Call for proposals: Public understanding of local authorities and climate

Important links

- [Online version of this document](#)
- [Application form](#)
- [Q&A Event on 14th January 2022](#)
- [Join research commissioning mailing list/Research pool](#)

In one sentence

mySociety is looking for an individual, organisation or joint team to research public understanding of what local government does, and especially its role in combating climate change, primarily through conducting a literature review, to be completed by the end of March 2022.

About mySociety

Established in 2003, [mySociety](#) is a not-for-profit group, based in the UK but working with partners internationally. We believe that people can and want to work together to build a fairer society, to tackle the most pressing crises of our age. mySociety's role is to use our digital and data skills to help this [repowering of democracy](#). We build and share digital technologies that help people be active citizens, across the four areas of [Democracy](#), [Transparency](#), and [Community](#) and [Climate](#). Our projects include TheyWorkForYou, WhatDoTheyKnow, and FixMyStreet. We also conduct and commission research in our areas of interest, which includes our new Climate programme. Our research programme is concerned with ensuring we are producing tools and approaches that are a good fit for the problems the organisation is trying to address.

About mySociety's existing work in this area

The starting point for mySociety's Climate programme is that around a third of UK greenhouse gas emissions are within the power or influence of local authorities and their communities. Through the deployment of data and digital services, we are helping councils, community organisations, campaign groups and individual citizens to take faster, more informed and effective action to cut emissions at the local level. Our initial project is [a website that makes local authority climate action plans more discoverable and searchable](#). Our Climate programme seeks to support

engagement from citizens, action from local government, and better information for all. You can [read more about mySociety's Climate programme here](#).

Other areas of our work have involved local government and local democracy. Previous mySociety work of relevance to this project includes *[Participation vs representation: Councillor attitudes towards citizen engagement](#)* and *[Assessing success in Civic Tech: Measures of deprivation and WriteToThem](#)*.

About this project

We want to decrease UK carbon emissions that are either directly controlled or influenced by local government (see [Climate Change Committee report](#) on role of Local Authorities). Our hypothesis is that people know relatively little about local government, relatively little about the idea of Net Zero, and even less about the intersection of the two. If this is true, there are opportunities to improve public/campaigner knowledge that would help align public pressure and campaigns with the biggest opportunities for emissions reduction through local government. But, similarly the reasons for low understanding of local government may present barriers to this approach that need to be addressed.

We want to understand what people know about what local government does, what actions people think "the government" in general needs to take to reduce emissions, and where there is alignment/mismatch between where people put responsibility for changes, and the reality of local government areas of responsibility.

We would like a short literature review to clearly summarise existing work on these questions. We may also commission some polling (up to three questions) on this topic during the course of the project. If so, we would hope the research could help us shape the polling questions, and that the results would be included in the review (polling costs themselves should not be included in the budget). Useful sources are likely to include public opinion work conducted by polling companies, organisations like NatCen, and specific projects such as [the Hansard Society's Audit of Political Engagement](#). Work by organisations focused on local government, such as the Local Government Association and New Local, may also be helpful.

The available budget for this work is up to £5000-8000 (inclusive of VAT), and the project would need to be completed by the end of March (around 4-6 weeks from end of commissioning process).

The main audience for this work will be mySociety, as we seek to understand how best to develop our Climate programme. However, we would hope it would be of wider use to other researchers and the interested public, and in line with our general approach, would plan to make the outputs

public. Our default assumption is that the main output is a single written report, that will be edited to our style, and published [on our research site](#), with a short 500-1000 summary that can stand alone from the document. We are open to proposals on the length and form of the outputs (for instance, if you believe the problem is better solved by a series of linked shorter pieces). We are also open to variations on the approach/research method if you believe it might provide a useful answer to our problem.

What we are looking for in and from a partner

Expertise/ skill set

While all projects benefit from subject expertise, we believe this project could be completed without a huge amount of prior experience with the local government/net zero problem, with knowledge of local government being more important.

Being able to understand our problem, effectively summarise available information, and work productively with us are also key factors. We will especially be looking for clarity of written communication. The proposed output should be focused on informing future decisions mySociety makes and so should be simple, concise and well-written. We will provide access to the mySociety research style guide which the project will eventually be edited to.

Alignment with values and aims

Our [Repowering Democracy strategy](#) puts a special emphasis on embedding equity and inclusion in our work practices and services, and our work aims in general to fulfill values of [equity/justice, openness and collaboration](#).

Applicants should consider if this presents any obstacles to a working relationship, and think about how these values should be reflected in the project plan, either in terms of subject matter to investigate, or research approach. For instance, within the bounds possible given what has been written, we would be interested in strategies for ensuring a reasonable gender balance in authors cited.

