DAFNEA funding call – Frequently asked questions (FAQs)

Funding scope and eligible costs

What types of costs can the funding cover?

The funding is deliberately flexible. It can be used for salary costs, hardware, project management, technical support, information governance, consultancy, and any resources needed to get your data asset over the line. There is also a central pot for information governance and technical setup support via a consultancy.

Can the funding be used to set up new data storage or enhance existing capacity?

Yes, if it helps your organisation support data for research, this is a good use of funds. However, ongoing funding for maintenance is not provided—this is a one-off setup grant.

Can funding be used to transform existing data into a new standard (e.g., OMOP)?

Yes, as long as the project meets the other criteria of the call.

Data hosting, access, and security

Where will the data be hosted? Is federated or local hosting allowed?

The preferred model is federated/local hosting. Data remains within your organisation, accessed via secure pipelines (e.g., Docker containers) for specific projects. There is no central data lake; data is only pulled for approved projects and then stored securely.

Who controls access to the data once it is in the environment?

Access is governed by a Data Access Committee with public and professional members. The data controller (usually your organisation) is a key partner in any application. Special arrangements can be made for unique or sensitive datasets.

What about data licensing, citations, and intellectual property?

You retain copyright and intellectual property for your dataset. Citation and credit requirements will be detailed in the contract.

Data requirements and types

Is there a minimum dataset size? Are qualitative datasets eligible?

There is no strict minimum, as it will depend on the dataset itself. Both qualitative and quantitative data are welcome, but the fund cannot support projects based solely on qualitative data.

Can data in non-standard formats (e.g., Excel, paper records) be submitted?

Yes. The programme aims to discover and help digitise valuable data, even if it is currently in non-standard or paper-based formats.

Can the funding be used for digitising or codifying data (e.g., from paper or free text)?

Funding can support digitisation, but not the development or trial of new NLP tools. If you already have structured outputs from NLP, these are eligible.

Does the data need to be new, or can existing datasets be used?

Only existing datasets are eligible. The novelty lies in making previously inaccessible data available for research, not in collecting new data.

How recent must the data be?

Data should be relevant to modern healthcare and treatment. Exceptionally valuable historical datasets may be considered.

Eligibility and application process

Who can apply? Are partnerships allowed?

Applications are open to NHS, academia, industry, and VCSE organisations, provided the data is from or relevant to the Southwest. Partnerships are welcome, but the data controller must be a key partner on the application.

Can international applicants apply?

Yes, but the data and data owners must be from the Southwest.

Can an organisation submit multiple applications?

Multiple expressions of interest are allowed, but typically only one project per organisation will be funded unless there are distinctly separate projects.

Are university-led or multi-university projects eligible?

Yes, as long as there is a Southwest anchor. Replicating successful models from other regions is encouraged.

How many projects will be funded, and what is the funding range?

The fund expects to support around 10–12 projects, with grants ranging from £25,000 to £125,000.

Special considerations for VCSE organisations

Is there dedicated funding for VCSE organisations?

Yes, at least 10% of the fund is ring-fenced for eligible VCSE applications that meet the quality standard.

What support is available for building capacity and skills in the voluntary sector?

The programme recognises the unique challenges faced by VCSEs and aims to build trust, capacity, and skills. Centralised resources and matchmaking for technical support are available.

Data access, maintenance and sustainability

Will there be ongoing funding for data maintenance?

No, ongoing maintenance is not funded. Applicants should consider sustainability in their proposals. If sustainability is a concern, flag it in your application for discussion.

Will there be future funding calls?

The intention is to continue supporting data asset growth, but future calls depend on additional funding.

Data use, ethics and opt-outs

How is patient consent and opt-out handled?

The system has Health Research Authority approval to collect non-consented data, which is de-identified before researcher access. Both NHS and local opt-outs are respected, and governance is managed centrally to reduce the burden on data providers.

What kind of data is preferred - patient-level or anonymised survey data?

Patient-level identifiable data is preferred for linkage, but pseudonymised or anonymised data can be acceptable. The value of anonymised data depends on its scale and the richness of metadata.

Application assessment

How important is patient and public involvement (PPIE)?

PPIE is valued and will be considered in the assessment. Existing engagement should be described in the application. Patient and public involvement will also play a role in deciding which assets are funded.