

NERC International Opportunities Fund – 2013 Call Pump Priming and Pump Priming Plus Grants

Guidance for Applicants

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August 2013

Closing date for proposals: Thursday 17th October 2013 at 16.00 (BST)

1. Summary

The aim of the International Opportunities Fund (IOF) Scheme is to provide resources to NERC-supported researchers to allow them to forge, long-term partnerships with overseas scientists that add value to current NERC-funded science.

IOF grants are **pump-priming**, to help stimulate novel research collaborations. Mature research collaborations should apply to NERC's Standard or Large Grant schemes, which allow for overseas project partnerships, or to other appropriate sources of funding.

The IOF has the specific aims of:

- i. **Novel** international collaborations that will lead to excellent research (i.e. developing new knowledge that cannot be achieved by UK communities alone or by existing international collaborations). This includes activities such as data syntheses, large scale assessments, intercomparisons, etc which often require collaborative approaches;
- ii. Adding value to **current** NERC-funded research projects through international collaboration (e.g. supporting access to complementary international data, skills, infrastructure, etc.);
- iii. Supporting development of **long-term** partnerships with overseas scientists that have potential to become self-sustaining beyond the life-time of the grant;
- iv. Promoting partnerships with researchers in emerging or current research-leading nations (NB: Building capacity in least developed nations is not an objective of this call);
- v. Promoting UK leadership of international research agendas and initiatives.

In general, NERC expects that pump-priming for international research can be supported with modest amounts of funding. For example, to support a focused programme of exchange visits and/or scoping workshops. However, we recognise that exceptionally, larger and longer-term amounts of funding may be required, e.g. to build new large scale networks, to develop new community-owned research tools and standards, or to pilot deployment of infrastructure overseas. Consequently, the IOF supports two levels of grant:

(i) **IOF Pump Priming grants**

These aim to help researchers establish and develop novel, collaborative links with international partners. Although the grants may have exploratory elements, the proposal should include specific scientific objectives.

Proposals for IOF Pump Priming Grants may request funding of a maximum of **£50K (100% FEC) for up to 2 years duration**. The total amount of funding available for this Call is anticipated to be approximately £300K. NERC anticipates funding up to 8 grants.

Calls for IOF Pump Priming grants will be held biannually.

(ii) **IOF Pump Priming Plus grants** .

These aim to support establishment of novel international collaborative links, as for the IOF Pump Priming Grants, but to allow for development of partnerships that require more resource. Such partnerships will be exceptional, and the additional resources requested must be well justified. Examples of where such resource may be appropriate include:

- **UK leadership of large scale, multilateral, international efforts**
- **Piloting the deployment of UK infrastructure overseas**

Proposals for IOF Pump Priming Plus Grants may request funding of a maximum of **£400K (100% FEC) for up to 3 years duration**. The total amount of funding available for this Call is anticipated to be approximately £800K. NERC anticipates funding up to 2-3 grants.

Calls for IOF Pump Priming Plus Grants will be held annually.

Because the two types of IOF grant differ in the nature and scale of research collaborations that they will support and the level of funding available from NERC, some aspects of the application process differ between the two calls. **Where there are differences in the application and assessment process for Pump Priming and Pump Priming Plus grants, this is noted below.**

2. Background

In 2009/10 NERC conducted a review of its recent and current funding schemes that support international activities. One of the aims of the review was to ensure that future investments target gaps where international activities are not typically supported through NERC's 'usual' funding schemes. Based on the results and recommendations of the review, the International Opportunities Fund (IOF) was re-launched to support **international collaborative activities** that are not typically funded through other NERC funding schemes.

Following the 2012 IOF call NERC undertook a survey of previous applicants and panel members in order to review how best the IOF scheme could continue to meet the needs of the community to support international partnerships. The outcome of the consultation was: a greater clarification of the pump-priming role of the call; an emphasis of the need to add value to current NERC research; and the creation of a more agile funding stream (with two calls a year) to support typically modest pump-priming needs and as well as retention of a stream to support the more exceptional needs for more substantial pump-priming support.

3. Scope

3.1 Objectives of the IOF scheme

- i. **Novel** international collaborations that will lead to excellent research (i.e. developing new knowledge that cannot be achieved by UK communities alone or by existing international collaborations). This includes activities such as data syntheses, large scale assessments, intercomparisons, etc. which often require collaborative approaches;
- ii. Adding value to **current** NERC-funded research projects through international collaboration (e.g. supporting access to international data, skills, infrastructure etc);
- iii. Supporting development of **long-term** partnerships with overseas scientists that have potential to become self-sustaining beyond the life-time of the grant;
- vi. Promoting partnerships with researchers in **emerging or current research-leading nations** (NB: Building capacity in least developed nations is not an objective of this call);
- vii. Promoting **UK leadership** of international research agendas and initiatives.

