



**BBSRC**  
bioscience for the future



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs



# Announcement of Opportunity: Soil Security Programme Coordination

---

**Call Published: 6<sup>th</sup> February 2014**

**Closing date for proposals: 16.00 GMT, 8<sup>th</sup> April 2014**

*It is recommended the following papers be read in conjunction with this announcement:*

*The Soil Security Theme Action Plan*

[www.nerc.ac.uk/research/funded/programmes/soilsecurity/tap4-sunr-soil.pdf](http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/funded/programmes/soilsecurity/tap4-sunr-soil.pdf) (Note link change as of April 2014)

## Summary

On behalf of the Soil Security programme funders, the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) are inviting applications for a Soils Programme Coordinator to lead, manage and coordinate activities within the Soils Security programme. The Soil Security programme is aligned with the Global Food Security (GFS) Programme.

The Soil Security programme is a NERC-led five-year research programme supported by NERC, Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), Scottish Government and Defra that aims to secure future soil quality to sustain ecosystems and the services they deliver to people – such as food, flood and disease regulation, carbon storage and clean water.

**Funds of up to £700,000 (80% FEC) are available for a single grant of 5 years duration.**

## The Soil Security programme

Soil systems are essential to the delivery of many ecosystem services upon which societies depend, including those that are crucial to food security, climate mitigation, water and nutrient cycling. They are highly complex systems which involve multiple physical, chemical, and biological processes, which interact to regulate their functioning, and their ability to resist and recover from perturbations.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> De Vries, et al. (2012). Land use alters the resistance and resilience of soil food webs to drought. *Nature Climate Change*, 2, 276–280.

Moreover, these controls on soil functioning, and their response to perturbations, are likely to vary across different spatial and temporal scales,<sup>2</sup> and across different soil conditions and land types; in other words they are highly scale and context dependent.

Despite their importance to mankind, our understanding of what regulates the ability of soils to perform these multiple functions in different contexts and at different spatial scales, ranging from the soil profile to the Earth system scale, is severely limited, as is our knowledge of the ability of different soils to adapt and respond to land use and climate change.

This represents a serious gap in knowledge given the rapid rate at which soils are being degraded worldwide and the urgent need to inform policy makers and land managers on the sustainable management of soils.

The overarching aim of the Soil Security programme is to deliver improved forecasts of the response of the soil system to changes in climate, vegetation or management at scales of analysis which match the scale of decision making. This will be achieved by addressing the goals to gain an integrated and predictive understanding of (i) the ability of soils to perform multiple functions in different contexts and at different scales and (ii) their ability to resist, recover and adapt to perturbations, such as those caused by land use change and extreme climatic events. This information is essential to inform policy and practical land management decisions at local and national scales. In England, Government has committed to ensure that all soils are managed sustainably and degradation threats tackled by 2030 through the Natural Environment White paper<sup>3</sup>. There is still a significant challenge, however, to (a) define suitable metrics of sustainability and (b) identify and prioritise appropriate management interventions.

The goals of the Soil Security programme will be achieved through multi-disciplinary research calls. The calls will be managed on behalf of all partners by the Programme Secretariat at NERC Swindon Office.

## **Programme Coordination Requirements**

The funders are seeking a Soils Programme Coordinator to lead and coordinate activities within the Soil Security programme and to link with other relevant initiatives of the funders, in particular the BBSRC/NERC programme Soils and Rhizosphere Interactions for Sustainable Agri-ecosystems (SARISA), the NERC/BBSRC Sustainable Agriculture Research and Innovation Club (SARIC) and the Defra soils research programmes and the Sustainable Intensification Platform.

An essential role of the coordinator will also be to facilitate two-way knowledge exchange between researchers and policy/practitioner audiences. This will include communicating policy questions to researchers as well as assisting with the synthesis and translation of research outputs.

It is expected the role of Programme Coordinator will be fulfilled by one main individual, with additional support as necessary, to fulfil the requirements as specified in this document below (for example, support for communications and KE/impact activities, admin support). Other individuals may also be contracted for a temporary period for specific activities related to their area of expertise (e.g., specific reports like the evidence review). The time commitment of staff should be enough to fulfil the requirements of the role, and be justified in the case for support. A single grant will be

---

<sup>2</sup> Ettema, C. and D. A. Wardle. 2002. Spatial soil ecology. *Trends in Ecology and Evolution*, 17, 177–183.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm80/8082/8082.pdf>

awarded to the Programme Coordinator's institution. The Programme Coordinator will report to the Programme Executive Board (PEB).

