

# Announcement of Opportunity

## Part A: Scope of ESPA-2014 Grants

Critical Deadlines:

Full proposals to be submitted via Je-S  
by **16:00 (4pm) UK Local Time (GMT+1/UCT+1), 14<sup>th</sup> May 2014**



## Summary

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The ESPA-2014 Grants call is for “blue skies” research projects designed to significantly advance global understanding on the way that ecosystem services contribute to poverty alleviation, with specific emphasis on generating new understanding that can benefit poor people in low-income countries (LICs). Research funded under ESPA-2014 is expected to **inform thinking and practice over, at least, the next decade**, representing a step-change in the knowledge and evidence that will underpin future activities in ESPA’s sphere of activity.

**Applicants for ESPA-2014 are encouraged to think creatively and to consider more risky research approaches where it can be shown that the potential returns are significant.**

The Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation (ESPA) research programme is funded by the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID), Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) and Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). ESPA is an international programme funding cutting-edge interdisciplinary research generating new knowledge to enhance global understanding of how ecosystems function and provide services that contribute to human well-being, poverty alleviation and sustainable growth that benefits the poor. ESPA was launched in 2007 and will run until March 2017.

For information about ESPA-funded projects please see: [www.espa.ac.uk/projects](http://www.espa.ac.uk/projects).

Applications are invited for funding in the range of between £50,000 and £150,000 GBP Full Economic Cost (FEC). This call has been allocated a total available budget of up to £1.5M GBP, which may be revised at the discretion of the Programme Executive Board (PEB). Projects will be funded for a maximum duration of 12 months, with an expected start date between 1 December 2014 and 1 February 2015. **Projects will be eligible to delay their start from this date by up to 3 months only.** All other standard NERC guidelines will apply.

Projects will be selected through a one stage process using standard NERC procedures for research proposals (see Part B of the AO for further details). Applications can be started on the Je-S system from March 7<sup>th</sup>.

**Full proposals must be submitted via Je-S by 16:00 GMT+1/UCT+1  
on 14th May 2014**

## Abbreviations

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AO	Announcement of Opportunity
DFID	Department for International Development
ESPA	Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
FAQ	Frequently asked questions
FEC	Full Economic Cost
GBP	Great British Pound
GMT	Greenwich Mean Time
Je-S	Joint Electronic Submission System
LIC	Low-income country
MIC	Middle-income country
NERC	Natural Environment Research Council
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PEB	Programme Executive Board
RCUK	Research Councils UK
UTC	Coordinated Universal Time

## Important Terminology (Related to the Call)

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Term	Definition	Reference
Developing Country Research Institutions	A national or regional research institution or an NGO with the capacity to undertake high-quality research that is operating in a low-income or a middle-income country. ESPA does not consider that offices of international agencies and research organisations or international NGOs that are located in developing countries should be considered to be developing country institutions.	
Developing Country Researcher	An individual holding the nationality of a developing country (low-income or middle-income countries) who will undertake a research role in the ESPA project.	
Low-Income Country (LIC)	As classified by the World Bank. <a href="http://data.worldbank.org/about/country-classifications">http://data.worldbank.org/about/country-classifications</a> LIC countries have an average annual <i>per capita</i> income of less than US\$1,005 calculated using the <a href="#">World Bank Atlas Method</a> .	<a href="#">World Bank Lending Groups</a>
Middle-Income Country (MIC)	As classified by the World Bank. <a href="http://data.worldbank.org/about/country-classifications">http://data.worldbank.org/about/country-classifications</a> . MIC countries have an average annual <i>per capita</i> income of between US\$1,006–\$3975 (lower–middle-income) or US\$3,976–\$12,275 calculated using the <a href="#">World Bank Atlas Method</a> .	<a href="#">World Bank Lending Groups</a>
Poverty	Poverty can be generally understood as the lack of, or inability to achieve, a socially acceptable standard of living, or the possession of insufficient resources to meet basic needs. Poverty is a contested concept and is experienced and conceived differently according to context. Researchers will be expected to adopt a multidimensional approach to poverty.	<a href="#">ESPA Poverty Framework</a>
Ecosystem Services	Ecosystem services are the final point in the delivery chain from ecosystems that are used for material or non-material goods. They result from underlying biophysical processes and structures. See the Research Strategy and UK National Ecosystem Assessment.	<a href="#">Knowledge Strategy</a>
Ecosystems	The places where abiotic and biotic components of the environment come together spatially. They involve biophysical processes and structures that underpin a variety of final ecosystem services.	<a href="#">Knowledge Strategy</a>

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## Change Log

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In addition to the Change Log for this document, the ESPA Secretariat will publish a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document to support the call, which will be updated as necessary and is available at

<http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/funded/programmes/espa/news/ao-2014/> or by emailing [espa@nerc.ac.uk](mailto:espa@nerc.ac.uk).

