NERC COVID-19 public engagement grant
Announcement of Opportunity

1) Summary

The Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) is inviting proposals for public engagement with environmental science which understand, address or mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak. NERC intends to fund projects costing up to £10,000 each with a total budget of £50,000. Successful projects must be completed by 31 March 2021. The closing date for proposals is **16:00 (BST) Wednesday 13 May**, via email.

2) Background

Social distancing and the closure of many public instiutions present major challenges to engagement, to research and to society. Public engagement with environmental science can respond to these in a positive way.

This funding aims to help researchers to find different and better methods of engagement that they would not otherwise be able to implement. It could also help researchers to find alternative ways to gather data that would otherwise be collected on fieldwork which can no longer go ahead. There is also room to consider how a diversity of audience groups will be affected and able to access digital engagement. There is a wealth of expertise around digital engagement methods, including citizen science, which could be considered when planning effective, excellent engagement.

3) Scope

Proposals will need to support the objectives and approach in the NERC Public Engagement with Research and Innovation Strategy, and to be sensitive to social distancing and other restrictions being brought in as a result of the current situation, including adhering to Government guidelines.

Desired outcomes

- Capacity of researchers is built to deliver new or changed public engagement with environmental science research, which understand, address or mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak, and/or
- Delivery of excellent public engagement with NERC reseach which understands, addresses or mitigates the impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak, and/or
- Capacity of researchers is built to deliver digital public engagement with environmental science research

A note on references to impact

- Reference to "impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak" could be on research, engagement or any other impact of the outbreak
- Engagement activity should be planned such that it has intended outcomes and impacts. Impact may focus upon society, culture or the environment, or any other area of impact as described by the Research Excellence Framework. Proposed projects should focus on reach and/or significance of impact. This is a public engagement call, so there must also be demonstrable impact on research(ers) as well
- All impact generating activity must be linked directly to NERC research and generic public engagement with science is not appropriate in this context.

Activities in scope (not exhaustive)

- Delivery of new or adaption of current public engagement
- Development of existing digital public engagement assets
- Collaborative projects, including with museums and/or science centres
- Developing partnerships, including with local communities
- Building capacity (such as through networks, training, mentoring, sharing best practice)
- Digital engagement with potential focus on (but is not limited to):
  - Citizen science projects
  - Use of new and emerging technology, for example virtual reality
  - Creation of digital assets
  - Innovative use of social media

Out of scope

- Digitisation of pre-existing documents
- One way engagement
- Engagement with international audiences, engagements should focus on the UK public only

Additional leverage

Applicants may include additional leveraged funding as part of their submission from appropriate sources. Applicants must clearly state the source and amount of any existing leveraged funding (in-kind or cash).

4) Proposal requirements

Eligibility

- Proposals will be accepted from applicants (project lead) who are normally eligible for NERC grants, based within eligible research organisations
- Proposals must be within NERC's remit, but may include partnerships with other researchers across academic disciplines beyond NERC remit
- Successful projects must finish, as a condition of funding **by 31 March 2021**
- Any activities must be free at the point of access for public audiences
- Applicants to this call may submit only one proposal as the project lead. Applicants, however, can be co-investigators on multiple projects if appropriate.
- All outputs must be accessible for the intended audience/user
- All public engagement with research must align with NERC's definition

Sustainability

Proposals should also consider the sustainability of the project, in-line with NERC's current approach: *sustainability for NERC is all about creating and nurturing an environment and culture in which social, economic and environmental responsibility is embedded, balancing the needs of the NERC community and our stakeholders, including immediate needs and those of future generations.*

Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)

As well as the key legal requirements, applicants should consider how they will address specific needs related to EDI. As part of this, applicants must:

- Ensure that all imagery in public engagement is diverse and inclusive, so that the public and other external stakeholders see NERC as an inclusive, welcoming community
- Ensure effective engagement with a broad range of communities, so NERC funded public engagement activity is more inclusive
- Consider the accessibility needs of people they work with to ensure that everyone who wants to is able to engage with NERC engagement activity e.g. wheelchair accessibility of venues, subtitles, British Sign Language (BSL) translation where appropriate etc.

More information about NERC's EDI approach can be found online.