## **Programme Coordinator Role**

The appointment will be made at a senior level and the Programme Coordinator will be expected to have the following qualities:

- excellent understanding of the current research landscape and emerging issues in Soil Security, both nationally and internationally, including being able to identify opportunities for interaction/collaboration
- experience of leading and managing large projects with a structured, organised approach
- strong knowledge of the stakeholders and potential users relevant to the programme, and an understanding of the potential impacts of the programme
- knowledge or potential to rapidly develop understanding of relevant soils policy and an ability to frame research priorities within a wider context
- ability to act as a credible figure head, representing the programme in a wide variety of fora, both nationally (at UK and Devolved Administration levels) and internationally
- ability to communicate effectively and persuasively, establishing links with researchers across disciplines, policy makers, and wider stakeholder communities
- strong negotiation and influencing skills with the ability to achieve positive outcomes in difficult circumstances
- strong publications record in a relevant area.

## **Responsibilities**

### **Programme development, coordination and integration**

The programmes objectives will be met through support for multi-disciplinary research and impact activities. Calls for research proposals will be managed by NERC on behalf of the funders. The Programme Coordinator will be expected to:

- provide overall intellectual leadership for the Soil Security programme, maintaining an oversight of the funded research activities, ensuring progress in delivery against the programme objectives, and advising the PEB on future programme activities and direction in order to meet the objectives of the programme
- represent the Soil Security and SARISA programmes on behalf of the funders to the wider research community and stakeholder groups, both nationally and internationally where relevant
- to promote a joined up approach between the Soil Security programme and SARISA, such as by ensuring regular communication with both participants (such as PIs), aligning activities and outputs to maximise the added value to each programme, and facilitating the coordination of activities including workshops, conferences and communications

- maintain a wider view of national and international research being undertaken relevant to this area (including the relationship between soil health and ecosystem services) and develop contacts to promote synergies between funders where appropriate, particularly between the funders' relevant activities; for example maintaining an awareness of activities in SARIC and the Defra farm platforms and Soil programmes, to provide added value to the Soil programme and SARISA
- seek to promote the research aims and teams of the Soil Security and SARISA programmes , both nationally and internationally
- maintain regular contact with the PEB and Secretariat
- To lead an evidence review that will advise Defra on priorities for their soils research programme.

### **Evidence Review**

The Coordinator will lead the coordination of an evidence review on UK soils research to both inform programme activities and develop a set of recommendations to inform investment in soils research that is (1) basic and (2) policy focussed in the next 3–5 years. This should inform current and emerging policy on soils, agriculture, land management and the environment. In particular, the analysis of research needs should address commitments on soil management made in the Natural Environment White Paper<sup>4</sup>. The review will inform the direction of future strategic research to improve understanding of the range and importance of ecosystem services provided by soils and how they can be managed as part of an integrated, productive and sustainable farming system. The Review should also highlight where recommendations in the White Paper may create potential strategic research opportunities with Devolved Administrations. The review will be undertaken within the first six months of the award being made and will (a) identify knowledge requirements to inform policy, (b) review and synthesis existing research to address these requirements, and (c) identify evidence gaps and priorities for new research. This will be undertaken in close collaboration with researchers, government officials and other appropriate stakeholders. It will be delivered as a report that prioritises evidence needs within the context of ongoing UK and international research activities and wider policy development. Further details of this requirement will be provided to the successful applicant on request.

### **Applicant advice**

- to provide assistance and guidance to researchers on the progress of projects and the dissemination of findings
- to provide scientific advice to potential applicants for funding awards on fit to programme objectives.

### **Communications**

The Programme Coordinator will develop a programme Communication and Implementation Strategy, for approval by the PEB, which will set out plans for:

---

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm80/8082/8082.pdf>

- ensuring effective communication of the Soil Security, programme objectives, activities and research findings both within the programmes and to a wider audience
  - the strategy must also include a plan to engage with the SARISA programme and ensure a level of communication with other UK soils programmes including SARIC and the Defra Sustainable Intensification Platform
- promoting effective dialogue and engagement of the Programme with wider relevant national and international communities, facilitating collaboration where appropriate
 

regularly engaging with appropriate Defra and devolved administration policy teams; it is expected that this will principally (but not only) through the PEB membership.
- publicising the Soil Security programme to the widest possible community through the most appropriate media (with support from the funders' Communications team where appropriate), including producing outputs suitable for non-academic audiences
  - it is expected that publicity and outputs would draw on other aligned programmes – specifically SARISA, and might include other programmes (e.g. SARIC) to provide maximum leverage for the programmes and ensure a joined up activity
- planning and delivery of a final promotion activity for the programme to publicise the results and achievements. This should also incorporate SARISA and where possible relevant outputs from other activities

