Regional Impact from Science of the Environment

NERC will contribute £2.5-£4m to awards at 80% FEC over 5 years for Research Organisations to boost impact from NERC environmental science

Closing date and time for outline proposals: 16.00 Thursday 21 September 2017

Background

NERC-funded research produces a wealth of knowledge, expertise and skills, as well as technologies, tools and data that have the potential to produce significant benefits for the economy and society while ensuring continued resource availability from and resilience of the environment. Enabling research organisations to achieve impact from current and past investments is a key priority for NERC. We recognise that NERC funded research organisations contain a valuable concentration of people, skills, facilities and know-how, offering substantial capability to achieve these benefits. We also recognise the significant opportunity that collaborations between research organisations, businesses, policy makers and other non-academic organisations in their region offer, combining research excellence with regional strengths to deliver substantial economic gains.

The Regional Impact from Science of the Environment (RISE) initiative follows on from the Environmental Science Impact Programme (ESIP), with a continued focus on developing regional impact from environmental science. This ambition has also been clearly articulated in the recent Building our Industrial Strategy green paper and as well as focussing on impact in their region, applications to RISE should look for opportunities to address the key ambitions of the Industrial Strategy (the ten pillars are summarised on page 8 of this AO). Building the relationships to develop benefit takes time and effort. This initiative has been designed in acknowledgement of the drive from the academic community for larger scale, longer term support for the development of impact from environmental science, working with an understanding of, rather than in isolation from, other public and private sector funding streams. In a complex landscape, it will be important to develop synergy without losing the focus on outcomes and impact relevant to NERC research investment.

Purpose

Regional Impact from Science of the Environment (RISE) is dedicated to bringing research organisations together with businesses, policy bodies and other actors contributing to economic development specific to their location to deliver significant regional impact from NERC environmental science.

NERC invites research organisations with a strong and substantial portfolio of NERC funded research to apply through RISE calls for a five year programme of activity with a NERC contribution of £2.5m-£4m at 80% FEC.

RISE will fund a limited number of highly ambitious programmes that will achieve transformative impact from NERC environmental science research by:

- bringing considerable NERC investment in excellent research within the participating research organisation(s) together with strengths in businesses, policy bodies and other stakeholders particular to their location(s);
- conducting a coherent programme of high impact, focused, co-designed and co-delivered research translation and innovation activities;
- leveraging benefits and contributions from other sources of funds relevant to the ambition of the proposal;
- creating durable collaborations between the academic and non-academic participants.

Transformative impact will be achieved through the translation of NERC science into actions or policies that improve performance, resilience and sustainability, and support growth. Programmes bringing in other discipline interests in order to maximise environmental science impacts will be in scope where this adds value to the proposed work. The geographical reach of this impact may range from regional to global (recognising the Industrial Strategy aim to service global markets), and can include societal and economic benefits, but there must be realisable economic gains to the UK region. The region will be defined by the focus of the impact programme the Research Organisation(s) has chosen.

NERC will take an active interest in funded programmes throughout their duration.

Focus for the Call

The call is being framed broadly within the scope of the UK Industrial Strategy, recognising that while the overarching ambitions of this strategy have been defined in ten pillars, the strategy document is currently under consultation. Applicants are encouraged to take a flexible and creative approach to delivering against the purpose of this initiative. As was the case with ESIP, programmes should be designed to support the strategic ambitions of the research organisation(s) involved while understanding and gaining benefit from the opportunities offered by their region. Applicants must also propose an integrated approach managed at the institutional level, which does not divide funding into disaggregated activity across departments. Applications from consortia of research organisations are welcome where this is consistent with the regional approach and overall ambition of the proposal. This may include research organisations from outside the region if it can be demonstrated that their participation is essential to the achievement of the proposed goals.

