



Arts & Humanities  
Research Council

## **AHRC Research Networking Scheme Highlight Notice**

### **Additional Notes Relating to the Connected Communities Programme.**

***Please note: A supplement has been issued to these notes in May 2011 – please scroll to the end to see the supplementary notes***

Connected Communities is a new cross-Council Programme being led by the AHRC in partnership with the EPSRC, ESRC, MRC and NERC and a range of external partners. The current vision for the Programme is:

*To mobilise the potential for increasingly inter-connected communities to enhance participation, prosperity, sustainability, health & well-being by better connecting research, stakeholders and communities.*

At the core of the Programme will be research to understand the changing nature of communities, in their historical and cultural contexts, and the value of communities in sustaining and enhancing our future quality of life. This enhanced understanding will also inform the development of enhanced self-reliance and participation in communities and more effective community based initiatives, policies and interventions to address key economic and societal challenges. Cross-disciplinary approaches are needed to understand communities as complex cultural and social phenomena and interconnected systems the diverse cultural, historic, economic, social, technological and environmental factors driving change in communities, and the role that communities can play in addressing many of the major challenges facing societies.

Further details about the Programme can be found on the AHRC's Connected Communities webpages at

<http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/FundingOpportunities/Pages/connectedcommunities.aspx>

A key objective of the Programme is to add value to the substantial, but often fragmented, research base addressing community-related issues, to promote greater cross-disciplinary and cross-domain research in the field and enhance engagement between research, communities and other stakeholders. This highlight notice in AHRC's networking scheme is intended to help to stimulate such boundary crossing activity as well as research which can underpin and inform future development of the Programme. Networking proposals in this highlight notice should have arts and humanities research at their core but

proposals that cross boundaries with disciplines outside the arts and humanities, as well as within them, are strongly encouraged.

The following are **examples**, emerging from our initial consultations, of the types of issue which could be considered as a part of the Connected Communities highlight notice. However, ***we are keen to encourage creativity and innovation in developing the Programme's agenda and would welcome proposals developing other approaches, topics or issues under this highlight notice provided they have a focus on communities and the connections within and between them at their core.***

### **Cross-Cutting Themes:**

#### **Understanding Changing Community Cultures and Patterns of Connectivity within and between**

How can we better understand the evolution of communities as complex cultural phenomena, for example by drawing on insights from history and different cultures and contexts? How have conceptions of communities changed over time and been represented and mediated through different forms of language, literature, creative and performing arts and other cultural media? How has migration and increasing mobility affected the development of communities, for example through development of diasporas and community diversity and multiculturalism. What role does participation in various cultural activities, cultural heritage and cultural organisations play in developing and sustaining communities? What role are new digital and other technologies and changing patterns of communication playing in the development of new cultural communities? How are community and civic values changing? How are debates about communities framed by different philosophical and political perspectives, for example individual, liberal, communitarian and collectivist thinking, and by religious and other systems of belief? What does a successful community look like?

#### ***Connecting Research on Communities***

A key objective of the Programme is to connect research across subjects, disciplines and domains and networks which cross traditional research boundaries, including those between the Research Councils and between the arts and humanities and other fields of research, are therefore strongly encouraged. For example, many areas of research involve a communities dimension but this is not always fore-grounded and the broader potential for learning about communities in general not fully exploited. Similarly, there is greater potential to learn from the many community-based case studies and projects and from projects focused on different issues such as crime, cohesion, regeneration, participation, cultural activities, etc. There is also a need for under-pinning conceptual thinking, for example, on the role of communities in quality of life and for methodological development, for example, in evaluating effectiveness of

community-based initiatives and quality of life in communities and in engaging communities with research.

***Connecting Research with Communities and other Stakeholders, Stimulating Research Partnerships & Enhanced Harvesting of Research for the Benefit of Communities***

A central theme of the Programme is to encourage appropriate engagement of communities and other stakeholders, such as community groups, policy-makers and practitioners, **with** and **in** the research being undertaken. Whilst supporting research on communities the Programme will also seek to encourage research in which researchers become closely embedded in communities, in which communities actively take part in the research or in discussing research outcomes and will encourage placements and exchanges to enhance knowledge exchange. Networking applications under the highlight notice are encouraged to consider whether community or stakeholder engagement can appropriately and usefully be built into their proposals and proposals involving innovative approaches will be welcomed. However, it is recognised that this will not be appropriate for all networks and proposed focused on crossing research boundaries will not be disadvantaged.

Networking applications which seek to explore some of the methodological and ethical challenges associated with such community-engaged research are also encouraged. Proposals could, for example, seek to learn from our cultural institutions, creative and performing arts, creative use of digital technologies and innovative research across a wide range of fields about effective and appropriate ways to engage communities with research.

**Thematic Areas:**

***Improving Community Health and Well-being***

What role do communities play in providing purpose and meaning to life and to our overall quality of life? How can cultural networks, connections and participation within communities help to sustain mental health and well-being and help to provide care and support for those who are less able to care for themselves? How might community based cultural and arts initiatives contribute to tackling challenges such as promoting healthy ageing and addictive behaviour?

