

Research Software Maintenance Fund (RSMF): Terms and Conditions

Introduction

About the RSMF

The Research Software Maintenance Fund (RSMF) is managed by the Software Sustainability Institute (SSI) as part of the SSI Phase 4 grant. The fund aims to support and maintain existing research software that is vital to the UK research community.

Fund Purpose

The RSMF is specifically designed to support and maintain existing research software. This fund is not intended for developing new software but rather for ensuring the continued availability, functionality, and sustainability of software that is already being used by the research community.

The RSMF is aimed at funding work -- particularly around reducing technical debt, improving user experience, and building community -- that will improve the sustainability of research software.

It is intended to fund the following types of activities:

Technical - updates to code/software: e.g.

developing components/plugins/integrations to improve interoperability;

improving user experience for end users;

structural improvements to the codebase (refactoring/rearchitecting, scalability, porting, testing).

Community - development of materials or events used to engage users or developers: e.g.

community meetings and outreach to users;

contribution process improvement (including Code of Conduct development);

sprints, hackathons;

dissemination (including blog posts, case studies).

Documentation - revisions and extensions to written material used as reference for users and/or developers: e.g.

user manuals;

contributor guides;

project websites;

tutorials.

Training - events or schemes to improve users and/or developers' ability: e.g.

hosting in-person or virtual courses and workshops;

mentoring new contributors to the project.

Governance - activities to improve management and/or sustainability: e.g.

improving governance structures;

developing roadmaps;

working with advisors to improve sustainability/identify business models.

Key Project Details

Fund Name: Research Software Maintenance Fund (RSMF)

Total Funding Pot: £4.8m

UKRI Grant Reference: AH/Z000114/1 (SSI Phase 4)

Grant Holder: The University Court of the University of Edinburgh

Fund Manager: Software Sustainability Institute (SSI)

Terminology

Award: A grant made under the Research Software Maintenance Fund.

Grantee: The organisation receiving funding through an RSMF award.

Lead Organisation: The UK research organisation that submits the application and takes responsibility for the management of the award.

Project Lead: The individual responsible for leading the funded project. This person can be a software creator, project manager, RSE, researcher/academic, or other relevant role.

Co-Lead: An individual from a partner organisation who assists in leading the project.

fEC: Full Economic Cost.

Award Types

Large Awards

- Up to £500,000 for two years
- Intended for maintenance projects involving several related activities

Note: Large Awards will only be available in Round 1, due to time constraints.

Small Awards

- Up to £150,000 for one year
- Intended for maintenance projects with a small number of well-defined short activities

Note: Small Awards will be available in all Rounds.

Eligibility Requirements

The Project Lead must be based at an organisation eligible for UKRI funding. A Project Lead may submit multiple Expressions of Interest, but the SSI reserves the right to limit the number of full applications that may be submitted by an applicant, depending on demand.

To be eligible for funding, applicants must demonstrate that the software(s) they maintain:

- Is beyond the prototype/pilot stage and has had at least one stable release.
- Is used by people outside their organisation(s), and is used beyond the immediate collaborators of the software's developers/wider project team.
- Supports research being carried out in the United Kingdom.
- Is open to feedback and additional contributors.
- Is committed to developing a roadmap and sustainability/business plan.

Software is recommended but not required to be openly licensed, however, the SSI encourages all grantees to consider how they can improve practices to enable an active community of users and contributors.

Funding Restrictions

All expenditure must comply with UKRI funding rules. The following restrictions apply:

All projects must be completed by 29 February 2028.

Funds cannot be used for developing entirely new software.

Funds cannot be spent or used beyond the end date of the project.

Alcohol is not permitted and should not be sought as an eligible cost.

Funding Rates and Team Composition

Funding Rates for Different Organisation Types

UK Research Organisations: Will be funded at 80% of the full economic cost (fEC).

International Research Organizations: Funding rates vary as detailed in the International Project Co-Leads section.