Working practices

mySociety works flexibly and remotely, and there is no requirement to work from or visit an office. Applicants can distribute their work as appropriate over the time available, but we would expect

regular check-ins on progress to be arranged over that period. A shared slack channel and a specific contact person will be used to help coordinate and quickly share questions and information between mySociety and the researcher.

Successful applicants would be expected to abide by the mySociety Code of Conduct in mySociety communications channels and events.

Outputs and deliverables

The production of a literature review in around 4-6 weeks (deadline by the end of March 2022), a summary of this research and an internal presentation of the research to mySociety staff. To be discussed: the usefulness of public polling, and any specific areas there is a lack of evidence.

Q&A and contact details

The application timeline includes a Q&A event, which you can sign up at the link at the top of this document.. The Q&A session will include an element to help individual researchers coordinate to form a joint submission (applications are welcome from individual researchers). Answers will be made available in a video on this page for applicants who cannot take part. Questions can be emailed to the contact address below.

Please send any queries or questions to research-commissioning+call1@mysociety.org and mention which project it is in regard to. Questions in advance are preferred and will be prioritised in the session.

Your application

Applications can be submitted by individuals, organisations, or joint teams of individuals/organisations. These should be sent to research-commissioning+call1@mysociety.org by the closing date.

You should submit a short application, of up to 4 pages of A4. A template for the response can be download at this link, and covers:

- Who you are (whether an individual, organisation, or joint team).
- A description of your previous experience/previous work and why you want to take on this project.
  - To the extent that this is possible, this should be anonymous and not include names (to help with anonymous stages of the recruitment process)

- How you would approach and deliver this project - a short project plan with approximate timings.
    - This could include discussion of whether the suggested approach - a short literature review - is the right one for what we want to achieve, and any possible alternatives.
- The total value (£) of your proposal (**including VAT**), and high-level breakdown of costs (perhaps an indication of days per person, any other expenses). This does not need to include production costs of the report.
    - Given the cost of the project, we will not be giving a great deal of weight to budget plans so please keep this short and high-level - we can dig into further details during interviews, if necessary.
- A short description of the individuals or team who will do the work, including biographies

A separate equalities monitoring form, which can be filled out online and is processed separately from the main application (there is a link to the form in the application form). This is for understanding the reach of our method of distributing the call for proposals.

If you are interested in joining a 'researcher pool' mailing list that we will contact with details of future projects, please see the link at the top of this document.

Application timeline

If there are changes during this timeline, the table on the website version of this form will be updated.

Stage	Date	Description
Call for proposals published	6 January 2022	
Q&A Webinar	14 January 2022	An open, online public event for interested bidders to learn more about the project and ask questions. This will be recorded and available afterwards. You can submit questions in advance to research-commissioning@mysociety.org. Questions in advance are preferred.
Questions answered	17 January 2022	Video of the webinar to be made available to all potential bidders, in addition to answers to any other questions submitted via email
Deadline for applications	21 January 2022 (end of day)	
Initial decisions	27th January 2022	Applicants to be informed whether they have made it through to a short panel interview (and may be asked for a sample of existing work). Applicants not progressing past this stage to be offered written feedback
Interviews	w/c 31 January 2022	Format to be decided, but this will likely be a one-hour panel interview with several people involved in the climate programme, towards the end of the week (3rd, 4th Feb)
Final decision	w/c 8 February 2022	Remaining applicants to be informed of the final decision. Applicants not progressing to be offered feedback
Project briefing/kick-off meeting	End of w/c 8 February 2022	To include a brief introduction to mySociety, discussion of any onboarding required and approach to project management, communication and catch-ups

Project deadline	31 March 2022	Remaining applicants to be informed of the final decision. Applicants not progressing to be offered feedback

What happens after the project

We intend to publish the report you produce, credited to you, on the mySociety website, licensed under a creative commons licence (see recent publications on research.mysociety.org for details). We may make some light edits (beyond proofreading) before we publish. You will be free to make publicly available your own version should you wish to, and any other material based on the research you conducted.

We will convene a short lessons learned session to discuss how the project went - what went well and anything that could have been improved. We will also discuss any future work based on the delivered project (e.g. if you are an academic and might want to co-author an article) and our ongoing relationship. We would also like to arrange a presentation on the project to mySociety staff, and there may also be an opportunity to promote the work in a public event held by mySociety (budgeting for this would be separate to the project above).

Terms and conditions

Interested parties must be UK-based individuals or organisations.

Work must be completed by the end of the financial year (31 March 2022).