Q: As this is NERC and UKRI, what is the role of NERC and what is the role of UKRI in this?
A: The SPF Clean Air Wave 2 programme is delivered by NERC and the Met Office, with STFC, EPSRC, ESRC, IUK, MRC, NPL, Defra, DHSC, DfT, Scottish Gov, Welsh Gov. NERC is the co-lead and is leading some of the calls e.g. Networks, on behalf of the funders. However, the calls cover the full UKRI remit. UKRI leads the overall Strategic Priorities Fund.

Q: What is the expected outcome from this call? How will this call align with later calls in the programme?
A: The call addresses the first aim of the programme - to generate a new coordinated self-sustaining UK community, positioned ready to drive forward and use world-leading interdisciplinary clean air research and innovation at the indoor/outdoor air quality interface. It is a longer term ambition to bring together different disciplines to explore how they will work together for the future and prime the stakeholder community to be ready to implement research outcomes. The outputs of the networks will not directly inform the later calls in the programme, but will be reactive to future funding opportunities, and also potentially providing evidence for future research priorities.

Q: Why is there a plan to fund 6 networks?
A: Indoor/outdoor interface is such a large space that it would be difficult for one network to engage with all the stakeholders and to address all the aspects of the challenge. We would like to encourage diversity of approaches and meaningful conversations with stakeholders, for which there needs to be some focus of the network. Supporting six networks will provide a spread across the different themes and topics within the programme. Each network will be interdisciplinary and hopefully focussing on different challenges.

Q: How will the successful networks work together?
A: The Clean Air Champions will help network the networks, and bring together those communities. The call does not ask for funding to be set aside for cross-network activities or broader programme activities, but to be aware that cross-network activities will occur and you will be invited to attend them, and therefore this may be prudent to bear in mind when writing your proposal. Regarding cross-network activities, these will depend on the successful networks funded and the focus of these networks.
Q: What is the expected nature of the networks? Is it expected that this is a call for fully formed interdisciplinary multi-partner network, where the partners are also proponents from the early stages, or can a Network be formed by one entity and subsequently contacts with other stakeholders be made?
A: The spirit of the call is to create and build networks which will have a long future and be responsive to future challenges. This does not need to be fully formed interdisciplinary networks but there needs to be steps taken towards recognising the different disciplines needed for the network to address the challenge proposed. We expect additional stakeholders and members to be drawn in throughout the lifetime of the network and to set out how the network will identify and attract those people. To note, we will not be adding new PIs and Co-Is to awarded networks.

Q: How many participants would the funders like to see in each network?
A: The funders are not prescriptive regarding the number of participants involved in a network. We are happy for the bid to propose and justify this, and this will likely come down to the challenge the network will address and the requirements of that challenge.

Q: What are the future plans for these networks? Will there be related substantial funding opportunities?
A: There will be future opportunities through the Clean Air programme that the networks will be able to apply into. The opportunities will be before the networks have finished but the networks should be self-sustaining and ready to respond to future opportunities. This could include being ready for funding opportunities outside this programme.

Q: If your Networks proposal is successful, are you precluded from subsequent SPF Clean Air activities?
A: No.

Q: Is membership of a network a prerequisite to future SPF Clean Air wave 2 funding?
A: No.

Q: Are the funders expecting networks to have specific themes e.g. transportation, or should the networks be more general?
A: There is no prescription about how broad or narrow a network theme needs to be, but proposals should include a focus which will enable the network to bring together the relevant stakeholders and disciplines. They may have specific themes or be cross cutting networks which look at different types of methodologies, or uptake of technologies for example. We are expecting the networks to propose and justify their focus theme within their bid.
Q: Will there be an attempt by the funders to join groups who offer similar themes?
A: No – the model we are using does not have an outline stage, so there is no place in the process for us to manage and join groups up who offer similar themes. Also, we will not be looking to support two networks which are focussed on very similar areas. The Notification of Intent stage submissions will not be published, its purpose is to help us assess demand and plan the peer review.