The primary focus of proposed programmes must be on the exploitation of NERC environmental science and the programme of activity should build on core research outputs/outcomes generated from NERC science investments. However science that addresses the NERC strategic ambitions but comes from disciplines outside of environmental science will be welcomed and will be expected to add value to proposals, increasing the potential for delivery of impact from NERC science. Where this occurs programmes are encouraged to use/leverage funds from associated sources, including other Research Councils and the Higher Education Funding Council.

Funding

Ambitious proposals of significant scale are encouraged with between £2.5 - £4m available per award over five years.

Eligibility

Applicants must be from eligible research organisations, which include Higher Education Institutions and NERC Research Centres. Applicants should refer to the NERC Research Grants Handbook.

Single research organisations or a consortium of research organisations can apply. The lead organisation must be able to demonstrate a significant portfolio of NERC science relevant to the focus of the programmes, as well as fit to their own organisational strategy.

Private, public or third sector organisations or institutions with a remit that can contribute to the programme of work are eligible to be considered as project partners. These include: private industry, public bodies (such as government departments, local government, regulatory authorities, etc.) and non-government organisations or charities. However any commitment of funds or in-kind contribution from these partners should be guaranteed for the duration of their proposed engagement and letters of support should reflect this commitment at the full proposal stage.

Applicants who applied to Round 1 are eligible to come back into Round 2. Those who reached the full proposal stage should start their Round 2 bid by submitting an outline proposal. If you received a suggestion on your feedback from Round 1 that you should resubmit please indicate this in your outline bid.

One of the benefits of the RISE process is that it provides NERC with a bank of potential sizeable investments where much of the groundwork has been done. If NERC has an opportunity to leverage funds from another source this possibility will be investigated and if funding looks likely you will be contacted for your views and input.

Guidance for Applications

How to Apply

Submission of proposals is via a two stage process: Outline and Full Proposal. Applications for both stages must be made via the Research Councils' Joint Electronic Submission system (JeS). JeS will open on 6 July 2017 for this call. JeS guidelines will be posted at the foot of this web page. Note the funding is 80% FEC so for example NERC will fund £4m of a £5m programme.

Applications must be made at the institutional level, signed by the most senior member of staff with responsibility for the academic school or research centre featuring in the proposal.

Stage 1: Outline proposal - Open Call

One outline proposal is required for each RISE proposal and should be submitted by the lead organisation.   Outline proposals received after the deadline will not be accepted. Any outline proposal that does not comply with these specifications or exceeds the stated page limits will be rejected.

Outline proposals will be considered by an assessment panel taking into account the ambition of and assessment criteria for the call. Applicants will be given brief feedback summarising the reasons why the application was successful/unsuccessful. No further feedback will be provided.

Your proposals are confidential. Please emphasise to non-academic partners that they should not reveal approaches they have received.

Only applicants successful at the outline stage will be eligible to submit a full proposal. Applicants will be informed by November 2017 if they are to be invited to proceed to the full proposal stage. The full proposals will be sent to reviewers for comment and all the full proposal teams will be interviewed to determine the awards.

Documentation for Stage 1 – see JeS guidance for further details.

Outline proposals must contain:
- Case for support which addresses the announcement of opportunity [up to 10 sides A4 including two pages track record]
- Justification of resources [up to 2 sides A4]
- Short statement from an appropriate senior member of Lead Organisation [2 sides A4].

    Please note we do not require any letters of support for the Outline Proposal stage. Further details will be in the JeS Application Guidelines.

What can be requested

Proposals should be submitted on a full economic cost basis and 80% of FEC will be awarded. They can include reasonable costs for:
- Administration and coordination
- Salaries
- Travel and subsistence
- Meetings and events
- Consumables
- Sub-contracting of services

What activity can be included

The RISE initiative is designed to be flexible to encourage applicants to be innovative in their approach. Proposed activity can therefore be broad and diverse but should still represent a coherent, focused, co-designed and co-delivered research translation and innovation programme, aimed at achieving outcomes that deliver high impact.   Applicants must propose an integrated approach managed at the institutional level, which does not divide funding into disaggregated activity across departments.