### **Maximising impact**

The Programme Coordinator will be required to develop a programme Impact Strategy and Implementation Plan for approval by the PEB, which will set out how they will work with research teams to maximise the impact of the individual awards, and the programmes as a whole. The strategy and plan would be expected to incorporate outputs from SARISA that align to the programme in order to maximise the impact of the two programmes through:

- an understanding of where the Soil Security, and the SARISA research could have impact, and seeking to maximise this impact by promoting programme-level knowledge exchange and translation activities with users (including land managers) at all stages of the programme – including through liaison with Defra activities
- proactively working with policy, industry, non-governmental organisations and other stakeholder audiences to develop an understanding of their knowledge needs to shape KE activities and maximise the impact of the programme
- establishing an Advisory Group for the programme, or working in consultation with wider Advisory Groups from across the co-funders' portfolios;
- supporting research teams within the programme with the delivery and promotion of project-level impact activities, seeking to develop synergies between these and also with SARISA activities;

- developing plans for effective public engagement with different audiences using a variety of methods<sup>5</sup>
- developing appropriate contacts within policy and stakeholder organisations (including industry) and involve them in designing knowledge exchange activities to maximise the impact of the programmes
- working with the PEB and others to identify and secure potential sources of additional co-funding and/or collaboration. In particular, this may include working with the Research Councils' Impact teams to develop strategies for how to engage effectively with other relevant policy, practice and business communities
- promoting the consideration of how emerging findings from soils research interact with wider environmental and socio-economic outcomes
- agreeing with the PEB suitable metrics for measuring impact.

### Data management

Effective data management and adherence to NERC data policies are central to the aims of the programme. The Programme Coordinator will be expected to:

- in collaboration with the NERC Data Management Coordinator and the relevant Data Centres, develop a written Data Management Plan for the programme, for approval by the PEB, and implement arrangements to ensure the establishment of mechanisms for quality assurance of data and for the dissemination of data sets and models produced during the programme
- monitor PI adherence to the programme Data Management Plan and any project Data Management Plans, and ensure that PIs submit data in a timely manner.

### Reporting

To ensure an efficient reporting process is in place for the programme, the Programme Coordinator should:

- maintain oversight of the programme research activities to inform reporting to the PEB, including progress reports at agreed intervals, exception reports and final report
- complete and submit biannual progress reports to NERC, using the template to be provided, to enable NERC reporting to BIS
- provide additional information as required by the co-funders in order for them to meet their organisational reporting requirements
- attend PEB meetings as required to report on progress
- Provide, as part of the evaluation review, Defra with a short report recommending future priorities for their soil science programme.

---

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/about/whatwedo/engage/public/>

## Programme Governance

The Soil Security programme will be governed under the principles of the NERC policy for Governing and Managing Investments.

NERC Swindon Office, on behalf of the funders, retains the overall executive authority for the governance and management of the programme. It will be responsible for:

- the overall Research Programme budget, including the high-level budget management and allocation of resources, e.g. profiling of funds within the programme budget and awards for research and funds for procurement of services
- commissioning, delivery and management of key funding opportunities, including authorisation of funding decisions, issuance of awards, post-award administration and payments, and award completion.

The Programme Coordinator will be required to provide support on certain activities, as requested; for example, assisting with peer review selection process.

The governance of the Soil Security programme will be provided by a number of key bodies, as indicated in Annex 1. The Programme Coordinator will be able to convene appropriate advisory bodies as required, in consultation with the PEB.

The PEB will provide the strategic direction for the programme and will be the ultimate decision-making authority. The PEB will be chaired by the NERC Head of Terrestrial Sciences, and will include representative(s) from the other programme funders and relevant users/stakeholders as required.

## Eligibility and Funding

This opportunity is open to individuals and organisations eligible for RCUK funding, i.e. applicants based in UK Higher Education Institutions (HEI's), RCUK Research and Collaborative Centres, and Independent Research Organisations (IRO's) that are eligible to receive NERC or BBSRC Managed Mode funding. Please refer the RCUK website for more information <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/funding/eligibilityforrcs/>.

Applicants eligible for Defra and Scottish Government funding but not for RCUK funding, may apply for support up to the amount provided by those partners (SG £50K, Defra £70K). All applicants need to be registered or be able to register on the Joint Electronic Submission system (Je-S) to be directly named on an application. Otherwise they may be named as a subcontractor on the application of a registered Je-S user.

