



Community Engagement Process: Ideas for New Strategic Science Capital

Guidelines

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Deadline: Open ended (second cut-off TBC)

1. Summary

The Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) is the UK's leading public funder of environmental science, investing in cutting-edge research, postgraduate training and innovation in universities and research centres. NERC also invests in strategic capital priorities to provide a well-found research and innovation environment to support world-class environmental science.

NERC is seeking the views of the NERC-funded research community on ideas for potential new strategic capital. This will be an open-ended and on-going process of engagement. **It is important to note that no funding has been allocated or is associated with this call for ideas.**

In determining potential new capital priorities NERC will also take account of existing and emerging information including:

- alignment to NERC's strategy and goals¹
- NERC's strategic focus on an integrated approach to observing systems and data science that identified a number of strategic priority areas².
- priorities identified in previous reviews including the RCUK Strategic Framework for Capital Investment³.
- the outcome of recent competitive calls that focused on capital investments up to £0.5m⁴.
- NERC's existing capital assets including in research centres and services and facilities
- the recent call for evidence⁵ to inform NERC's investment priorities for the next Comprehensive Spending Review, identifying emerging research and innovation opportunities.

Based on existing information NERC needs to better understand large scale community capital priorities (over £1million). Note however this is an ideas process, not a call for costed proposals. The NERC [Joint Capital Advisory Group](#) (JCAG) will consider how proposed capital ideas can be supported from other NERC funding⁶ including national capability, strategic research, discovery science, training and innovation. Additionally, where appropriate, proposals should demonstrate how leverage from other sources (e.g. other RCs, industry etc.) may enhance the scientific and wider impact of the investment.

¹ [NERC Strategy: The Business of the Environment](#)

² [NERC's developing approach to capital](#)

³ [RCUK Strategic Framework for Capital Investment](#)

⁴ [NERC Strategic Environmental Capital Calls](#)

⁵ [Call for evidence to inform NERC's investment priorities for the next CSR period](#)

⁶ [NERC funding streams](#)

Ideas will be collated and assessed by the JCAG who will review the feedback from this process, together with existing evidence to advise NERC on potential future priorities.

Eligible research organisations (RO) are therefore invited to submit up to **three** ideas, in order of priority for new capital assets (for science, innovation, estates, IT, facilities) that are currently required by the NERC science community or will be needed to support the next generation of NERC research. Ideas that span the full breadth of the indicative financial range are encouraged. NERC services and facilities can submit one idea per institution (in addition to ideas submitted by their hosting organisation).

Ideas should demonstrate how the capital asset would support world class environmental science, aligned with NERC's remit and strategic priorities, and have potential to stimulate innovation and economic impact. Ideas that cannot demonstrate strategic benefit to NERC science or do not significantly enhance scientific capability are not likely to be considered.

The aim of this process is to encourage ideas for capital investment from across our community and we encourage all ROs to actively participate. Future calls for capital at these levels may, however, encourage collaborative approaches to maximise the impact of any investment. Proposals for ideas should therefore also indicate where this is also supported by the wider community including by another RO.

2. Background

This process is about generating new ideas. It is not a request for detailed, costed proposals. The level of detail provided should be sufficiently clear on what investment is being proposed, why it is important and what impact it will have.

NERC is committed to sustained funding for the UK environmental science community that delivers scientific understanding of environmental processes. To support this NERC is also committed to investing in state-of-the-art facilities, equipment and infrastructure to underpin and enhance the delivery of world-class environmental science, generating exciting scientific discovery and building an effective capability to sustain high-quality research.

Although opportunities exist to request capital associated with specific research projects via associated grants and capital calls, NERC is looking for new ideas for larger strategic capital investments from across our community. This process therefore aims to address this gap and assess the need across the environmental science community for strategic investment in items to support research.

It is important that NERC can respond on short timescales to identify strategic capital requirements from across the whole NERC community, for example in response to emerging opportunities. It is therefore NERC's intention that information received from this process will provide input into its new capital planning process by identifying the demand and range of capital investment costing over £1million.

The process is open ended but with cut off dates to allow assessment and review. Future engagement with the community may seek additional information.

3. Eligibility

This opportunity is open to the following research organisations:

- independent research organisations (IROs) eligible for NERC discovery and strategic research funding.
- UK higher education Institutions that receive grant funding from one of the UK higher

- education funding bodies⁷.
- NERC research centres (BGS, BAS, CEH, NOC, NCAS and NCEO) and delivery partners (MBA, PML, SAMS, SAHFOS, SMRU).
 - NERC services and facilities are eligible but may only submit **ONE** idea (this is in addition to ideas submitted by their hosting organisation).

Pro-vice chancellors and/or equivalent senior institutional representatives will be expected to respond on behalf of their institution.

Potential applicants should contact NERC well in advance of the submission deadline if they have any queries concerning their eligibility.