All potential applicants are strongly encouraged to [register](#) to receive the ESPA Directorate's mailing list and newsletter. Any important information relating to the call during the first stage of the proposal process will be publicised the Directorate's mailing list.

Date	Section	Page	Detail

# 1 Scientific Scope of the Call for ESPA-2014 Grants

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## 1.1 Objective

- 1.1.1 This Announcement of Opportunity (AO) invites applications for projects that will deliver **“blue skies” research** providing **innovative, new approaches** that **enhance the understanding of the way in which ecosystem services contribute to the sustainable alleviation of poverty for poor people (especially those living in low-income countries)**.
- 1.1.2 Projects funded under the ESPA-2014 call will enhance ESPA’s academic and development impact **by changing the way that the world views the links between ecosystem services and poverty alleviation**. Research funded under ESPA-2014 is expected to **inform thinking and practice**, and represent a step-change in the knowledge and evidence that will underpin future activities in ESPA’s sphere of activity.

## 1.2 Overview

- 1.2.1 This call will fund a number of small projects (funding £50K to £150K FEC) which have been designed specifically to add significant value to the ESPA programme by delivering innovative, new research enhancing global understanding of how ecosystem services contribute to sustainable poverty alleviation (both benefits and dis-benefits can be considered). £1.5 million is available to fund projects in this call.
- 1.2.2 Projects will utilise the current ESPA Knowledge Strategy and ESPA research portfolio as a starting point to frame their work and then adopt highly innovative and forward-looking approaches to significantly extend global understanding in ESPA’s area of activity.
- 1.2.3 The ESPA-2014 call provides an opportunity for the world’s best researchers to add significant value to the ESPA programme and, through this, influence future research and development activities around the world. The research commissioned under ESPA-2014 will be expected to support innovative approaches that will substantially inform efforts to ensure that the sustainable management and utilisation of ecosystem services contributes to the long-term alleviation of poverty for poor people in developing countries around the world. The types of activities that ESPA would consider funding under the 2014 call include:
- Synthesis and/or meta-analysis
  - Transformative, forward-looking literature review(s) to identify gaps and opportunities
  - “Think-pieces” and/or new frameworks
  - Convening small groups of world experts for strategic reviews, e.g. Bellagio-type groups and meetings

**The list of activities above is not intended to be exhaustive, and if you have ideas that are not covered here, you are encouraged to discuss these with the ESPA Secretariat before submitting a proposal.**

- 1.2.4 Applicants are encouraged to note that experimental research activities, while not excluded, may be difficult to deliver in the time available. ESPA-2014 is not designed to provide top-up/incremental funds to existing pieces of work, funded either by ESPA or by other agencies, and any research proposed needs to propose a ‘step-change’ in thinking.

### 1.3 ESPA's Vision

1.3.1 ESPA is an international research programme providing evidence of how ecosystem services can be used sustainably to support well-being and sustainable poverty alleviation among poor people in developing countries. ESPA projects are interdisciplinary, linking the social<sup>1</sup> and natural sciences to address a series of focused research questions and evidence challenges. They are delivered through collaborative partnerships of the world's best researchers. *ESPA's success will be measured by the way that its research can be turned into results that benefit the poor in a sustainable manner* (see [www.espa.ac.uk/vision](http://www.espa.ac.uk/vision)).

1.3.2 ESPA's vision combines research excellence with development impact<sup>2</sup>, with a focus on:

- generating world-class science in ESPA's key research areas (see [ESPA's Knowledge Strategy](#); and
- working with partners to ensure that ESPA's new knowledge is put into use to support significant and sustainable delivery of ecosystem services, poverty alleviation and growth (see ESPA's [Impact Strategy](#)).

### 1.4 The ESPA-2014 Research Theme:

*Blue Skies Research: Developing the next generation of thinking for ESPA*

1.4.1 ESPA-2014 will support the development of innovative, forward-looking science on the way that ecosystem services contribute to sustainable pathways out of poverty for poor people in developing countries.

