

Frequently Asked Questions

This document is based on a [call information event](#) which was held on 22 September 2016.

Projects and Eligibility

Q: What counts as ‘public engagement’?

A: This call considers public engagement to be an activity that is mutually beneficial to both research/researchers AND members of the UK public. This fits under our [Public Engagement Strategy](#), which states that “Research Councils UK has adopted the following definition for Public Engagement, based on that of the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement: *‘Public engagement describes the myriad of ways in which the activity and benefits of higher education and research can be shared with the public. Engagement is by definition a two-way process, involving interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit.’*”

Q: Are citizen science projects (engaging non-professionals in research) eligible?

A: Yes, if the citizen science project fits the [definition of a public engagement](#) project (an activity that is mutually beneficial to both research/researchers AND members of the UK public), then it would be eligible.

Q: What counts as a ‘contemporary issue’?

A: These are cross-cutting environmental science themes that are relevant to the UK public, rather than issues of specific research projects (which are already covered by [Pathways to Impact](#)). However, in this call (over a three-month timescale), public engagement with the work of a specific research project that is set in the context of, and engages the public with, a broad contemporary issue, would be eligible.

Q: Do public engagement projects have to be new?

A: No. As long as the application is clear about how the project meets the aims of the call and adds value to an existing activity, then is it acceptable to build on an existing project. Objectives, spending and evaluation for the NERC call must all take place in the specified time frame before the end of March.

Q: Is it acceptable for applications to focus on certain ‘publics’?

A: Yes, a focus on specific, relevant ‘publics’ is encouraged.

Q: Does the project evaluation also have to be completed by the end of March 2017?

A: Yes, anything for which NERC funding is requested must be delivered by the end of March 2017.

Q: Can the project run before or after the period of January to March 2017? What if the project starts in that period but runs beyond March 2017?

A: If applicants can demonstrate that NERC funding is spent and delivers public engagement activity in the period between January-March and a named supplementary funding source is used to fund legacy activity from March, then this is eligible. If a project starts before January, but runs until after March, then proposals should focus on what will be delivered as a result of the NERC funding and, where the success of the project relies on it. Applicants must have a clear plan for how the project and its maintenance will be funded beyond the NERC funding period.

Q: Are commercial companies eligible?

A: Commercial organisations are not eligible to apply for funding as Principle Investigator, but they can be public /community partners and apply as Co-Applicant if the company provides a public service. Commercial organisations can provide outsourced services, which can be costed for.

Q: Are applications that engage members of the public that are not UK-based acceptable?

A: Research is likely to be global in nature, but the focus of the engagement must be predominantly with members of the UK public (those based in the ‘United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland’), as stated in NERC’s [Royal Charter](#).



Public engagement pilot call: *Engaging the UK public with the big issues of environmental science*

Q: Would local authorities be considered a public-facing body?

A: Local authorities would be considered a public-facing body, as long as they have ‘access’ to the public. The organisation should be a proxy for working with the UK public.

Q: Are applications to cover staff costs acceptable?

A: Yes, costs for contributions to salaries are eligible, where a named individual will undertake work that would not be considered part of their normal duties.

Q: Is there a preference for the Principle Investigator to be an environmental scientist or a public/community partner?

A: No. The call has been influenced by the learnings of the [Connected Communities programme](#), which highlights the benefits of giving the option of either a researcher or public/community partner being a lead applicant.

Matched Funding

Q: Will applications including a matched-funding element be looked upon favourably?

A: Applications with matched funding components are not more likely to be funded. Providing training and support for the involvement of environmental science early-career researchers and PhD students could contribute to the second aim for the call (“building public engagement capacity”).

Q: Do early career researchers and PhD students have to be named on the application?

A: No, although the panel will look for assurance that applicants have given consideration to appropriate mechanisms for identifying and engaging suitable students or ECRs within the funded period.

Q: Can undergraduate or master’s students be involved in projects?

A: The matched funding component only applies to early career researchers and PhD students, however, the ‘publics’ could include engaging with undergraduate and masters students.

Q: Can the matched funding be used to train and support development of public engagement skills of non NERC-funded PhD students and early career researchers?

A: Yes, both NERC-funded and non NERC-funded individuals can be included, as long as they are working within NERC remit.

Q: Can the matched funding be used to support secondments/placements?

A: Yes, secondments can be supported for both NERC-funded students and non NERC-funded students. For NERC-funded students, their PhD submission date should be extended through an amendment to their Je-S record and the costs to the student’s host institution of any additional stipend to cover the time taken out of the studentship should be reimbursed from the Public Engagement grant. For a non NERC-funded student, award holders must come to an agreement with the student’s supervisor, host institution and funder about arrangements for extending the studentship and reimbursing any stipend to cover the time taken out of the studentship to attend a placement/secondment.

Q: What falls under the remit of early-career researchers and PhD students?

A: This includes the following people:

- Those trained as part of a NERC [Doctoral training partnership \(DTP\)](#)
- Those trained as part of a NERC [Centre for Doctoral Training \(CDT\)](#)
- NERC Industrial [CASE students](#) (Collaborative awards in science & engineering)
- PhD students associated with NERC research grants
- PhD students funded through other sources but working within NERC remit
- Current NERC fellows and early career researchers working within NERC remit who meet the [eligibility criteria for NERC’s Independent Research Fellowship scheme](#)