Activities under both IOF Pump Priming and Pump Priming Plus Grant calls are expected to deliver the above IOF scheme objectives, be outcome focussed and have lasting impact beyond the duration of the grant (i.e. exchanges, networks, workshops, etc. will not be supported as an end in themselves).

3.2 Activities supported

The nature of the activities supported should be appropriate to the scale of the grant.

Applicants for IOF Pump Priming Plus Grants must demonstrate why additional pump-priming resources to those available through IOF Pump Priming Grants are justified.

International partners are not eligible for direct funding from NERC. However, eligible UK organisations may request limited support for international partners, in order to support visits or exchanges in both directions where necessary. Further information on NERC funding for visiting researchers and overseas travel is provided in Section E of the [Research Grants Handbook](#). Requests for support for overseas researchers must be well justified, since an objective of the IOF is to promote partnerships that add value to NERC funded research, and consequently there is an expectation of significant contributions from the overseas partners.

Examples of the types of activities that could be supported by IOF grants include, but are not limited to, the following:

- i. **Scoping studies and/or workshops:** in areas of science of relevance to NERC remit, in order to develop, for example, common approaches, intercomparisons and standards, etc.;
- ii. **Collaborative secondments and exchanges:** building long-term partnerships with overseas centres of excellence, with a view to capacity building and accessing skills, data or infrastructure that enhance UK research capability;

- iii. **Piloting infrastructure deployment:** Proof of concept studies to extend the application of UK technology to novel systems overseas, e.g. in order to enhance technological specifications and/or address new science questions;
- iv. **Development/Coordination of International Programmes and Networks:** to coordinate international effort around key regional or global environmental challenges;
- v. **Major international workshops or conferences:** these can provide an effective way for researchers (and end-users) to exchange knowledge and skills and enhance capability, understanding of key issues, and dissemination of knowledge through high-impact scientific and/or policy publications;
- vi. **International Project Offices (IPO):** to coordinate implementation of major global research programmes. These programmes, often under the auspices of the United Nations and/or the International Council for Science (ICSU), for example, develop and align international research agendas, promote excellence and leadership in science, coordinate world-wide research campaigns, and disseminate outputs to international stakeholders. **NB:** The IOF will normally fund up to one IPO each year. NERC will normally expect IPOs to be hosted by NERC Research Centres, through which the IPO's linkage with national capability can be maximised. NERC will welcome applications for distributed IPOs in partnership with overseas organisations. **Because of these expectations, it is essential that applicants considering proposals for IPOs discuss the proposal with the NERC Head of International before submitting an application.**
- vii. **Other ideas:** we welcome other ideas that you may have for activities that deliver high impact outcomes through international collaboration. Please contact the IOF Programme Officer (iof@nerc.ac.uk) to discuss these ideas if you are uncertain whether the activity you are planning falls within the scope of this call.

The grant must be led by an eligible PI but we encourage the involvement of early career researchers, however applications will **not** be accepted where support for early career researchers is the primary aim of the project. Participation by students is welcome, as long as this doesn't interfere with their studentship.

There is no minimum grant size restriction, and we welcome contributions from partners that leverage the amount of funding requested from NERC.

3.3 Ineligible activities

In order to ensure that the IOF is targeted at international collaborative activities which are not typically supported by other funding schemes, the IOF will not accept mature research collaborations, which can be typically supported through NERC Standard and Large Grant schemes.

Proposals for IPOs that have not been agreed for submission by the NERC Head of International will also not be accepted.

Project studentships are **not** permitted as part of IOF Pump Priming Plus grants.

4. Eligibility requirements

Standard NERC eligibility requirements apply (See Section B of [Research Grants Handbook](#)). **In addition**, because the aim of the IOF is to add value to current NERC investments through international collaboration, **applications must be made by a Principal Investigator (PI) who is currently both eligible for NERC responsive mode funding and currently in receipt of NERC research funding as a PI (lead or non-lead)**, through one of the following mechanisms:

- i. a NERC responsive mode grant.
- ii. a NERC Research Programme grant.
- iii. a Research Scientist at one of the NERC Centres.
- iv. a current recipient of a fellowship grant from NERC.

The associated NERC grant or Centre Project **must** have started before the application deadline and must **not** have ended before the start of the IOF Grant. It is acceptable for the proposed IOF project to outlast the associated research grant; however, applications may be uncompetitive if there is little overlap between the projects.