1.4.2 Using ESPA's current [Knowledge Strategy](#) and associated Research Framework, and the growing body of [research evidence](#) generated by ESPA projects to frame their studies (i.e. as a starting point), ESPA-2014 projects are expected to challenge and extend current thinking through the implementation of highly innovative, transformative, "blue skies" types of research activity. **Applicants for ESPA-2014 are encouraged to think creatively and to consider more risky research approaches where it can be shown that the potential returns are significant, and have transformative potential.**

1.4.3 ESPA-2014 projects will be expected to develop scientific advances that will be essential to underpin the next generation of research and development activities in ESPA's area of activity, supporting sustainable approaches linking ecosystem services with poverty alleviation.

For ESPA-2014, applicants will need to demonstrate their potential to undertake "blue skies" research that can change the way that the world views how poor people in developing countries benefit from sustainable *Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation*.

Research funded under ESPA-2014 is expected to **inform thinking and practice over, at least, the next decade**, representing a step-change in the knowledge and evidence that will underpin future activities in ESPA's sphere of activity.

1.4.4 ESPA-2014 projects are expected to produce academic outcomes of very significant importance. As such all applications must demonstrate their aspiration to publish

<sup>1</sup> The term "Social Science" is considered by ESPA to include a wide range of disciplines, including economics, the social and political sciences.

<sup>2</sup> See also the Research Councils UK document "[Excellence with Impact: Framework for the Future](#)".

results in the highest ranked international journals and the case for support should describe the realistic prospects for achieving this.

1.4.5 As ESPA-2014 is encouraging the development of “blue skies” thinking, there are very few restrictions to the types of research that could be supported. Successful applications, will, however, be required to:

- **Demonstrate multi/interdisciplinary approaches/thinking** linking ecosystem services for poverty alleviation in a way consistent with the socio-ecological systems thinking outlined in the ESPA Knowledge Strategy.
- **Utilise the current ESPA Knowledge Strategy and ESPA research portfolio as a starting point** to frame the study and then adopt highly innovative and forward-looking approaches to significantly extend understanding in ESPA’s area of activity. **Projects are encouraged to take risks and go beyond, and if appropriate, to challenge, the ways of thinking currently adopted by the ESPA programme.**
- **Demonstrate how the new thinking or evidence generated by the project has the *potential* to lead to very significant improvements in the lives of poor people in low-income countries.**

## 1.5 Requirements central to all applications

- 1.5.1 Projects will be required to consider the relevant range of the (multiple) dimensions of poverty and of multiple ecosystem services to ensure that the solutions are sustainable over the medium term (decades). Choices about which dimensions to consider must take account of relevant environmental, demographic, technological and societal changes.
- 1.5.2 Projects must work at relevant scales, which will be set in each context by the drivers of poverty (including relevant institutions and socio-political drivers) and ecosystem service management.
- 1.5.3 The 12-month timescale will mean that fieldwork will not be practical or expected in most cases. Applicants may wish to consider working with existing projects which have a field presence relevant to their proposal. A list of already funded ESPA projects is available at [www.espa.ac.uk/projects](http://www.espa.ac.uk/projects).

### **Applications to the ESPA 2014 call must:**

- Demonstrate the “blue skies” innovative, and, if appropriate, the “risky” nature of the proposed research. Proposals should explain how the successful completion of the project will change the way that the links between ecosystem services and poverty alleviation are viewed.
- Clearly demonstrate research excellence that has relevance to the needs of poor people living in low-income countries.
- Have clear hypotheses and/or conceptual frameworks that utilise ESPA’s Knowledge Strategy and Research Framework as a starting point and then seek to challenge and extend existing thinking.
- Include clear methodologies and rationale for the methods proposed.
- Address a range of ecosystems services, and link these to a multi-dimensional analysis of poverty and the ways that poor people can move out of poverty.
- Consider natural and social systems (socio-ecological systems) and processes (and the links between them).
- **Include/consider multiple dimensions of poverty and human well-being** (see [ESPA’s Poverty Framework](#)).
- **Demonstrate understanding of the ecosystem processes that underpin different services and benefits or dis-benefits** in order to identify synergies and trade-offs between them (see [ESPA’s Knowledge Strategy](#)).
- ***Document any relevant links and potential synergies with other ESPA research investments (both current and past).***

## 2 Poverty Focus and Geographic Scope of this Call

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### 2.1 Poverty focus of the research and its location

2.1.1 ESPA's research needs to be focused on poverty *and* have a pathway to impact that will help to reduce poverty and, through this, improve the lives of poor people, particularly those living in low-income countries. It is recognised in the ESPA-2014 call, the ways that “blue skies” research can lead to poverty alleviation will often be difficult to predict.