Potential applicants should contact NERC Swindon Office using the contact details below well in advance of the closing date if they have queries concerning their eligibility.

**Applicants should note that the successful Programme Coordinator will not be eligible to bid for research grant funding from the programme.** This is a standard stipulation for all such posts and applies also to chairs of programme Steering Committees. Its purpose is to counter any perceptions in the community that holders of such posts may have preferential access to funding. For the avoidance of doubt, NERC wishes to make it clear that the restriction applies only to the named individual(s) and does not extend to members of their research department or organisation.

Funding of up to **£700,000** (80% FEC) is available over the 5 years of the grant duration.

## Application Process

Full proposal applications must be submitted using the Research Councils' Joint Electronic Submission system (Je-S). Please select the Scheme – 'Directed' and the Call – 'RP coordination'.

To use this system, the applicant's Research Organisation must be registered as a Je-S user. Full details are available on the Je-S website. Further information can also be obtained by contacting the Je-S Helpdesk by email at JeSHelp@rcuk.ac.uk or by telephone on 01793 444164.

Applicants must ensure that their application is received by NERC by **4pm** on the closing date of **8th April 2014**. Applicants should leave enough time for their application to pass through their organisation's Je-S submission route before this date. Any application that is received after the closing date, is incomplete, or does not meet the eligibility criteria, will be returned to the applicant and will not be considered.

## Proposal Components

1. Je-S proforma. This includes a series of sections to be completed online, including the summary and objectives of the proposal (note the summary will be publically available) and the finances requested.
2. Case for Support, comprising:
  - a. Previous Track Record of key individuals (up to 2 sides A4), particularly noting experience on managing interdisciplinary, multi-partner initiatives.
  - b. Description of the Programme Coordination Plan (up to 8 sides A4), including:
    - i. description of how the requirements for programme coordination will be planned and implemented
    - ii. description of how the evidence review will be undertaken within the first six months
    - iii. proposed mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of programme activities, particularly as related to outcomes and impacts
    - iv. management plan – should include details and justification of the time commitment of the Programme Coordinator (%FTE), and any other support roles required. It should also include an indication of other external organisation/individual resources that will be subcontracted, and confirmation of the organisation's ability to host the activity for the duration specified
    - v. a work plan for the activity, including a Gantt chart and detailed work plan for the first year, and a broad forecast plan for subsequent years including anticipated milestones and deliverables.
3. Pathways to Impact (up to 2 sides A4). Description of how knowledge exchange and the Impact Strategy will be developed and implemented, including how possible collaborative partnerships and sources of co-funding for the programme may be pursued.
4. Justification of resources (up to 2 sides A4).
5. CV (up to 2 sides A4 per CV).



## Assessment of Proposals

Applicants may be invited to present their proposal to an evaluation panel comprising representatives of the funding partners and other experts as required, and to answer any questions raised.

Assessment will be based on the written proposal, and the panel presentation and Q&A.

### Assessment criteria

The evaluation panel will consider the following when assessing proposals:

1. Quality and appropriateness of proposed approach for delivering the responsibilities of the role:
  - demonstrable understanding of the aims and objectives of the programme and appropriate plan to deliver the requirements
  
2. Track Record:
  - relevant research credentials and knowledge of the field
  - experience of managing or co-ordinating a research programme of comparable size and type
  - proven track record of communicating complex messages on research or related issues to both diverse research and lay audiences
  - broad knowledge of the Research Councils' system (strategic priorities, funding system)
  - broad knowledge of the relevant strategic priorities of UK and Developed Administrations and their respective policy approaches
  - knowledge of intellectual property and other exploitation issues
  - strong network of contacts relevant to Soil Security within academic, user and stakeholder communities, national and international.
  
3. Impact
  - demonstrable understanding of the relevant stakeholders and potential impact
  - Realistic and appropriate plans for the development of the impact strategy and implementation plans.
  
4. Value for Money
  - appropriate allocation of funds and justification of resources
  - added value – involvement with other related initiatives where synergies may be made.

## Timetable

Call published – 6<sup>th</sup> February 2014

Deadline for proposals – 8<sup>th</sup> April 2014

Interview Panel date – wc 5th May 2014 (tbc)

Applicant Notification – May 2014

Award made – June 2014

Award start – the award should start within one month of the Award start on the application, in order to start the Evidence Review within the time needed.

## Contacts

For queries related to this call please contact Ann Kemp on [soils@nerc.ac.uk](mailto:soils@nerc.ac.uk)

# Annex 1

