

NERC International Opportunities Fund – 2014 Call Pump Priming Awards

Guidance for Applicants

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March 2014

Closing date for full proposals: Tuesday 22nd April 2014 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 pump-priming for international research can be supported with modest amounts of funding. For example, to support a focussed programme of exchange visits and/or scoping workshops.

This call is for IOF Pump-Priming Grants:

These aim to help researchers establish and develop new, collaborative links with international partners. Although the proposed projects may have exploratory elements, they should include specific objectives in defined science areas.

Proposals for IOF Pump-priming awards may request funding of a maximum of £40K (at 80% FEC) for up to 2 years duration. The total amount of funding available for this Call is anticipated to be approximately £280K. NERC anticipates funding up to 7 awards.

As IOF Pump-Priming grants are limited to a maximum of £40K (at 80% FEC) proposals should be realistic in terms of proposed objectives, resources and impact. Proposals should also show clear added value to NERC science (i.e. from a specified existing NERC grant or NERC Research Centre Programme: please see eligibility criteria) and 'buy-in' from the international partner(s).

Applicants for either type of grant who are considering international collaboration with researchers from São Paulo State, Brazil, should note that this call will accept joint proposals to NERC-FAPESP (the State of São Paulo Research Foundation) under the terms of the RCUK-FAPESP Lead Agency Agreement. Further information is provided in Annex A.

2. Scope

2.1 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;
- 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.

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

2.2 Activities supported

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 such support must be well justified, since an objective of the IOF is to promote partnerships that add value to NERC funded research, consequently with 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. **Development/Coordination of International Programmes and Networks:** to coordinate international effort around key regional or global environmental challenges.
- iv. **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.
- v. **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 or Collaborative 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.**
- vi. **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.

2.3 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 partnership research awards.

3. 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 award from NERC.

The NERC grant reference should be quoted on application

The associated NERC grant or Centre Project **must** have started before the application deadline and must **not** have expired before the start of the award. It is acceptable for the proposed 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 Pump-Priming Grants.**

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

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

4. International Project Partner requirements

The main 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 contributions. 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;
- 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 application 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.

5. Application Process

General guidance for completing and submitting applications, and links to forms, 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 included below.

5.1 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. **IOF Pump-Priming Awards: 'International Opportunities Fund 2014a Pump Priming'**

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 **Tuesday 22nd April 2014**. Applicants should leave enough time for their application to pass through their own organisation's Je-S submission route before this date. Any application 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.

5.2 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 2). 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 award).
 - **The specific intellectual and material contribution of each Partner.**
 - **The potential durability of the collaboration, including routes for further long-term collaboration.**
- 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.

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

- iii. Letters of Support. Applications must include a detailed Letter of Support from each named Project Partner, and may also include Letters of Support from any Supporters. 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 awards 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.

6. Assessment of proposals

6.1 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.
 - 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 award 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>

6.2 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 awards announced in August 2014 so the earliest start date that can be requested on applications is the 1st of September 2014. A 3-month limitation on the delay of the start date applies.

7. 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.

8. Timetable

March 2014: AO published

22nd April 2014: Closing date 16.00 (BST)

15th July 2014: Assessment panel

5th August 2014: Announcement of Awards

1st September 2014: Earliest start date.

9. Contact

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

NERC International Opportunities Fund – 2014a Call Pump Priming Awards

Annex A. Joint Proposals to NERC-FAPESP

Applicants considering international collaboration with researchers from São Paulo State, Brazil, should note that this Call will welcome proposals jointly prepared and submitted by PIs from the UK and São Paulo State, Brazil, under the terms of the RCUK-FAPESP (the State of São Paulo Research Foundation) Lead Agency Agreement.

1. Context

In 2009 RCUK and FAPESP signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to strengthen the existing research links between the UK and Brazil and to help encourage and support proposals that involve international collaborative teams. The MoU provides for a Lead Agency Agreement whereby UK and Brazilian researchers may apply for funds from both countries through the UK Research Councils' funding schemes. Further information is available from the [RCUK website](#).

2. Aims

FAPESP will consider proposals from PIs eligible for FAPESP funding and that demonstrate excellence in one or more of the following characteristics (international collaboration is a must):

- develop research with high impact and outcome focused on areas of interest for [FAPESP's Research Program for Global Climate Change \(PFPMCG\)](#) and [FAPESP's Virtual Institute for Biodiversity Research \(BIOTA\)](#).
- activities that place international collaboration at the centre of their approach, adding value to Brazilian capability and delivering outcomes that cannot be delivered by scientists in São Paulo alone (FAPESP's standard requirement that the PI must be a scientist affiliated to a research organization in São Paulo still applies to the Brazilian side of the collaboration).
- activities with lasting outputs that are expected to have benefits beyond the duration of the IOF and the FAPESP award (e.g. establishing long-term collaborations, pump priming for ongoing, self-sustaining activities and/or developing high-impact knowledge).

