Innovation Placements: Open Call 2018

Announcement of Opportunity

Call opens: Wednesday 11 April 2018
Call closes: Wednesday 4 July 2018 at 16.00 hours
Projects start: 01 November 2018

1. Summary

NERC invites academic researchers to apply for 3 – 12 month placements at non-academic organisations. These can include private businesses, third sector organisations (for example, NGOs), or public bodies including government departments, local government, and regulatory authorities.

Researchers will explore and demonstrate how these partner organisations can make use of scientific knowledge, data, models or other tools to understand and manage their impacts and/or dependencies on the environment, and/or to inform policy and decision making in relation to the environment.

Each project will involve a non-academic partner in the capacity of the host organisation, and one (or exceptionally a maximum of two) academic researchers who will undertake the placement, spending between 80% and 100% of their time embedded in the partner organisation on the placement.

The objectives of the scheme are to:

1. Initiate collaborations, or deliver a step-change in existing collaborative activity, between academic researchers and non-academic partner (host) organisations, leading to longer term self-sustaining activities undertaken by the latter.

2. Provide opportunities to enhance the capacity of NERC’s academic community to engage with, and meets the business needs of, private, public, policy and third sector users of environmental evidence.

3. Generate evidence and case studies of how non-academic organisations have used, or could use environmental science research outcomes in collaboration with academics, to add value to their operations through the innovative use of new tools, data or expertise.

Projects may include science from a range of disciplines as part of the proposal but challenges addressed must fall within NERC remit, and must identify clear examples of where environmental science research, data and skills can be used to make a real difference to non-academic organisations, starting from a clear articulation of the user needs and...
drawing on existing science and expertise. This may be around accessing data for better
decision-making; evolving and introducing approaches for integrating environmental data,
or new innovations; understanding and managing their impacts and/or dependencies on the
environment; or reducing costs of the impact of the natural environment on business
processes. Projects must identify how Research Council-funded research feeds into the
existing activities, tools and processes of users, identifying current gaps and potential future
needs.

During the placement, host organisations and academic researchers will work
collaboratively, with the non-academic partner, clearly communicating feedback on user
requirements, and making maximum use of the knowledge and data provided.

It is hoped that the placement will either be part of, or the start of, a longer-term
relationship between the academic partner and the host organisation, at an institutional
(and potentially also at an individual/department) level.

2. Host organisation (partner)

Through this scheme, host organisations will benefit from having an academic researcher
undertake a focused piece of translational or innovative work (not research) of direct benefit
to their organisation. NERC has received the following placement opportunities’
specifications that may be of interest to applicants:

Innovation Placements 2018 – Host Organisation Specifications

NERC also welcomes applications that propose working with other hosts on other topics
which build on Research Council funded research, and which fall within NERC remit. Please
note that each host organisation can only apply for and host up to a maximum of three
projects, and must have the resources to support all if funded.

Evidence of co-development of a proposal and early engagement with the host organisation
is required. A Letter of Support from the host organisation is mandatory to evidence host
support for the placement. For placement opportunities listed on the NERC web page,
letters of support must be signed by the authorised personnel at the host organisation, as
named in the published specification. Some hosts may have internal application processes
preceding providing a letter of support to manage demand, and so applicants are strongly
advised to check for any key dates and processes within the published host specification.

Projects must propose a placement within a single host organisation.

All applicants are advised to discuss their application with the host organisation at the
earliest possible opportunity.

3. Eligibility

Applicants must be resident in the UK and be employed by an eligible UK Research
Organisation for the duration of the proposed project.

This opportunity is available to academic researchers (at any career stage from a minimum of postdoctoral level), including those with academic positions, who can demonstrate how Research Council-funded research could be used to make a real difference to non-academic organisations.

Applicants who have submitted their PhD thesis but not yet completed their award are eligible to apply, but must be awarded their PhD ahead of the start date of the innovation placement. Where this is the case, the Head of Department statement provided with the proposal must clearly identify when the PhD is expected to be awarded, and confirm that the applicant will be employed by the Research Organisation as a postdoctoral research assistant for the duration of the placement.

Please note that researchers based at organisations on the UKRI list of eligible Independent Research Organisations (IRO’s) are eligible to apply to this call. Organisations on the UKRI list of eligible IROs are however not eligible to act as host (partner) organisations for this call.

It is envisaged that the majority of placements will involve one academic researcher undertaking a placement at one host organisation. However, proposals may include up to two academic researchers (from the same or multiple academic organisations) undertaking a placement within a single proposal, provided sufficient justification is made for the arrangement.