Team Composition and Restrictions

Project Co-Leads from UK Business, Third Sector or Government (PcLs):

- Cannot serve as Project Leads
- The combined costs of all PcLs from UK business, third sector, government organisations, and any Project co-Leads (International) (PcL(I)s) from non-OECD DAC list countries must not exceed 50% of the total fEC of the grant application (at 100% fEC)
- No more than 75% of the number of leads (Project Lead, PcLs, PcL(I)s) can be from business, third sector, government organisations, and international partners

Eligible costs vary by organisation type:

Cost Type	Business/Third sector receiving subsidy	Third sector	Government
Staff - Salary	Yes	Yes	No
Staff - NI/Superannuation	No	Yes	No

FTE limits	1 year FTE	No limit	Not applicable
Travel & Subsistence	Yes	Yes	Yes
Other Direct Costs	No	Yes	No
Overheads	No	Yes	No

Applications which include PcLs from the UK business sector or from third sector organisations must comply with the UK Subsidy Control Act 2022.

International Project Co-Leads Applicants based in non-UK organisations can be included as Project co-Leads (International) (PcL(I)s) but cannot be Project Leads. The following funding rules apply:

For PcL(I)s based at non-UK research organisations:

Funded at 100% of eligible costs where sufficiently justified

Overheads paid at 20% of directly incurred staff salary costs

Indirect costs may not be charged on non-staff related direct costs

For PcL(I)s from countries on the OECD DAC list (except India and China):

No 30% funding cap applies

For PcL(I)s not from OECD DAC list countries (including India and China):

Total costs must not exceed 30% of the total fEC

For PcL(I)s based at business or third sector organisations:

The same criteria apply as for UK business or third sector guidance

Any other international costs not associated with a PcL(I) will be funded at 80% fEC

Allowable Costs

Acceptable use of funds includes, but is not limited to:

Salary costs for staff involved in software maintenance (full-time, part-time, or contract): developers, research software engineers, contributors, technical writers, community managers, product managers, project managers, user experience researchers, community educators, or other roles that directly support the software project(s)

Funding for community building and engagement activities (e.g. hackathons, sprints, outreach), including venue hire, catering and travel and subsistence for participants, but noting exclusion of alcohol costs

Infrastructure for operational needs (e.g. cloud computing, storage, networking, or continuous integration services)

Software licences for relevant tools or services

Training relevant to the future sustainability of the software

Contracting specialists for particular activities (e.g. technical writer, governance consultant)

Support for work that bridges software projects or ecosystems, including better coordination across software projects that are similar, dependent on one another, or frequently used together

The Responsibilities of a Grantee

Project Delivery Requirements

Deliver the work as described in the accepted proposal.

Adhere to the timeline specified in the proposal.

Notify the SSI in advance of any substantive changes to plans, for approval.

Maintain clear and accessible documentation for any maintained software (including creating improved documentation if the existing documentation is inadequate).

Reporting Requirements

Outputs Management Plan

Grantees must provide an outputs management plan no later than one month after the start of the award. This plan should include details of the software and data, along with any other relevant outputs that will be managed and published during the project. The plan should be updated periodically as the project progresses.

Quarterly Progress Reports

Grantees will be required to report quarterly throughout the duration of the funded period. For example, a short project of four months duration would have two reporting periods.

A reporting template will be provided and grantees will be required to include:

- Overall status of the project
- Progress against grantee-defined indicators
- Achievements and key deliverables in the past quarter
- Identification of any risks to project completion
- Mitigation strategies for identified risks

Final Report

A comprehensive final report must be submitted within one month of the project end date. This report should include:

- Summary of project achievements
- Outcomes and impacts
- Challenges faced and how they were addressed
- Future plans for the software beyond the funding period
- Financial summary

The final payment will be withheld until the final report is received and approved.

Ethical Conduct

The Software Sustainability Institute is committed to high standards for ethical conduct of research. We recommend that grantees follow the guidance provided by the UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) on research ethics, integrity and culture. We reserve the right to terminate a RSMF grant if there are substantiated concerns about research ethics or misconduct as defined in the UKRI Terms and Conditions.

