



Funding Opportunity Notice – August 2023

The United States Department of Defense, Office of the Under Secretary of Research and Engineering, Minerva Research Initiative and the United Kingdom Research and Innovation, Economic and Social Research Council announce the **Bilateral Academic Research Initiative (BARI) Social Science Program** competition for research that falls within the purview of the topic

Understanding and Influencing Behavior Below the Threshold of Armed Conflict: Countering Influence that Leads to Socio-economic and Political Instability

Research focus outline

Both the COVID-19 pandemic and conflict in Ukraine have exposed vulnerabilities in the highly interconnected and interdependent world in which we live, with these very different shocks each quickly turning into major international social, political, and economic crises. The United Kingdom, United States and their allies need to build societal resilience to these shocks and play a leading role in maintaining a secure international order. The rapid socio-economic, political, and technological changes of the Information Age are also driving substantial shifts in defense and security strategy needed to stay ahead of changes in the nature and character of warfare. New tools and tactics are being used to undermine political, social, and economic stability and cohesion. There is a need to better understand adversarial acts that influence population attitudes and behaviors and undermine institutions, infrastructure, and social cohesion in order to help mitigate against their impact and inform countermeasures.

The funders expect to support social science-led interdisciplinary projects that bring together a broad and diverse range of academic expertise and stakeholders to tackle pressing questions in this field. Research should expand understanding of vulnerability and susceptibility to advanced adversarial information warfare techniques that undermine social cohesion and trust in different cultural and environmental contexts. We are looking to identify areas of US-UK coordinated research that could most effectively move this field forward.

Through this initiative, the funders will support research that is international in focus, which can involve comparing or contrasting information campaigns and sub-threshold conflict contexts in different countries. Applicants to this call may select their countries of focus and are required to justify how their selection allows them to meet the objectives of the call. The funders recognize that applicants may need to consider one or multiple country contexts and include activities both internal and external to the US and UK in order to undertake their study.

Through this initiative, the funders will support research that aims to:

- understand what constitutes societal resilience, how it is maintained or strengthened, and how it is weakened
- understand the motivations and strategies of (international) information campaigns on target states and populations

- identify and examine coordinated attempts to influence population attitudes and behaviors and the techniques and tools used to undermine socio-economic and political stability
- examine the immediate, incremental, and cumulative effects of narratives and information campaigns on populations occurring through single instances or through multiple sources of information
- understand how cultural, economic, social dynamics, and individual traits (thoughts, feelings, and behaviors) influence susceptibility to, and the impact of, information campaigns
- explore whether particular communities (both online and offline) are more or less vulnerable to influence and socio-political instabilities, and the implications this has for countering influence
- examine the relationship between environmental or contextual characteristics and susceptibility to disinformation, deception, and negative influence, and explore how this can be measured
- examine how information campaigns affect social cohesion and trust in different national, local, and organizational cultures, and how efforts to influence populations (online and offline) affect group affinity, identity, behavior, and affiliation
- identify where sub-threshold techniques are influencing populations or causing socio-economic instability, examine how this is impacting the socio-political environment and political decision-making, and characterize the role of culture and context in the effectiveness of such efforts
- examine how different nations, governments, administrations, and state and local jurisdictions respond to information campaigns and sub-threshold warfare efforts
- examine efforts of state and non-state actors (media, private sector, charities, and others) in information counter-narratives, interception and regulation of messaging, and the effectiveness of their approaches
- develop new or further develop existing methodological approaches to understanding misinformation, disinformation, deception, and international efforts to interfere and influence societies

What we want

- Innovative proposals that will add to existing knowledge and consider how to build societal resilience to nefarious activities that adversely influence populations
- Research that will advance the state of the art and make significant advances in the field of social sciences and other disciplines
- Proposals that include a means for an enduring Trans-Atlantic Academic Alliance

What we do not want

- Proposals that fail to take account of previously identified pitfalls in understanding and influencing behavior below the threshold of conflict, such as a lack of reliable measures of the effects on behaviors; behavioral changes over time; or sociocultural differences at the group, organizational, and societal levels
- Research that would not be considered revolutionary, that duplicates existing work, and delivers only incremental advances to existing theories and concepts

Deadlines:

- White Papers due **15 September 2023**
- Full Proposals due **31 January 2024**

To apply, visit <https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/search-grants.html?keywords=SUBTHRESHOLD>. For

more information, visit <https://minerva.defense.gov> and <https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/work-with-us-based-researchers-on-subthreshold-conflict/>