Please note that this funding opportunity does not permit applications from current PhD students. However, current PhD students interested in undertaking innovation placements with non-academic organisations are encouraged to seek further information about support available via NERC’s National Productivity Investment Fund allocation to doctoral training award holders.

4. Duration of the placement

Placements may last for between three to twelve months. The expectation is that appointees will usually spend 80% to 100% of their time undertaking the placement. However, in the interests of supporting diversity, NERC will accept from applicants their case for a different % time allocation, if either project requirements, or the researcher’s personal circumstances, make this appropriate. Allowable reasons to request a different time allocation would include, for example, teaching commitments, or being employed on a part time basis (ie: <100% FTE). The limit on placement duration would still be a maximum of 12 months, and a significant amount of the placement would still need to involve the researcher located with and embedded within the host organisation. The time to be committed to the placement should be clearly indicated in the proposal.

NERC anticipates that the majority of placements will be for between three to six months. Any placements with a longer duration than six months will be expected to submit evidence within the Case for Support attachment of their application justifying the additional
duration required.

5. Costings

During the placement, the researcher(s) will remain employed by their academic institution.

The proposal must include all costs that NERC is expected to fund. NERC will pay for direct salary costs for the applicant, plus their NI and superannuation. Travel and subsistence costs, including accommodation, may also be requested from NERC. No other costs may be requested.

The partner (i.e., the non-academic organisation hosting the placement) is responsible for all other costs of hosting the applicant, including training, equipment, consumables and overheads. Details of the host organisation’s contributions should be included in the proposal, including direct financial support (if any) and in-kind support to the project.

6. Location

Academic researchers are generally expected to spend between 80 and 100% of their allocated time in the partner organisation’s premises during the placement; the exact proportion to be agreed with the partner (and the applicant’s employer). Some projects may require some of this time to be spent at other locations in the UK or abroad, such as at host organisation regional offices, in the field, or making off-site visits associated with the placement project.

A plan of the time that will be committed to working within the host organisation, plus an outline of the anticipated time to be spent at different locations, should be provided in the proposal. Evidence concerning this agreement must be provided in the supporting letter from the host organisation.

7. Conditions of work

All academic researchers must adhere to their employer’s and the host organisation’s requirements of independence from direct commercial interest. Academic researchers will need to adhere to any necessary confidentiality agreement which should specify knowledge and data which is the property of the business partner organisation, and any discussions taking place during the duration, which cannot be disclosed without prior written agreement of the partner (host) organisation.

8. Deliverables

At the end of the project, a case study will be required summarising the activities undertaken, the impact achieved, the learning from the project and any follow-up activity. Partner organisations must be willing for this information to be disseminated as appropriate; confidential matters will be respected, as above. There is an Innovation
Projects Highlights and Impact Template to complete.

9. Application Process

Submitting a proposal

Proposals must be made by the academic researcher (or lead academic researcher for any proposals involving more than one applicant) via the Je-S system, following the guidance in Annex 1 (how to apply, page 8).

The call will close on Je-S at 4pm (local UK time) on Wednesday 4 July 2018 and it will not be possible to submit to the call after this time.

Applicants should leave enough time for their proposal to pass through their organisation’s Je-S submission route before 16.00 on the closing date.

NERC proposal checks

All proposals are subject to initial checks by the funding agencies prior to assessment. In order to be considered fundable, proposals must:

- Meet the eligibility criteria for this call.
- Address the scope and other criteria of the call as presented in this document.
- Be based on Research Council-funded research.
- Fall within NERC remit.
- Be primarily focused on translational, innovative outcomes to a host organisation (this funding call does not support research).

Proposals that do not meet the criteria above may be rejected by NERC, without reference to the Assessment Panel.

Assessment process

Proposals will be assessed at a Panel meeting according to the assessment criteria (as described in Annex 2, page 13). The Panel will involve both academic and industry experts. Please note that there is no formal refereeing stage or PI response stage for this call.

The Panel will make funding recommendations to NERC via a ranked list of the proposals, which NERC will use to fund the projects that best meet the aims of the call within the available budget.