NOTE: Applications to multiple FAPESP-NERC programmes with similar applications are not allowed.

3. Activities Supported

The NERC International Opportunities Fund aims to facilitate international collaboration for research and research-related activities that are aligned with NERC strategic priorities.

Requirements and conditions for any FAPESP-funded elements of submissions under this optional collaboration between the UK and Brazil are as follows.

- The São Paulo, Brazil part of the proposal must have a research content consistent with the “collaborative secondments and exchanges” section of IOF AO, i.e., building long-term partnerships among Brazilian and UK centres of excellence, with a view to capacity building and accessing skills, data or infrastructure that enhances Brazil and UK research capabilities.
- FAPESP is especially interested in proposals in which the geographic focus of the collaboration is South America and the adjacent oceans, particularly the Amazon and the South Atlantic. Other geographies can be considered, pending analysis by FAPESP of the justifications given. Therefore, applicants from São Paulo, Brazil, **must** contact Mr Alexandre Roccato (chamada-fapesp-nerc@fapesp.br) **before submission**, to discuss and obtain permission to submit a proposal focusing outside of the preferred geographic area.
- The focus of the São Paulo, Brazil-UK partnership will be in Earth System Science and Global Environmental Change research, and the research collaboration will address one or more of the topics below:
 - (i) facilitate links between scientists in both countries, building on existing partnerships, but also widening to other groups of both countries;
 - (ii) develop groundbreaking techniques for communicating scientific outcomes to stakeholders;
 - (iii) engage directly with the wider Earth System Science community

Only proposals that are not typically supported through other FAPESP funding schemes will be considered.

Applicants from the State of São Paulo may request up to £40K from FAPESP for each proposal for up to two (2) years duration.

Proposals must be “related” (i.e. FAPESP terminology for proposals that complement and build upon another grant) to an ongoing FAPESP grant. Thus, researchers regarded as eligible to submit proposals are Principal Investigators of ongoing research projects funded by FAPESP within the following funding lines: Regular Research Awards, Thematic Projects, Young Investigators, Research, Innovation and Dissemination Centers (RIDC/CEPID), Public Education Research Program, Research in Public Policies and Research Partnership for Technological Innovation (PITE). Co-Principal Investigators (PPs) of ongoing Thematic Projects, RIDCs or PITEs are also eligible to apply.

FAPESP will provide the selected proposals with funds to cover short-term scientific exchange visits to UK (travel, accommodation, living expenses and health insurance), workshops (within the rules of FAPESP) and small research expenses (consumables, services, low cost research equipment). Research Infrastructure Overheads are not applicable.

FAPESP will only accept one application per related ongoing research project. Likewise, each Principal Investigator can present only one proposal to this Call. The ongoing FAPESP research project linked to this proposal must have a minimum of six months left at the scheduled beginning of the mobility project.

The FAPESP contribution is in addition to the support that can be sought directly from NERC.

4. Additional Application Procedures for joint FAPESP – NERC proposals

Applicants considering applying under this Agreement must read the Operational Guidelines available from the [RCUK website](#). Please note that there are specific guidelines for applicants to NERC within these RCUK Guidelines.

UK Principal Investigators of potential collaborative proposals should, in this case, contact the IOF Programme Officer (iof@nerc.ac.uk) before submitting a proposal.

Brazilian Principal Investigators should contact FAPESP's representative for matters related to this joint Call, Mr. Alexandre Roccoatto (chamada-fapesp-nerc@fapesp.br) and find the matching announcement on the FAPESP website.

Proposals must be submitted through NERC by the UK PI, following the procedure described in the corresponding [Announcement of Opportunity](#).

The Case for Support must:

- state that the RCUK-FAPESP Lead Agency Agreement is being applied by the applicants;
- mention the PI in São Paulo and other members of the research team affiliated to research and higher education institutions in São Paulo, including summarized CVs for each participant;
- identify the number of the ongoing FAPESP Grant led by the PI in the State of São Paulo;
- clearly define the budget requested to FAPESP, within the limits set out above

The Brazilian applicants should be included as Project Partners on the JeS form and their role should be described in the Case for Support, following the guidelines in Section 5 of the Guidance for Applicants.

A specific Proposal Form for this Call must be attached by the UK PI to his application as a supporting document (follow link below):

➤ [FAPESP-NERC Pump Priming Proposal Form](#)

Further documentation will be requested by FAPESP to enable the processing of proposals, following the usual procedures for research grants. This will include detailed budget forms, budget justifications, research team description, etc.