Q: Do you expect each Network to address a specific related theme (or one of the themes) or multiple themes?
A: It is anticipated that successful networks will define an interdisciplinary challenge aligned to the aims and objectives of the second wave of funding. The networks are to build the interdisciplinary research and stakeholder community that can address the identified challenge within the programme themes. As such the challenge may span one or all of the themes, and this should be justified within the bid.

Q: Regarding specifics within the strategic context of the call document, e.g.:
Where might analysing the cognitive/behavioural responses of users/people have relevant? Where might a concern for indoor air quality regulation be relevant? What are the desired parameters for aerosol properties e.g. size?
A: We set out the motivation for this programme in the announcement of opportunity. Specifics within this are for the Network to propose and justify within their bid.

Q: The strategic context of the Networks call focuses on ultra-fine PM and VOCs, does that mean all other pollutants are out of scope. Are other exposures, other than through indoor air pollution e.g. house dust, in scope for this call?
A: The spirit of the call is detailed within the announcement of opportunity. We are interested in how indoor emissions affect outdoor air and vice versa and how that affects exposure. The call sets out that fine PM and VOCs are the pollutants that are likely to increase in importance, but recognises that these exposures occur in combination with other pollutants/allergens. If the exposure forms part of a challenge that is within the spirit of the call then it would be within scope. This should be justified within the bid.

Q: The call documents focus specifically on vulnerable groups and health. Will this call consider allow other groups and criteria e.g. workplace and wellbeing?
A: The funders are looking to constrain the programme to focus on vulnerable groups. The problem the programme addresses is large, and so the priority is around the health impacts for vulnerable groups and this is where we would like to see the focus on.
Q: What should be the balance between funded activities e.g. between engagement and networking and small research activities, on the proposal?
A: This will depend on the challenge the network addresses and how it is best to address this challenge and this should be justified in the bid.
The balance of funds should be commensurate on the reach of the network, to support small research activities between its members (including core funded members and those engaged through networking activities).
For example a brand new Network may have more engagement and networking activities than small research activities. The balance should be justified in the proposal.

Q: Is it envisioned that the Network will undertake research directly or facilitate research proposals/projects from others by fundraising and becoming a catalyst of subsequent calls? Can the successful Networks distribute funding to those not named on the full proposal through competition e.g. hub and spoke funding?
A: The networks are able to use a proportion of the funding to undertake research activities and this can be done both directly by the core network and through distributing funding to those not named on the proposal through competition. Fundraising to enhance the competitions is not a requirement of funding, but is permissible.

Q: To what extend is there an expectation that the whole range of workplace exposures/pollutants would need to be considered or would it be sufficient to be specific to pollutants such as PM/NOx within indoor workplace setting?
A: The funders are open to it being a broad or focussed range of exposures as long as this is fully justified within the bid.

Q: What is the NOI stage for, and can information change between an NOI and submission of a full proposal?
A: The NOI will not be assessed and will be used to helps us to plan the assessment process. The NOI is an obligatory requirement of this call and full proposals will only be accepted from those teams who submit a completed NOI form prior to the deadline.
Between the NOI and the full proposal deadline, the PI may not change. The title and vision content may not change, although the wording within this may be amended slightly. The Co-Is may change although it is helpful for our planning processes if they remain broadly the same and we would ask that changes to Co-Is be kept to a minimum where possible please.
Application and Assessment

Q: Could you provide some more details about how the application process will be assessed? Could you provide more detail about how some of the assessment criteria will be assessed?
A: All proposals received which meet the eligibility criteria will be peer reviewed and this will be followed by a panel.
Regarding specifics within the criteria such as ‘suitability of the network core management team and the range of expertise of the proposed core members’ this is about whether you have convened a core leadership team who are able to provide leadership and direction, and is there evidence of this, also have you brought together a credible group of people who will be able to reach out to members in the areas that the network is looking for.

Q: Could you define stakeholder and who this may apply to?
A: The stakeholders will be whoever the network needs to engage with in order to address the challenge posed. If you are not eligible to receive UKRI funding directly, this does not preclude you from involvement with the networks.
Relevant stakeholders may include healthcare, policy, practice, industry, 3rd sector and the public, as appropriate.

