

International Opportunities Fund

Announcement of Opportunity

Issued on: 6 March 2015
Proposal deadline: 30 April 2015 16:00



Revised on: 27 March 2015

This call will accept joint proposals to NERC-FAPESP under the terms of the RCUK/FAPESP Memorandum of Understanding (Annexe A).

1. Summary

The Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) is inviting proposals for Pump Priming grants to its International Opportunities Fund (IOF). Note: larger Pump Priming Plus grants are *not* invited to this call.

The IOF scheme provides resources for 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.

NERC has allocated £300k to this call and each proposal may request funding of a **maximum of £40k (at 80% FEC) for up to two years duration.**

2. Background

NERC's usual funding schemes encourage international project partnerships and the IOF is not intended to simply support international collaborative research. It has a specific aim of adding value to existing NERC-funded research, data and knowledge through international collaboration. Furthermore, the IOF seeks to provide a foundation for long-term partnership and added value that will continue beyond the lifetime of the grant. As such, the IOF aims to support collaborations that are not typically supported through NERC's usual funding schemes.

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 the creation of two separate calls per year under the IOF scheme: a Pump Priming call to support the initiation and development of new international partnerships; and a second call to cover both Pump Priming and larger Pump Priming Plus awards, which

allow for development of partnerships that require more resource. Such partnerships will be exceptional and the additional resources must be well justified, such as for UK leadership of large scale, multilateral, international efforts, or piloting the deployment of UK infrastructure overseas. (To note: this call does not include Pump Priming Plus awards).

3. Scope of Call

In general, NERC expects 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.

The IOF has the specific aims of:

- 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;
- adding value to current NERC-funded research projects through international collaboration (e.g. supporting access to complementary international data, skills, infrastructure, etc.);
- supporting development of long-term partnerships with overseas scientists that have potential to become self-sustaining beyond the life-time of the grant;
- 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);
- 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).

Although the grants may have exploratory elements, the proposal should include specific scientific objectives.

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

- *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. These should have a clear identifiable outcome which supports the work carried out and are not an end in themselves.
- *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.
- *Development/Coordination of International Programmes and Networks*: to coordinate international effort around key regional or global environmental challenges.
- *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.
- *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 proposals 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, [Helen Beadman](#), before submitting a proposal.

- *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.

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). **The supporting NERC grant reference should be quoted on the proposal.**

Applicants 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.

4. Programme Requirements

International Project Partner

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:

- providing facilities or data not otherwise available to the applicant, or available at a cost;
- provision of staff time;
- input of scientific or technical expertise and/or advice;
- contributions to outputs (e.g. publications);
- a commitment to make practical use of the project's outputs;
- a commitment to the project beyond the period of NERC support;
- 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 below), which confirms their commitment and clearly states their 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.

Data Management

All NERC proposals require an Outline Data Management Plan to identify data sets of long term value that should be made available to NERC data centres for archiving and reuse at the end of the grant. Full details on data management planning are available on the NERC website.¹

5. Eligibility and Funding

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, proposals must be made by a Principal Investigator (PI) who is currently both eligible for NERC Discovery Science funding and currently in receipt of NERC research funding as a PI (lead only), through one of the following mechanisms:

- NERC Discovery Science grant
- NERC Strategic Research Programme grant
- Research Scientist at one of the NERC Centres
- Current recipient of an Independent Research Fellowship from NERC.

The associated NERC grant or Centre Project must have started before the proposal 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, proposals may be uncompetitive if there is little overlap between the projects.

Individuals can only be named as Principal Investigator or Co-Investigator on one proposal for Pump-Priming grants.

The grant must be led by an eligible PI but we encourage the involvement of early career researchers; however proposals 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.

¹ <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/sites/data/dmp/>

Proposals for IOF Pump Priming grants may request funding of **a maximum of £40k (at 80% FEC) for up to two years duration**. The total amount of funding available for this call is anticipated to be approximately £300k. NERC anticipates funding up to 8 grants.