4. Scope

What is capital? Capital can be anything from equipment to buildings, from IT software to supercomputers that has a useful life exceeding one year. For this process NERC is interested in ideas over £1million.

Significant upgrades to existing capital assets may also be supported where it can clearly be demonstrated that this will enhance delivery of NERC science and strategy. 'Routine' replacement and/or repair of assets are out of scope for this process – this includes building repairs, maintenance and scheduled replacement of standard equipment.

NERC is inviting new ideas for strategic capital assets which fit the above definition and support NERC's research strategy. It is important to stress however ideas do not need to include a detailed breakdown of costs.

Potential applicants are encouraged to contact NERC well in advance of the deadline should they have any queries regarding the definition of capital and scope of the process.

5. Ideas submission process

Eligible ROs can submit up to three ideas (in order of priority) with an approximate minimum value of £1million (per idea). NERC services and facilities are eligible but may only submit one idea (this in addition to the three ideas that can be submitted by their hosting organisation).

Where an idea is supported by other ROs, this should be stated on the ideas form as indicated. Being named on an application form as a supporting organisation will not count against an RO's total number of submissions.

Please use a separate ideas form for each idea. Completed forms should be submitted by the authorising representative⁸ for the RO. The authorising representative and second contact will receive all further communications.

The authorising representative of each RO is responsible for ensuring their application limits are not exceeded and that ideas are submitted in priority order. RO's submissions not conforming to the process will not be included in any analysis.

Ideas must be submitted to capitalrequirements@nerc.ac.uk. Confirmation of receipt of submission will be provided. Submissions made after the cut-off date will not be included in the analysis but may be included in future reviews. General feedback on the process will be provided through the NERC website. Specific feedback on ideas submitted will not be supplied to applicants. By submitting an idea you are agreeing for your idea to be included in future NERC work on capital.

⁷ Eligibility for Research Council funding

⁸ Pro vice-chancellor, organisation director or equivalent.

6. Submission details

Ideas must be submitted via email to capitalrequirements@nerc.ac.uk.

For each idea submitted the following details are required. **Ideas must be submitted in prioritised order (1–3) as indicated on the form.**

Criteria [Character limit - no spaces]	Detail
A Very short description of idea/name of proposed asset Max. 50 characters	Provide a short statement or title describing the proposed idea.
B Scientific area	State which scientific area the idea covers. Delete as appropriate from list provided on ideas form.
C Brief description Max 250 characters	Briefly describe the idea in plain English, expanding on Section A.
D Summary of science need Max. 500 characters	Briefly describe, in plain English, how the idea fits to NERC strategy and delivery of NERC science. Is this a unique asset (regionally/ nationally) or will it build on or complement existing networks/enhance regional and/or national research capability? NB we do not need a full breakdown of components.
E Innovation and impact Max. 500 characters	Indicate what scientific benefits, wider impacts (or potential innovations) the asset will have and how will this be tracked and measured? In terms of the outputs (e.g. data) generated from the asset, who are the likely beneficiaries of the research and knowledge generated, and how will it be used? Describe any potential social or economic benefits to be gained. Are there opportunities to strengthen existing strategic partnerships or establish new partnerships?
F Links to other processes Max. 500 characters	Has this idea been identified in other processes? Include a short description of existing or emerging information on capital priorities? (see Summary section for examples of these processes.)
G Existing landscape Max. 500 characters	Does the idea already exist in the same/similar form, in another RO, NERC service, facility, HEI equipment pool or similar? If yes, please state name of pool/facility and justification as to why this additional idea is being proposed.
H Supporting resource/leverage Max. 500 characters	Indicate what existing/future resources will support the use and maintenance of the proposed idea (e.g. institutional support, existing technical team with knowledge and experience of asset applied for). Indicate potential for leveraging support from other stakeholders/funders, grants from sources other than NERC.
I Supporting NERC funding List as indicated; maximum 6 entries	Identify confirmed NERC funding that the idea will support or align to. Provide a list of grant titles, grant references and grant value. 1.
J Community need State number as indicated	Approximate number of researchers that will use the equipment (internal and external to your institution).
K Community access	How will other academics/industry partners access the

	Max. 500 characters	asset? Would the asset be integrated into an existing equipment pool or facility (HEI, NERC or other?) If yes, please state name of pool/facility.
L	Community support List as indicated; maximum 6 entries. Max. 500 characters	Identify other potential funders/stakeholders and state how other investments might align with the proposed idea [at this stage formal letters of support are not required] – max 6 entries.
M	Approximate cost and scalability Max. 200 characters	State the estimated cost (ideas must be valued approximately over £1million). Note if the idea is scalable and to what extent.

7. Timeline

The second cut-off date for this process has not yet been agreed. An announcement on the NERC website will be made once a deadline has been confirmed.

8. Contacts

Enquiries capitalrequirements@nerc.ac.uk

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