In order to support a targeted, long-term approach to developing international collaborations, **individuals may be named as Principal Investigator or Co-Investigator on no more than one application for IOF Pump Priming Grants and one application for IOF Pump Priming Plus Grants.**

NERC resubmission rules for RM standard grants apply, whereby resubmission is allowed only when nine months has passed from the closing date of the original submission¹.

Potential applicants should contact NERC well in advance of the submission deadline if they have any queries concerning their eligibility.

5. International Project Partner requirements

The focus of the IOF Scheme is **international collaboration, to add value to NERC funded science. Consequently, international Project Partners are mandatory.** They should have a significant and integral role and should be actively involved in the proposed work, in order to maximise the quality of the activity and its potential to develop long-term, sustainable partnerships.

*Because of the pump-priming nature of the grant, we recognise that some aspects of the international partnership may not yet be sufficiently mature to attract substantial co-funding and/or in-kind contribution. However, letters of support should provide **evidence of sufficient overseas ‘buy-in’ and material contributions to the proposed project such that it is clear that substantive collaboration will go-ahead if funded.***

Project Partners can be involved with a proposal in several ways, which include but are not restricted to the following examples:

- i. providing facilities or data not otherwise available to the applicant, or available at a cost;
- ii. provision of staff time;
- iii. input of scientific or technical expertise and/or advice;

¹ <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/next/resubmissions.asp>

- iv. contributions to outputs (e.g. publications);
- v. a commitment to make practical use of the project's outputs;
- vi. a commitment to the project beyond the period of NERC support;
- vii. hosting seconded staff.

Details of the Project Partners' contribution to the project must be included in the proposal in the following ways:

- i. Include the name, institution and country of all international partners in the 'Project Partners' section of the Je-S form, along with the financial and/or in-kind support they are providing to the project.
- ii. A full description of each Project Partner's contribution to the project should be detailed in the Case for Support.
- iii. All Project Partners must provide a signed Letter of Support on headed paper (see section 6.2 below), which confirms their commitment and contribution to the project.

In-kind contributions from the Project Partner(s) should be carefully costed to ensure there is no double accounting. Access to data already freely available in the public domain cannot be counted as in-kind support and care should be taken so as not to over-value in-kind contributions.

6. Application Process

General guidance for completing and submitting proposals is available at <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/application/information.asp> and in the [Research Grants Handbook](#).

For IOF Pump Priming Grants we will only accept single JeS applications. Joint proposals will not be accepted,

Some additional requirements exist for the IOF calls, which are described below.

6.1 Submitting proposals

Proposals must be submitted using the Research Councils' Joint Electronic Submission system (Je-S). Please select Proposal Type '**Standard Proposal**' and then select the Scheme '**International Opportunities Fund**' and the Call:

- i. ***For IOF Pump Priming Grants: 'International Opportunities Fund 2013 Pump priming'***
- ii. ***For IOF Pump Priming Plus Grants: 'International Opportunities Fund 2013 Pump Priming Plus'***

To use the Je-S system, the applicant's Research Organisation must be registered as a Je-S user. Full details are available on the Je-S website <https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk>. 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 (BST) on the closing date which is **Thursday, 17th October 2013**. Applicants should leave enough time for their application to pass through their own organisation's Je-S

submission route before this date. Any proposal that is incomplete, received after the closing date, or does not meet NERC's eligibility criteria will be returned to the applicant and will not be considered.

6.2 Proposal format components

All proposals must include the Je-S application form which consists of a number of structured sections to be completed, including investigator details, summary and objectives, and the financial request.

This application form must be supported by the following additional documentation, uploaded as attachments:

- i. The **Case for support** which consists of the following elements.
 - a) Previous Track Record not exceeding **2 sides of A4**, covering standard NERC requirements as set out in Section F of NERC Research Grants Handbook, and **in addition**:
 - evidence of any experience and leadership in an international context including past collaborative work that is relevant to the current activity and activities where co-funding has been awarded (especially from an international partner).
 - reference number and title of the NERC grant or identification of centre research activity to which the proposed work will add value.
 - b) Description of the Proposed Activity addressing the following points:
 - standard NERC requirements as set out in Section F of NERC Research Grants Handbook, and **in addition how the activity will deliver against the objectives of the IOF Scheme** (see Section 3). In addressing the scheme objectives, the case for support should make clear:
 - **the significance of the international collaboration to the projects' objectives**—applicants should demonstrate how the proposed international collaboration links to and adds value to existing NERC-funded research (especially the specified current grant);
 - **the specific intellectual and material contribution of each Partner**;
 - **the potential durability of the collaboration, including routes for further long-term collaboration.**