2.1.2 ESPA considers that poverty is multidimensional, going beyond single measures of income or consumption (see [ESPA's Poverty Framework](#)), and recognises that poverty is experienced differently according to context. ESPA therefore expects researchers to adopt a multidimensional understanding of poverty, and one that is relevant to the specific research context. It is likely that a mixed methods approach will be most appropriate for improving the understanding of the underlying determinants and dynamics of poverty.

### 2.2 Where should ESPA-2014 research be focused?

ESPA's research is expected to generate new knowledge and/or thinking of international relevance that has the potential to benefit the lives of poor people in low-income countries. The World Bank's [income classifications](#) are available online. A list of countries currently classified as being low-income is provided at <http://data.worldbank.org/about/country-and-lending-groups>. The participation of developing country researchers and developing country research institutions is strongly encouraged in all ESPA Grants.

ESPA actively encourages international collaboration and the active involvement of developing country researchers and institutions in the design and implementation of projects.

2.2.1 There are no restrictions on where researchers are located or their nationality. Similarly, there are no geographic restrictions on where research institutions are based, as long as they meet the administrative eligibility requirements for funding (for further information or to check your eligibility, please contact the ESPA Secretariat directly at [espa@nerc.ac.uk](mailto:espa@nerc.ac.uk)).

## 3 Potential Impacts

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3.1.1 Applicants should refer to ESPA's [Impact Strategy](#) for guidance on the types of impacts expected from ESPA research. The “blue skies” nature of research that will be funded under ESPA-2014 means that it is accepted that there is likely to be a long lag between the research and large-scale development impacts.

3.1.2 The ways that “blue skies” research can lead to poverty alleviation will often be difficult to predict, and hence within the pathway to impact statement of applications, proposals should also describe the ways that projects will **promote** and **enhance** the academic and conceptual impacts of the project (i.e. influencing the way people think, and informing future research), changing the way that the world views the links between ecosystem services and poverty alleviation.

## 4 Why Partnership Matters

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### 4.1 People and Partnerships

4.1.1 People and partnerships are central to ESPA's research and to delivering its impact. The importance of this is illustrated both in ESPA's Impact Strategy ([www.espa.ac.uk/impact](http://www.espa.ac.uk/impact)) and in the related Knowledge Strategy (<http://www.espa.ac.uk/our-work/knowledge>).

4.1.2 The level of funding available for individual ESPA-2014 Grants will create restrictions for the types of and size of teams that can be involved in projects, and are not expected to be of the size or scale seen in some of the previously-funded large ESPA grants and consortia. The upper limit of funding should allow for a team consisting of (but not restricted to) a senior academic (part-time) supervising a full-time post-doctoral research fellow. Alternatively, the same level of funding could be used to bring together a small team of senior researchers to work intensively on a specific issue.

Proposals for ESPA-2014 Grants will be **assessed on whether the proposed team and associated partnerships are likely to be adequate to ensure effective delivery of the proposed programme of work.**

4.1.3 Applicants are encouraged to consider the potential for strategic partnerships with existing [ESPA projects](#), but should also consider working with projects funded under other programmes working in similar areas. Some of these are listed in the [ESPA Knowledge Strategy](#).

### 4.2 Interdisciplinary Research

4.2.1 The ESPA programme, and the ESPA-2014 Grants funded under this call, will require interdisciplinary research. It is recognised that some "blue skies" approaches for this call may necessarily have a more 'unbalanced' approach to interdisciplinarity than in other ESPA calls, (i.e. they may focus more on socio-economic science than on natural/biophysical science, or vice versa). However, applicants will need to demonstrate how interdisciplinarity is considered and integrated into their research, and how it will be developed, supported and managed to deliver an integrated project that is relevant to the ESPA programme.

Proposals for funding under this call are encouraged **to show how work from the different disciplines will be integrated** and what approaches will be used to do this.

### 4.3 Developing Country Participation

4.3.1 The level of funding and time available for ESPA-2014 projects means that some funded projects are likely to be from single institutions and it is recognised that this may restrict opportunities for the types and scale of international partnerships seen in earlier calls.

The ESPA programme believes that the experience and expertise of talented developing country researchers will significantly enhance the outcomes expected from ESPA-2014 projects. Project teams should, wherever possible, include developing country researchers and the track record (part one of the case for support) should demonstrate their expected intellectual contribution to the project.

#### 4.4 Working with other ESPA Projects and the ESPA Directorate

- 4.4.1 All ESPA-2014 Grants will be required to work with the ESPA Directorate as part of a wider ESPA Global Forum. Applicants should consider how working with other ESPA projects or using results from earlier closed projects might assist in enhancing their project's or the ESPA programme's overall delivery of research excellence and potential development impact.