The types of activity that would be considered eligible include, but are not limited to:

- Translation of existing data, knowledge and/or expertise into tools, solutions and approaches that meet user needs
- Decision-support tools incorporating data, knowledge and know-how
- Model synthesis, merging and manipulation that addresses specific challenges, needs or opportunities
- Direct embedment of new knowledge in user organisations to enhance uptake and deliver improvements, e.g. in process, service provision etc., via means of people and knowledge exchange
- Commercialisation focused upon taking academic outputs further towards exploitation for likely economic return.

The following activities are considered ineligible, although RISE-funded activity can be aligned with these types of investments where appropriate and beneficial to achieving the purpose:

- Fundamental research
- Training
- Studentships
- Capital investment
- Academics acting as consultants for commercial third parties
- Activity between only different sections of the academic community
- Activity between only the research community and the general public.

Assessment Criteria

Proposals will be assessed against the following criteria:

i. Timeliness and strategic fit: rationale for the focus of the programme illustrating;

- o fit to the call ambition to address opportunities presented by the UK Industrial Strategy (note the breadth of context - this is <u>not</u> limited to current priorities of 'Pillar 1; Investing in Science, Research and Innovation)
- o fit to the strategic ambitions of the research organisations involved
- o timeliness of the opportunity paying particular attention to regional strengths, leverage and exploitation potential and;
- o well-articulated anticipated outcomes aligned with NERC strategy

ii. Quality and innovation: innovativeness of programme of work including how this represents a step change appropriate to the scale of the opportunity;

iii. Track record: relevance of experience of applicants to the proposal, including a demonstrable portfolio of relevant NERC funded research;

iv. Added value of partnership: strength of co-applicants and project partners and the added value brought by their participation;

v. User engagement: demonstration of the involvement of users in design and delivery;

vi. Efficiency and effective management:

- o Evidence of credible and effective leadership and management;
- o Outline of work plan exemplifying how the programme will deliver on objectives;
- o Value for money: justification of resource request noting ineligible costs and including partner contributions in cash or kind and leverage of and linkage to other funds;
- o Evidence of the potential for a lasting legacy and long term sustainability: a long-term outlook to continuing beyond NERC's investment.

Please note that there is a checklist for outline proposals at the end of this AO.

Measuring performance and success

Lead applicants will be required to devise and report against key performance indicators (KPIs) that track progress and key success measures (KSMs) that demonstrate achievements. The range and complexity of KPIs and KSMs may ramp up in proposals over the five years to reflect the programme of work and anticipated outcomes. In preparing KPIs and KSMs applicants are asked to consider the following:

- User engagement: evidence that user-informed and involved activity is being undertaken and that the programme has delivered outputs and outcomes appropriate to users

- Measures required to assess innovation performance that could include:
    - o scale, depth and additionally of activity
    - o creation and strengthening of collaborations
    - o funds and investments attracted/leveraged
    - o new innovative solutions, tools, processes, services or policies derived from NERC science

- Demonstration of transformative impact upon the region, for example through:
    - o cost-avoided/savings
    - o future resilience
    - o policy/regulatory/practice improvements
    - o inward investment
    - o new businesses/business opportunities
    - o jobs created/protected
    - o increased turnover/profits
    - o wellbeing

It is fully anticipated that as well as use of information based on metrics, narrative evidence, including case studies, testimonials etc., will be collected and used by programmes to demonstrate progress and success.

Management and Governance

The lead Research Organisation is required to exercise budgetary control and be responsible for directing and delivering the programme.

Appropriate management and governance arrangements and full transparency for the use of funds is mandatory.

Representatives from the region should be involved in the strategy and decision making throughout the programme to ensure continued relevance and delivery to the users and the region.

Reporting and Evaluation

All programmes will report annually to a NERC appointed Programme Executive Group. Programmes are expected to self-monitor on a regular basis and alert NERC of areas of concern. NERC reserves the right to stop a programme at any time if significant issues arise that cannot be resolved.