5) Application process

How to apply

Proposals should be emailed to Hannah Lacey (publicengagement@nerc.ukri.org) by **16:00 Wednesday 13 May 2020.**

NERC will be accepting one PDF proposal document with a maximum of two sides of A4, and must include the following information:

- Overview information (project lead, job role, organisation and department, email, phone number, full name and organisation of all co-applicants)
- Project title (max 30 words)
- Project summary (max 300 words)
- Objectives: describe the project objectives and how you will meet NERC's intended outcomes (max 600 words)
- Management and planning: outline a plan for project delivery. Please describe briefly how those involved have relevant knowledge and experience to deliver (max 600 words)
- Total funding requested from NERC, and any leveraged funding

This proposal must not exceed 2 sides of A4, and must be a completed in single-spaced typescript of minimum font size 11 point (Arial or other sans serif typeface of equivalent size to Arial 11), with margins of at least 2cm. Please note that Arial narrow, Calibri and Times New Roman are not allowable font types and any proposal, which has used these font types within their submission, will be rejected. References and footnotes should also be at least 11-point font and should be in the same font type as the rest of the document. Headers and footers should not be used for references or information relating to the scientific case. Any other documents will not be considered.

Given the rapid developments in this and other funding calls addressing COVID-19, we are attempting to keep processes simple, whist still being robust and transparent. In light of this we have simplified the proposal form, removing the need for detailed financial information.

Please also ensure you set out clearly answers to all questions asked in the proposal form, as incomplete proposals will be rejected.

Funding - what can be requested?

Proposals can include fully justified direct costs incurred in delivering the project. This may include, for example:

- Staff resources (including administration and coordination, contributions to salaries (where a named individual will undertake work that would not be considered part of their normal duties), sub-contracting of services, enabling public/community partners to take part)
- Non-staff resources (including cost of materials and travel & subsistence, meetings and events, consumables, materials and equipment, evaluation costs)

Funding – what cannot be requested?

The budget and costings must be based on valid estimates. Funding will not be provided for:

- Estates and in-direct costs
- Fees or honoraria to people already in paid employment to deliver activities where such activities would reasonably be undertaken as part of their normal duties
- Retrospective funding, including those projects with a start date after the closing date but before the funding decisions are announced
- Infrastructure/building costs
- Expenses incurred submitting the proposal
- Academic courses such as Master's degrees or PhDs, and other tuition fees

This call is funded outside of Full Economic Costing (FEC) rules. The process to award these grants will be as follows:
1) A purchase order will be raised, and a purchase order number will be shared.
2) The grant will be paid by invoice (which must include the purchase order number, site address, NERC's address, and a unique invoice number)

NERC may require participation in catch up phone calls and will require proportionate evaluation of projects and as such collection of data for reporting purposes (and suggest relevant work is submitted onto ResearchFish as well). There will also be requirements for final project expenditure in line with proposed costs.

Further information on the application procedure can be found in the [NERC research grants and fellowships handbook](#). Please note that in cases where this call makes exception to the handbook (for example on eligibility) these exceptions are explained in this call document.

Information relating to proposals may be shared, on a confidential basis, across UKRI councils, and with other organisations to support the national and international coordination of research to combat COVID-19 and to seek funding contributions from third parties.

6) Assessment

Assessment Process

Proposals will be assessed by a panel including NERC staff and two independent external members, who will come to a consensus in deciding which proposals are successful. You may be asked for more information before a grant is confirmed.

NERC reserves the right not to fund up to the limit allocated to the call and to make changes to the budgetary limits of the successful grants.

NERC will reject proposals judged not to be eligible, prior to the assessment panel.

Assessment Criteria

Proposals will be considered on the following criteria:

- Overall fit to the desired outcomes of the call and potential for impact.
- Alignment to NERC [Public Engagement with Research and Innovation Strategy](#)
- Value for money
- The quality of [engagement](#) looking at the following aspects:
  - The intention of the engagement
  - Is there mutual benefit
  - Quality of engagement
  - Sustainability of engagement

For more information on developing public engagement projects please see suggested guidelines on the [National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement](#).

7) Timeline

Date	Deliverable
22 April 2020	Announcement of opportunity published and call opens
13 May 2020	Call closes
18 May 2020	Selection panel
21 May 2020	Successful proposals informed
31 March 2021	All work and project evaluations to be completed and submitted to NERC

8) More information and contact

Please contact Hannah Lacey (publicengagement@nerc.ukri.org).

Please note that other funding opportunities across UKRI related to COVID-19 can be found [online](#).

For more information on UK Research and Innovation's response to COVID-19 please see the [UKRI Coronavirus Hub](#).