Applicants will be given feedback from the Panel summarising the reasons why the proposal was successful/unsuccessful. No further feedback will be available.
10. **Key dates**

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<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>Call Opens in Je-S</td>
<td>Wednesday 11 April 2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>Closing date for proposals</td>
<td>Wednesday 4 July 2018 at 16.00 hours</td>
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<td>Assessment Panel</td>
<td>September 2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>Successful projects start</td>
<td>November 2018</td>
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11. **Contact**

For any queries relating to this funding call, please contact:

Tessa Edgecombe  
Senior Programme Manager (Innovation)  
Telephone: 07788 190531  
Email: tjed@nerc.ac.uk

12. **Document version log**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Version</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Changes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>11 April 2018</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>16 April 2018</td>
<td>Clarification on eligibility of IRO’s added to section 3 (P4).</td>
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Annex 1: Innovation Placements 2018: how to apply

Proposals must be submitted using the Research Councils Joint Electronic Submission system (Je-S). In order to prepare a Je-S proposal submission, the researcher (or lead researcher for any proposals involving more than one applicant) must log onto Je-S and create a new proposal. Please note that this person must have previously created an individual Je-S account for themselves. Applicants will need to have a verified account, any applicants currently holding a “fellowship” Je-S account will need to upgrade it (which will require verification from their Research Organisation) before they will be able to submit the application. This should be done well in advance of the application deadline as there may be some delay in the approval of an individual Je-S account. Full details are available on the Je-S website.

Applicants should also ensure that they leave enough time for their completed proposal to pass through their organisation’s Je-S submission route, to ensure that their proposal is processed and submitted to NERC in advance of the application deadline. Applicants are advised to discuss their application with their Grants Office at the earliest opportunity.

a. Starting your Je-S proposal

Once logged into Je-S, applicants should select the following options:

Select Council: NERC  
Select Document Type: Standard Proposal  
Select Scheme: Innovation People  
Select Call/Type Mode: Innovation Placements 2018

The proposal will comprise a Je-S proforma and a number of attachments (see required attachments). Details of what is required in each document and section of the proposal are given in this guidance. The name of the host organisation should be included as a prefix to the Project Title.

b. Project Details

Please note in this section when filling in the salary costing please follow the instructions below. The NERC contribution rate should be set to 100% direct costs, by clicking the exceptions button.

Total hours estimate: Use the percentage of time that you will be working on the project to calculate the hours worked  
Cost type: Exception  
Start date:  
Duration Months: Between 3-12 months  
FTE %  
Scale: Post band in the university  
Effective date of scale  
Increment date (pay rise if applicable)
Starting salary
London allowance – nil (can enter if applicable)
Superannuation and NI: total amount
Total: manually add up

c. Objectives (up to 4000 characters)

In this section, please outline the key objectives of the placement. Please state clearly the name of the host organisation.

d. Summary (up to 4000 characters)

In this section, please provide a general description of the project that conveys its purpose. You should also clearly state in this section which Research Council funding this proposal builds on (including a grant reference number and title where possible).

e. Beneficiaries (up to 4000 characters)

In this section you should identify the key users who will benefit from your programme of work and what impacts this may generate (both within and beyond the host organisation). This may be economic benefits or those that increase the quality of life, or generate changes in policy.

You should consider how your project will enhance the impact of environmental science related to your community and think about how you will connect with the most suitable people in the NERC community to generate impact.

f. Other Support

This section should be completed if you have other sources of support or funding for this placement or other research or innovation activities in the same field.

g. Resources

Costs will be funded at 100% of direct costs.

These placements will cover the following direct costs only: salary (including superannuation, NI and specific allowances), travel and subsistence costs, and accommodation (if required). Proposals may not request NERC support for any other direct or indirect costs, such as overheads, estate or indirect costs, equipment or consumables.

For each cost entered in the resources, please click on the exception button: the NERC contribution rate will then be set to 100%.

h. Required attachments

As well as the completed Je-S proforma, a number of attachments, containing information to
support your proposal and further demonstrate how the proposal meets the call assessment criteria, must also be uploaded and submitted with your proposal.

All attachments must comply with the NERC standard formatting requirements as listed in the NERC Research Grants Handbook:

- With the exception of Letters of Support and services/facilities/equipment quotes, all attachments submitted through the Je-S system must be 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 either of 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.

- Embedded diagrams or pictures or numerical formulae may contain text that is smaller than 11 point but applicants should ensure that the font is legible. Text in tables and figure labels not within embedded diagrams should be at least 11 point.

- If applicants are not able to use Arial font and are unsure whether the font type they plan to use will meet NERC guidelines then they should contact the NERC Grants Team at researchgrants@nerc.ac.uk before submitting their proposal for confirmation of whether or not the font type they plan to use is acceptable.

