 2028?
Employment to March 2028 is not required as, if for example you anticipate employment through to December 2027, access could be provided before this date. Engage with the Service Providers to discuss possible timings. However, this should be considered carefully, particularly in regard to whether the impacts from the access will be negatively affected. Please note, co-leads can be included on the application.

Q16. What if I cannot complete the access before March 2028?
Feasibility has a 30% weighting in the application assessment, and all access funded through the Second Call must be completed by the end of March 2028 to enable funding. The RICHeS Access Fund is an annual fund, and a future call may be more feasible. Extensions will only be considered under exceptional mitigating circumstances that are outside the reasonable control of the recipient or Service Provider. Inadequate planning relating to feasibility is not an acceptable mitigating circumstance. All requests must be submitted to RICHeS IHQ and will be assessed on a case-by-case basis, and approval is not guaranteed. You should therefore always only apply if you can confirm you are able to complete your activity within the approved timeframe, which for the Second Call is by the end of March 2028.

Q17. Can I resubmit an unsuccessful application?
In line with AHRC's resubmission policy, applicants may submit an application for a future call, provided that the focus of their work is not the same as, or substantively similar to, their previous unsuccessful application. This means any resubmitted application will need to show substantive differences in the focus of the work to the original version.

Public domain, copyright and data deposition

Q18. Does the subject of the study need to be in the public domain?
The material under study, or related to the study, must be in the public domain. If the material under study, or related to the study, is not currently in the public domain the route to making it publicly accessible must be clearly articulated within the application.

Q19. Do the outcomes of the access need to be in the public domain?
After completion, successful applicants are required to deposit data from the access with the Heritage Science Data Service or another approved repository to support further research. To allow researchers to publish their findings, the release of datasets may be embargoed for a set period in agreement with the HSDS. RICHeS IHQ will also collate case studies and utilise these with your permission.

Q20. Does material in the public domain have to be out of copyright, or can I include material able to be made accessible under non-commercial use?
To be eligible for the RICHeS Access Fund the material under study must be accessible to the public, or there be a clear route to making it so. There are no restrictions on whether it must be out of copyright in terms of application eligibility.

Q21. What happens to data copyright and IPR?
Researchers (and/or Service Providers according to their agreements with users) will retain copyright and IPR in all research data deposited with the HSDS, but will be required to sign a deposit agreement that gives the HSDS a non-exclusive licence to take whatever steps are needed to ensure preservation of the datasets and make them available for reuse. This will be under an appropriate open licence. The default HSDS data licence is a Creative Commons CC-BY 4.0 but alternatives, including CC-0, CC-BY-NC, and OGL (Open Government Licence) are available on request. Visit the HSDS for further information.

Q22. Where can I find further information on how to complete the required HSDS data deposition?
Please review the Access Fund Deposit Guide on the HSDS (Heritage Science Data Service).

Q23. Is the HSDS data deposit fee in addition to the £20,000?
The cost of depositing data with HSDS is covered by RICHeS outside of your application, with no additional fee to you. Your application for up to £20,000 should focus on your access costs, not the data deposition.

Contact details

Q24. How do I contact Service Providers?
Search the HSDS Catalogue of Services to identify suitable RICHeS Service Provider(s). To support applicants, contact details for each Service Provider are available alongside their service information.

Q25. How do I contact RICHeS IHQ?
Email RICHeS IHQ at RICHeS@ahrc.ukri.org