NERC will maintain regular contact with the lead of each programme, requiring short updates on progress on a six monthly basis, raising issues to the Programme Executive Group as appropriate.

The proposed programme of work which sets out key milestones and metrics will be a key tool for monitoring performance and achievement of individual programmes.

The Programme Executive Group will support NERC to monitor and evaluate the initiative on an on-going basis and informing adjustments to future calls.

Programmes will be expected to participate in or provide input to meetings to raise awareness of the programme of activity and publicise the innovation outputs resulting from the award.

Timetable

DATE	EVENT
July 2017	Call opens on JeS
21 September 2017	Outline proposal call closes
Early November 2017	Successful outline proposal applicants informed and invited to submit full proposals
1 February 2018	Deadline for submission of full proposals
March/April 2018	Full proposal interviews
April 2018	Awards announced

June 2018	Programmes start

The deadline for receipt of outline proposals is 21 September 2017

Contacts

For further information on the RISE Programme please contact:

Lynne Porter: lyn@nerc.ac.uk
Katie Hart: katrt@nerc.ac.uk

Further information to consider:

Building our Industrial Strategy Green Paper

The 10 Pillars

 1. Investing in science, research and innovation – we must become a more innovative economy and do more to commercialise our world leading science base to drive growth across the UK.

2. Developing skills – we must help people and businesses to thrive by: ensuring everyone has the basic skills needed in a modern economy; building a new system of technical education to benefit the half of young people who do not go to university; boosting STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) skills, digital skills and numeracy; and by raising skill levels in lagging areas.

3. Upgrading infrastructure – we must upgrade our standards of performance on digital, energy, transport, water and flood defence infrastructure, and better align central government infrastructure investment with local growth priorities.

4. Supporting businesses to start and grow – we must ensure that businesses across the UK can access the finance and management skills they need to grow; and we must create the right conditions for companies to invest for the long term.

5. Improving procurement – we must use strategic government procurement to drive innovation and enable the development of UK supply chains.

6. Encouraging trade and inward investment – government policy can help boost productivity and growth across our economy, including by increasing competition and helping to bring new ways of doing things to the UK.

7. Delivering affordable energy and clean growth – we need to keep costs down for businesses, and secure the economic benefits of the transition to a low-carbon economy.

8. Cultivating world-leading sectors – we must build on our areas of competitive advantage, and help new sectors to flourish, in many cases challenging existing institutions and incumbents.

9. Driving growth across the whole country – we will create a framework to build on the particular strengths of different places and address factors that hold places back – whether it is investing in key infrastructure projects to encourage growth, increasing skill levels, or backing local innovation strengths.

10. Creating the right institutions to bring together sectors and places – we will consider the best structures to support people, industries and places. In some places and sectors there may be missing institutions which we could create, or existing ones we could strengthen, be they local civic or educational institutions, trade associations or financial networks.

Checklist – Have you included these in your outline?

- The regional issue that your programme will address – state this first.
- Strategic aims of the university/research organisation and the strengths it can bring to this.
- Regional strategies that augment this proposal.
- Fit to UK Industrial Strategy
- How it will fit with the strategic aims of the partner organisations.
- Why now?

Content of the Programme

- The most significant impact of this programme – include figures such as market values, GVA, costs avoided.
- Strengths of NERC funded science that will be brought into the programme.
- Social, political and economic outcomes.
- How will your chosen region change due to this innovation programme?
- What would happen without this programme?

Partnership involvement in the design of the programme

- How have the users/partners/beneficiaries been involved in the design of your proposal?
- How will the key partner organisations benefit?
- How will you seek to engage more widely with industry/users?
- What will happen at the end of your proposed programme of work?

Management and Resources

- What will be your approach to managing this programme?
- Would you like to emphasise any particular resources that this programme will benefit from?

Monitoring and Evaluation including performance measurement

- Where are the risks in your proposal and how will you manage these?
- How will you evaluate the programme during and after its lifetime?