## 5 Timeline of the ESPA Programme

5.1.1 The current call for ESPA's 2014 Grants will build upon eight previous sets of projects since 2007 (Figure 1).

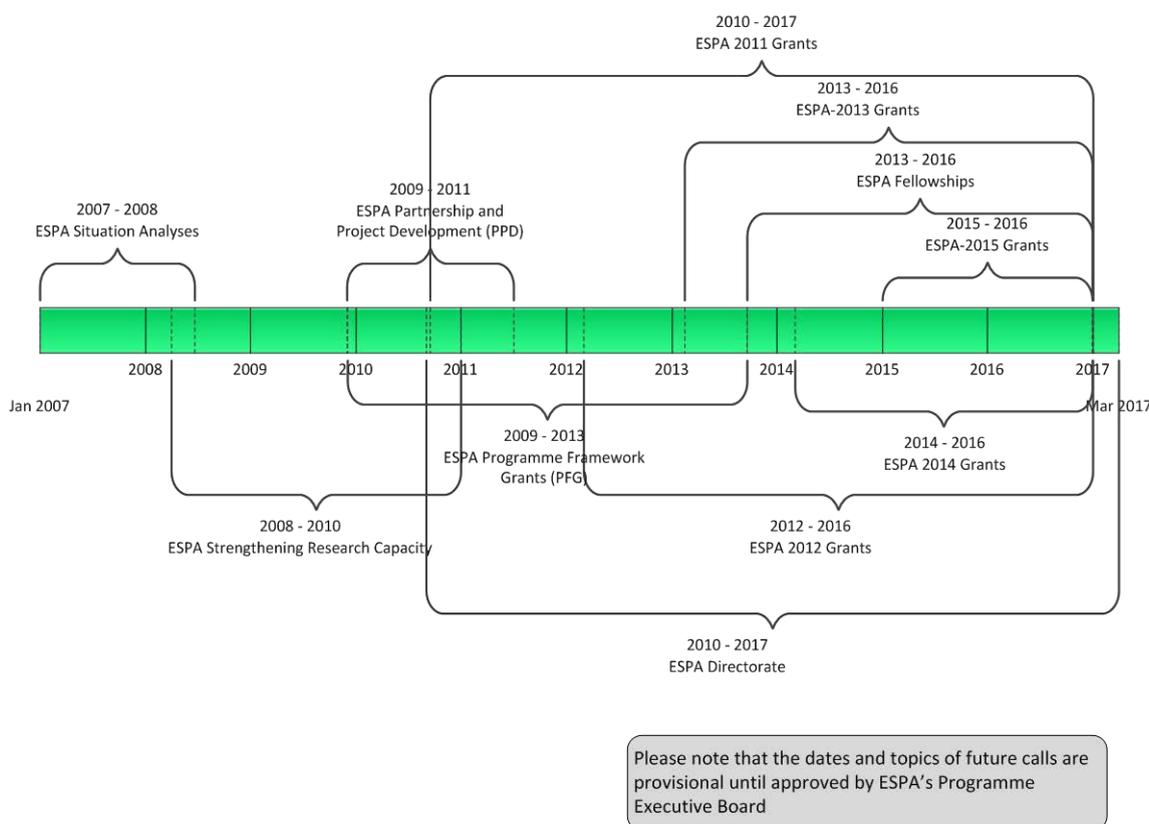


Figure 1 Timeline of past and future ESPA calls

When developing their proposals, potential applicants should consider how their research will complement other projects in the ESPA portfolio. This could be by building on existing research, or by filling critical knowledge and evidence gaps that have been identified by impact partners and potential users of research.

Information about projects that have been funded by ESPA is available from the ESPA website at: [www.espa.ac.uk/projects](http://www.espa.ac.uk/projects).

Call	Period	Number of projects
<a href="#">ESPA Situation Analyses</a>	2007–2008	6
<a href="#">ESPA Strengthening Research Capacity</a>	2008–2010	11
<a href="#">ESPA Partnership and Project Development</a>	2009–2011	28
<a href="#">ESPA Programme Framework Grants</a>	2008–2013	18
<a href="#">ESPA-2011 Grants (Consortium Grants)</a>	2012–2016	3
<a href="#">ESPA-2012 Grants</a>	2013–2016	6
<a href="#">ESPA-2013 Grants</a>	2013–2016	11
ESPA Fellowships	2014–2016	TBC
ESPA-2014 Grants	2014-2016	10–20