*The Description of the Proposed Activity (including all necessary tables, references and figures should not exceed **3 pages for IOF Pump Priming Grants and 8 pages for IOF Pump Priming Plus Grants.***

- c) Outline Data Management Plan not exceeding **1 side of A4**
 - A mandatory, single page, Outline Data Management Plan (ODMP) will be required for all applications submitted. The ODMP will identify data sets likely to be made available to NERC Environmental Data Centres for archiving and reuse at the end of the grant (guidance available on <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/sites/data/dmp.asp>). The page limits for the Case for Support have been extended by one page to incorporate the ODMP, and this extra page should be used only for this purpose. The Case for Support for successful proposals will be made available to the NERC Environmental Data Centres (see <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/sites/data/>) and where appropriate,

used by them to draft, in collaboration with the Principal Investigator, a full Data Management Plan (DMP). This full DMP should be mutually agreed between the Data Centre and the Principal Investigator within three months of the start date of the grant.

- ii. Justification of Resources should be attached to the application; this can be up to **2 sides of A4**. Refer to the [Research Grants Handbook](#) for details on completing a justification of resources.
- iii. ***Only required for IOF Pump Priming Plus Grant proposals:*** Pathways to Impact Plan should also be attached to the application; this can be up to **2 sides of A4**. For further information and guidance on what to include in a Pathways to Impact plan, please see: <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/application/pathwaystoimpact.asp>
- iv. Letters of Support. Applications must include a detailed Letter of Support from each named Project Partner. Information on what to include in Letters of Support from Project Partners is provided in Section F of the [Research Grants Handbook](#). Additional information on the expected nature of international partnerships for grants under the IOF is provided in Section 5, above.
- v. CVs, each of up to **2 sides A4** for each named PI, co-I, research staff post and Visiting Researcher.

7. Assessment of proposals

7.1 Assessment criteria

All proposals must clearly define how the project objectives deliver against the IOF Scheme and call objectives in the '**Case for Support**' documents. If proposals fail to demonstrate a strong link between the project objectives and the IOF Scheme and call objectives they will be considered ineligible for funding.

IOF proposals will be assessed on:

- i. **Fit to IOF Scheme** objectives
 - The novelty of the research collaborations and the extent to which this will promote science excellence
 - The added value to NERC-funded research through the international collaborative activity, especially to the specified current grant
 - The unique contribution and expertise of the overseas partners, i.e. why these partners above any others around the world or within the UK are involved
 - The potential durability of the collaboration, including routes for further collaboration
 - The potential to promote UK leadership of international research agenda's and initiatives
 - The level of the contribution made to this grant from other sources including the UK institutions and international potential partners

ii. **Excellence**

IOF Grants should promote excellent research that cannot be delivered by the UK alone. The pump-priming nature of the grants, means that some aspects of the research will be more speculative and exploratory than is typical for NERC Standard Grants. Full-realisation of science benefits may not always be possible at the pump-priming stage. Therefore, where appropriate, IOF proposals will be assessed on both the actual research excellence to be achieved in the duration of the grant and the potential to achieve further research excellence in the longer-term.

The NERC definition of research excellence criteria can be found at <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/assessment/assesscriteria.asp>

7.2 Assessment process

Proposals will be directly reviewed by an Assessment Panel consisting of members of the NERC Peer Review College and other experts as required, with extensive experience of international collaborative environmental science and research. Proposals will not be sent out for additional peer review prior to the panel.

NERC staff and advisors will, where appropriate, be asked to advise the Assessment Panel on fit to scheme. The Assessment Panel will make funding recommendations to NERC.

Feedback on applications will be available on request, after decisions have been made.

We hope to have all grants announced in December 2013 so the earliest start date that can be requested on the applications is the 1st of January 2014. The latest start allowed will be 30th June 2014. A 3-month limitation on the delay of the start date applies.

8. Reporting Requirements

The Principal Investigator for each grant is responsible for providing information on the outcomes of the research project each year. NERC no longer requires the submission of a Final Report for most grants. Research Outcomes are now collected through the Research Outcomes System (ROS). Further information on reporting can be found in the Research Grants Handbook (section G). NERC reserves the right to approach Project Partners on funded grants to understand their benefits from the grant.

9. Timetable

August 2013: AO published
17th October 2013: Closing date 16.00 (BST)
November 2013: Assessment panel
December 2013: Announcement of grants
1st January 2014: Earliest start date.
30th June 2014: Latest start date

IOF Pump priming Plus grants will have one closing date per year.
IOF Pump Priming grants will have two closing dates per year.

10. Contact

To discuss proposal ideas or eligibility issues, please contact the IOF Programme Officer at iof@nerc.ac.uk.