- The correct attachment type should be used in Je-S as that determines whether attachments are visible to reviewers and/or moderating panel members.

- Letters of support must be on headed paper and signed/dated.

- Attachments must not exceed the page limits specified for the attachment type and scheme (see below), regardless of the number of component Research Organisations. They should be converted to PDF and checked prior to attaching to the proposal in Je-S, as PDF conversion of documents with any non-standard fonts (scientific notation, diagrams etc.) can result in changes, such as missing data or increased document length. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that font size and margins remain the same when documents are converted to a pdf.

The following five attachments (case for support, CV, justification of resources, head of department statement and host organisation letter of support) must be uploaded to your application before submission to NERC:

1. **Case for support** (up to 4 sides of A4) - Please outline the project and the desired outcomes.

2. **CV** (up to 2 sides A4) - please attach your CV. For any proposals involving more than one
researcher, then please attach a CV for each academic researcher (up to 2 sides A4 per CV).

3. **Justification of Resources** (1 side of A4) - The Justification of Resources should explain how the resources requested (staff time, travel and subsistence costs, and accommodation) are appropriate for the proposed placement and represent value for money, in reference to the project objectives. It should not be simply a list of the resources required, as this is already given in the Je-S form. Please note that the salary cost in itself does not need to be justified, rather the amount of time to be devoted to the project by the applicant(s), and whether this is essential, sufficient and fully justified for the work proposed.

4. **Head of Department Statement** (1 side A4 max) – A single Head of Department statement (or equivalent) should be provided to support the proposal. For any proposals involving more than one academic researcher then please attach a Head of Department Statement for each academic (1 side A4 per applicant). The Head of Department Statement should demonstrate support for the placement, and cover the following points:

- Explanation of where the placement would support broader university, department and/or school objectives and partnerships, or Research Centre/Organisation equivalent.

- Confirmation that the researcher will be employed by the Research Organisation for the whole duration of the placement.

- That the placement has been discussed and agreed with the Head of Department, and has been developed to ensure that any mandatory commitments (such as training or teaching) are not disrupted and/or alternative plans have been put in place.

- For applicants who have submitted their PhD thesis but not yet completed their award, the Head of Department statement should also confirm when the PhD is expected to be awarded.

5. **Letter of Support** (up to 2 sides of A4) – Please upload a letter of support from the host organisation stating their support for the placement and the applicant(s). For those host organisations opportunities listed in the Announcement of Opportunity, the letter must bear the signature of the authorised contact. The letter of support should cover the following points:

- The host organisation’s support of the applicant and the proposed placement.

- The host organisation’s preparedness to support and host the placement, including their willingness to contribute staff time to support the placement, to provide desk space and facilities within their organisation for the placement, and to provide access to information or data held within their organisation, where this is required to develop the project. This should include a description of the direct financial contributions and/or significant in-kind support, which the host organisation will provide to the placement.

- Evidence of a coherent and credible approach, demonstrating how the collaboration will be managed to ensure that it provides value for money.
• A statement of the likely impacts of the placement, including a plan of how the outputs will be followed up, and potential longer term changes in company policy or practice, and the potential for follow-on activities and research, including perspectives on whether the activities and collaboration initiated will be viable and sustainable after the end of the funding.
Annex 2: Assessment criteria

An independent Assessment Panel will review all proposals which pass initial NERC proposal checks. NERC retains the right not to award all of the available funding, should an insufficient number of proposals be satisfactory when judged against the criteria outlined below.

Proposals will be assessed on the following assessment criteria, with innovation impact potential being the primary criteria of assessment, and project delivery and management being the secondary criteria of assessment:

- **Innovation impact potential**: The potential for the project outputs to be transformative to the organisation hosting the placement, and where appropriate beyond the host organisation (for example wider societal benefits/policy outputs).

  This will be the primary criteria against which proposals are assessed, and a high score in this criterion will indicate a project that is well aligned with the key challenges of the partner (host) organisation and likely to create significant impact from NERC-funded research.

- **Project delivery and management**: The appropriateness of the work-plan will be considered, concentrating on whether the proposed deliverable can be achieved within the stated timeframe. The management of the project and its milestones will be assessed to ensure best possible success of the project.

  This will be the secondary criteria against which proposals are assessed. Any proposals scoring below a minimum threshold for project delivery and management will not be considered for funding, even if they receive a high score for innovation impact potential.