

## **Innovation Follow-on Pathfinder – Guidance for applicants**

A preliminary Pathfinder (or equivalent market analysis) is strongly advised before applying to the annual Innovation Follow-on Call to obtain funding for commercialisation of your project. It will help ensure first, that your Innovation Follow-on proposal is built upon a robust understanding of the market opportunity for your research outputs; and second, most importantly, that your research achieves impact.

Pathfinder awards can be used to fund virtually any activity that is required to obtain knowledge and insights that are essential in building a compelling case for Innovation Follow-on funding. Illustrative examples include market assessment and competitor analyses, IP searches, engaging with potential commercial collaborators and end-users, and technical “milestone 1” work where the technical feasibility of the whole project depends on it.

Pathfinder proposals are normally between £7k and £10k, but in exceptional circumstances a maximum of £20k is available (£20k NERC contribution at 80%).

Your Pathfinder proposal, plus any outputs that arise from Pathfinder-funded work, such as market assessment reports, should be made available to NERC’s Innovation Follow-on Assessment Panel to help their consideration of any Innovation Follow-on proposal arising from Pathfinder work.

Please contact NERC via [keschemes@nerc.ac.uk](mailto:keschemes@nerc.ac.uk) when a Pathfinder proposal is submitted.

## **Preparing your Pathfinder Grant proposal**

Applications should be made through Je-S.

Select Council: NERC

Type: Standard Proposal

Scheme: Innovation

Call: Innovation Follow-on Fund Pathfinder.

Before applying for a Pathfinder award you should first read the [How to Apply guidance](#) for the [Innovation Follow-on Call](#), which explains the key issues that an application for Innovation Follow-on funding must address. The list is not comprehensive, but it will help identify the key areas to be covered by your Pathfinder work.

## **Points to consider, section by section**

The parts of the form not mentioned here should be completed in accordance with standard practice when applying for NERC grants.

The following points should be borne in mind when completing the sections listed below:

### **Objectives section**

Briefly explain the information gaps that need to be filled and/or technical work to be undertaken to enable you to submit a fully-informed proposal for the Innovation Follow-on Call. List the objectives of the proposed Pathfinder project in order of priority.

## Summary section

Describe:

- The work to be undertaken
- How it will inform your understanding
- How it will help shape the development and execution of your proposed Innovation Follow-on project work programme.

It is worth bearing in mind that many Innovation Follow-on applications would benefit from closer engagement with end-users and intermediaries and greater attention to developing appropriate routes to market. Work focused on these areas at the Pathfinder stage can significantly strengthen the likelihood of securing Innovation Follow-on funding and of you targeting your development work on those partners and users most likely to adopt your technology.

## Beneficiaries section

Explain your preliminary view of who will benefit and how they will benefit from the proposed technology/product/service you intend to develop. Your Pathfinder work is likely to provide greater clarity and certainty on both issues, but you should have an initial view at this stage. For obvious reasons, the more tightly you can define the likely key end-user beneficiaries of your intended Innovation Follow-on project the better.

## Impact Summary section

Please explain briefly how you anticipate that an Innovation Follow-on project would increase the likelihood of commercial adoption and uptake of your technology and/or increase its value.

## Additional documents

The following attachments **must** be included with your application:

### 1. Case for Support

Your Case for Support should comprise a **Project Overview** and **Project Workplan**, totaling 4x4 pages max.

#### a. Project overview

This should explain:

- The background and context to your proposed Innovation Follow-on project
- The current status of your technology
- Your understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of your intellectual property position
- The desired outcomes of your proposed Innovation Follow-on project.

You may not be in a position to speak with certainty on either of the last two points until you have completed your Pathfinder investigations, but you should be able to give a preliminary view at this stage.

#### b. Project Workplan

This should describe:

- The further information you need in order to define your Innovation Follow-on project, and why
- The specific work to be undertaken to satisfy each information need
- How you will use the knowledge/insights obtained to shape and define your Innovation Follow-on project
- Where external suppliers are to be used, the selection process and criteria to be used in appointing them
- If helpful, include a Gantt chart or similar, showing the key milestones and activities for the proposed work.

When planning the work programme pay attention to scheduling work early that will provide key “stop-go” decisions as to the feasibility of commercialising your research.

## 2. Letter of Support from the Technology Transfer Office

All Pathfinder Grant applications must include a Letter of Support from the Principal Investigator's Technology Transfer Office (TTO). This letter should include a statement confirming that the application has been developed in conjunction with the TTO.

The NERC Innovation Team will expect to see clear evidence of meaningful intellectual engagement by your TTO in scoping your Pathfinder application, particularly with regard to identifying the commercial and intellectual property rights (IPR) issues that need to be addressed.

The Letter of Support should indicate:

- The support (financial, investigative, strategic, IPR-related) already provided to you
- The support the TTO anticipates providing to your proposed Innovation Follow-on project on an ongoing basis if your application is successful.

### Supplementary documents

You **may** include the following supplementary documents, although they are not compulsory:

- A description of the track record of the investigators and any named staff (max 2xpages A4)
- Letters of support from project partners. All Innovation Follow-on grant applications are expected to be accompanied by letters of support from commercial partners. There is no reason why letters of support should not be available at the Pathfinder stage too, albeit that they may be more heavily caveated because the technology may be less developed and its viability for specific applications less certain.

## Assessment criteria

Pathfinder applications are assessed against the following criteria:

- *Scientific quality* – the proposed Innovation Follow-on project must be sound and based on a scientifically excellent programme of work from within NERC's remit;
- *Added value* – evidence that the proposed Innovation Follow-on project is likely to be cost-effective; evidence that funding is likely to significantly increase either the likelihood of appropriate and effective commercialisation and/or the exploitation value of the intellectual property concerned;
- *Appropriateness* – is the proposed Pathfinder work programme likely to provide the information required to produce a well-informed Innovation Follow-on project proposal?

Pathfinder proposals will be assessed by the NERC Innovation Team, who will aim to confirm whether you have been successful within four weeks of receipt of your Pathfinder application.

## Other points to note

Many Pathfinder projects involve a market assessment exercise. Your proposal should describe the purpose and scope of the project, including either details of the methodology to be used or a copy of the brief to be provided to potential suppliers invited to tender for the work.

Market research (and other similar studies) should be undertaken by consultants who are independent of the project team and who have no direct interest in any entity through which you anticipate commercialising the results of your work.

If you already have consultants in mind include the rationale for choosing them. In particular, take care to select the best available people for the job, rather than simply people you already know.

Pathfinder projects can be valuable in helping you identify any legislative or regulatory requirements that may impact the technical and commercial development of your proposed technology, product or service.

In summary, NERC's Innovation Team will expect you to be explicit on a number of points so they can understand who will be helping you ask the right questions and get the right information and insights:

- Who will do the assessment;
- What will they be looking for, and looking at;
- How will they go about this exercise, and why is it being done this way?

For more information please contact:  
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