Intellectual Property and Publication Terms

Intellectual Property Rights

Ownership of the intellectual property created during the funded project will remain with the grantee, subject to the policies of their institution. However, the University of Edinburgh (as the grant holder) may request licence rights in specific circumstances.

Grantees will be requested to allow the use of their software names and logos for the purposes of dissemination and publicity, solely related to the RSMF.

Publication and Dissemination Policies

Software Code

- The release of software under open licences and open development practices is strongly encouraged, as this builds community and a more resilient ecosystem, and aligns with UKRI policies around open research.
- Software may be closed source if adequate justification is provided..
- All software should follow the FAIR principles for research software (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable) where possible.
- Applications supporting multiple research software projects are encouraged, as are applications that seek to merge or bridge between similar software.

Data Sharing

- Research data generated during the project should be made openly available where appropriate, following the FAIR principles for data, and in line with UKRI's research data policy.
- Any restrictions on data sharing should be justified in the project documentation.

Publications and Additional Research Outputs

- Additional research outputs are not required to be developed as part of the funding.
- If research outputs are developed (e.g., publications, datasets, additional research software), they must follow UKRI's policy on open research.
- Publications resulting from the funded work should be made openly accessible in line with UKRI's open access policy.
- Pre-prints are encouraged to accelerate knowledge sharing.

Acknowledgment of Funding

All outputs from the funded project must acknowledge the funding source using the following text:

"This work was supported by the Research Software Maintenance Fund, managed by the Software Sustainability Institute and funded by UKRI through their Digital Research Infrastructure programme via grant AH/Z000114/1."

Grantees must not include the Software Sustainability Institute as co-authors on publications without explicit prior permission.

Using Your Application Data

Submitted applications, and expert reviews of those applications, may be shared with our funding partner, UKRI, as well as external programme evaluators. This use will be covered by confidentiality agreements and sensitive personal data will not be shared.

The Software Sustainability Institute may use anonymised data from your application for analysis and evaluation purposes. This analysis helps us improve our funding programmes and understand the research software landscape better. We may publish aggregated statistics and trends from this analysis, but we will not publish identifiable information without your explicit consent. The exception is that all applicants must agree to the public sharing of the proposal summary of their proposed work, along with the categories of activities they will be undertaking.

Demographic data is collected on a voluntary basis purely for statistical purposes to enable the SSI to better understand how to advertise the RSMF and make any adaptations to improve the application process. This information is kept confidential and not passed on to reviewers, and is not used in the decision-making process for awarding grants. The data will only be shared and published in anonymised and aggregated form, taking care not to inadvertently reveal individual information due to a low number of applicants from a particular category.

Fund Management

Complementary Funding

Grantees may obtain funds for their work from other funding sources, provided that there is no conflict with meeting the terms of the RSMF award. Any additional funding that substantially impacts the scope or delivery of the RSMF-funded work should be disclosed to the Software Sustainability Institute.

No-Cost Extensions

No-cost extensions are permitted but must be requested in writing at least three months before the project end date. Extensions cannot go beyond 29 February 2028, which is the completion deadline for all RSMF projects.

Termination Provisions

The Software Sustainability Institute reserves the right to terminate funding if:

- The grantee is in breach of any terms and conditions
- There are substantiated concerns about research ethics or misconduct
- The project is not making sufficient progress
- The funded work is no longer viable
- The grantee organisation becomes insolvent or enters administration

Help and Contact

Contact Email

For all fund-related queries, please contact: grants@software.ac.uk

Support Resources

Additional resources and guidance can be found on the Software Sustainability Institute website.

Appendices

Award Letter

The Award Letter contains specific details about your award, including the award amount, payment schedule, and any specific conditions applicable to your award.

UKRI Terms and Conditions

This award is subject to the UKRI Terms and Conditions. These terms apply in addition to the specific RSMF terms outlined in this document.

All terms and conditions are subject to the application platform rules (Good Grants), for which applicants must register to submit their application.

Version History

V1.0 - Initial version (7 April 2025)