Q: What stakeholders may be involved in the Networks? What kinds of interdisciplinary groups and forms of expertise are supported in the creation of the Networks, for example, can artists and cultural groups form part of the networks if the work is clearly shown to engage publics and audiences on air quality issues?
A: Yes – the Network may involve whoever is necessary to address the challenge, where they are receiving funding directly then they need to be eligible for UKRI funding.

Q: How do the funders envision stakeholders including industry, public bodies, and third sector involvement in the networks?
A: If you are a public sector research establishment with a credible research capability, you are eligible to be a PI or CO-I. If you do not currently hold IRO status then you will need to apply for this and there is information about how to do this in the announcement of opportunity.
Stakeholders who are not eligible for funding may participate in the core network management team at their own cost as project partners and may participate in network activities (workshops etc) in the same way as researchers not named on the proposal.

Q: How can interested parties best flag your interest to be a part of a Networks proposal?
A: There are no formal processes in place for matchmaking interested parties with networks for proposals.

Q: Is there a limit in the number of PIs per proposal? Is there a limit in the number of applications per Institution i.e. can an institution submit more than 1 lead proposal?
A: Investigators may participate as a Co-I or a PI in a maximum of two proposals submitted to the call, and only one of these as the lead PI.
There is no limit to the number of proposals that an institution may submit as lead.
There is no limit to the number of networks a person may be involved with, where they are not receiving direct funding from the bid, but care should be taken to ensure that it is feasible to commit fully to them all.
There is no limit to the number of Co-Is or PIs on an individual proposal but the team should be justified in terms of providing strong leadership for the network. Not everyone who participates in the network needs to be listed as a Co-I.

Q: Who can qualify to receive travel funding?
A: Those who are eligible and costed on the bid may receive travel funding. It is at the discretion of the network how travel funding is further disbursed and this should be justified in the proposal.

Q: Do all those who meet the eligibility criteria and are to be involved in the Networks activities, need to be named on the proposal?
A: Not everyone who participates in the network needs to be named on the proposal as a PI, Co-I or project partner. However, if there are plans in place for certain organisations or individuals to play a strong role, highlight this in the case for support so we can avoid conflicts of interest in the review process.

Q: How can those who do not meet the eligibility criteria be involved in the network?
A: Those who do not meet the eligibility criteria may be involved in the network as part of the bid as a project partner (at their own cost); through participation in network activities without being directly funded from the bid; or there is an option for involvement via sub-contract but this needs to be clearly justified in the bid as to why this is required.
As part of the programme Innovate UK will be running some calls in which SMEs will be able to receive direct funding and Met Office-led calls also have wider eligibility criteria.

Q: Are there any guidelines for work which could be replicated in other countries? And are there any rules around co-funding?
A: This programme is primarily focussed on the challenges faced in the UK and by other western developed economies. Replication in other countries would be added value but not a requirement.

A Network may bring in additional co-funding and when it comes to co-funding, please see the guidance around project partners. If this is industry funding, then the perceived risks to the independence of the research must be considered and the proposal should set out how these risks will be managed.

Q: Does any protocol need to be followed to be involved in more than one network bid, and subsequently if involved in more than one funded network?
A: You may only be named on two network bids. If you do want to participate in more than two, you need to evidence that you have the time and resource to contribute effectively.

Expression of Interest.

"Understanding mechanisms of toxicity and the relationship between levels of exposure and toxicological outcomes are fundamental to risk assessment associated with the exposure to environmental toxins. We are currently funded by the MRC to study how environmental exposure, in particular to diesel exhaust particles, induces the toxic/deleterious effects. Our work involves both the use of in vitro, in vivo and epidemiological studies (in collaboration with Prof. Jonathan Grigg). We are interested in joining a consortium involving either or epidemiologists, environmental monitoring/biomarkers, chemists and health care professionals"

To find out more about this opportunity please contact Roland Wolf at c.r.wolf@dundee.ac.uk