***Building Diverse and Cohesive Communities***

How are communities understood in different cultures, faiths and systems of belief and how does this affect the development of diverse multi-cultural communities? What role does engagement in cultural activities play in creating more cohesive communities and how could this potential be exploited more effectively? When can connectivity within communities lead to problems such as the exclusion of other groups, gang culture etc? What role can community-based approaches play in over-coming conflict and exclusion?

### ***Enhancing Community Participation, Self-reliance and Resilience***

How do notions of increasing community self-reliance and empowerment sit within the context of broader philosophical, political and ethical debates? How have conceptions of issues such as civility, neighbourliness and responsibility, and of the boundaries of unacceptable behaviour in communities, changed over time? What lessons can we learn from the past in terms of how to encourage or enable community self-reliance and resilience, enhance civility or address perceived 'anti-social' behaviour? What role does participation in cultural and community-based initiatives play in building broader community resilience and self-reliance? What can we learn from our cultural institutions, such as museums and galleries, the creative and performing arts and other spheres of arts and humanities about effective ways to encourage community participation? How can innovative design approaches assist in supporting community participation, self-help and care? To what extent is it possible to learn across community-based initiatives aimed at different areas of culture and behaviour, for example tackling crime, increasing engagement in political or governance activity, changing patterns of consumption, promoting healthier lifestyles etc.?

### ***Increasing Community Prosperity***

How can the potential of the creative and cultural sector be most effectively harnessed to support the regeneration of under-performing areas? How significant can cultural institutions and heritage be in stimulating regeneration? What can we learn from the wide range of different cultural-based regeneration initiatives that have occurred or are currently taking place and how can we improve the way we learn from future initiatives? How can we improve methodologies for evaluating the impact of community-based cultural initiatives? How could concepts such as social, cultural and community capital /assets be developed further to improve our understanding of the role of communities in supporting regeneration? What role have different community-based business models played in regeneration and what role might they have in the future?

What role do flourishing and culturally vibrant communities, and community diversity and cohesion, play in attracting inward investment and creating the conditions for businesses and local economies to grow?

### ***Developing Sustainable Community Environments, Places, Spaces and Institutions***

What role does a sense of place and belonging play in community life and how can we better understand the value of local community environments, including local heritage and historic landscapes, to the quality of life in communities? How can we improve the design of the places, spaces and institutions that are important to sustaining community life? How can community-based arts and cultural initiatives help to support transitions to more environmentally sustainable ways of living?

## Supplement to Highlight Notice, May 2011

Boundary crossing applications with a strong arts and humanities component at their core continue to be welcome under the AHRC networking scheme highlight notice on any topics relevant to the Connected Communities Programme, including all of the examples above. However, we would encourage applicants to consider the fit of their research to other activities being funded under the Programme to ensure maximum added value.

In addition, in the light of the outcomes of the recent commissioning of reviews and scoping studies under the Programme, we would particularly wish to encourage applications from arts and humanities researchers in the following areas, currently considered to be under-represented in the Programme:

- Role of religious and cultural institutions (e.g. libraries, local museums and theatres) in communities and participation in cultural activities such as local history and archaeology
- Languages and communication within and between communities (e.g. in relation to languages and bonding / connectivity, language communities, minority and multi-lingual communities etc)
- Transnational communities, including diasporic and migrant communities
- Narratives and representations of ideas and values about communities in literature (including in languages other than English), different faiths, the visual and other creative arts and in the popular media (both past and present)
- Reproduction and transformation of concepts of community and civic engagement through time and across generations
- Potential 'downsides' to connectivity and communities, for example in relation to past or current conflicts within or between communities, exclusion, gang culture, communities of crime or addiction (and/or related issues such as conflict resolution in communities) and/or challenges faced by potentially marginalised groups or 'subaltern voices' within or outside communities
- Relationships between the private and business sector and communities (including historic and comparative contexts), workforce communities, development of alternative community based organisational models e.g. community co-operative, mutual and partnership organisations, local trading systems, communal ownership models, community philanthropy etc)

- Communities in political and legal theory and philosophy, including issues relating to balancing individual, community and state interests; community ownership and management of accountability and liabilities; representation; equality and rights and the potential role of alternative legal or regulatory models (e.g. religious law, voluntary agreements, custom & practice etc)

We would also like to encourage proposals examining the role of communities in different cultural traditions and international comparative and collaborative proposals. For example, a recent workshop involving UK and US researchers organised in collaboration with National Endowment for the Humanities on the place of communities in pluralist societies demonstrated the potential richness of cross-national debates between arts and humanities researchers about the role of communities in societies and the way these are enriched by drawing on insights from different research traditions, value and belief systems and a range of historical, cultural, political and practical perspectives and experiences. We would be interested in proposals which follow this up either in the American context or in other comparative or contrasting contexts, such as Asia or Africa.