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

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.

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.

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.

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

Associated studentships are not permitted as part of IOF Pump Priming research awards.

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

6. Application Process

Proposals must be submitted using the Research Councils' Joint Electronic Submission system (Je-S). Applicants should select Proposal Type - 'Standard Proposal' and then select the Scheme – 'Directed' and the Call – "International Opportunities Fund 2015 - Pump Priming".

General guidance for completing and submitting proposals, and links to required forms, is available in the [Research Grants Handbook](#).

Applicants must ensure their proposal is received by NERC by 4pm on the closing date. Applicants should leave enough time for their proposal to pass through their organisation's Je-S submission route before this date.

For IOF Pump Priming grants we will only accept single Je-S proposals. Joint proposals will not be accepted.

Some additional requirements for this IOF call are included below.

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:

- a) **Case for support**; which consists of the following elements:
 - i. *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);
 - the reference number and title of the NERC grant, or identification of the centre research activity, to which the proposed work will add value.
 - ii. *Description of the Proposed Activity* not exceeding **3 pages**, covering 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.
- b) **Justification of Resources** should be attached to the proposal; this can be up to **2 sides of A4**. Refer to section F of the [Research Grants Handbook](#) for details on completing a justification of resources.
- c) **Letters of Support**, up to **2 sides of A4**. All proposals must include an international project partner. Proposals must include a detailed Letter of Support from each named Project Partner, and may also include letters of support from any other relevant individual or organisation. Letters of support must be on headed paper, signed and dated. Information on what to include in Letters of Support 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 4, above.

- d) **CVs**, up to **2 sides A4** for each named PI, co-I, research staff post and Visiting Researcher.
- e) **Outline Data management plan**, up to **1 side A4**
- f) **Facilities form/Technical Assessment** for access to NERC Services and Facilities (if applicable)

Please note a Pathway to Impact plan is *not* required.

All attachments submitted through the Je-S system, including the Case for Support, must be completed in single-spaced typescript of minimum font size 11 point (Arial or other sans serif typeface of equivalent size), with margins of at least 2cm. References should also be at least 11 point font. Applicants referring to websites should note that referees may choose not to use them. Attachments should be converted to PDF

and checked prior to attaching to the proposal in Je-S, as PDF conversion of documents with any non-standard fonts (scientific notation, diagrams etc.) can result in changes, such as missing data or increased document length.

Any proposal that is received after the closing date, is incomplete, does not follow submission guidelines (e.g. font size, document length etc.), or does not meet NERC's eligibility criteria, will be returned to the applicant and will not be considered.

7. Assessment Process

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. 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/application/assessment/assesscriteria/>

II. Fit to IOF Scheme objectives, including;

- 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.

Proposals will be directly reviewed by an Assessment Panel. NERC staff will, where appropriate, be asked to advise the Assessment Panel on fit to scheme.

The Assessment Panel will make funding recommendations to NERC via a ranked list of the proposals, which NERC will use to fund the projects that best meet the aims of the programme within the available budget.

Feedback will be provided on all proposals following the funding decision.

8. Timetable

AO published: March 2015

Closing date for applications: 30 April 2015

Assessment Panel: July 2015

Announcement of Awards: August 2015

The earliest start date for projects is therefore expected to be 1 September 2015.

Contact Details

For all enquires please contact iof@nerc.ac.uk

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, the United Kingdom Research Councils (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):

2.1 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)**.

2.2 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).

2.3 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-NEC programmes with similar applications are not allowed.

3. Activities Supported

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

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

- a) 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.

b) 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 Roccatto (chamada_nerc@fapesp.br) before submission, to discuss and obtain permission to submit a proposal focusing outside of the preferred geographic area.

c) 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.

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

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

3.5 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.

3.6 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 and Infrastructure overheads are not applicable.

3.7 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.

3.8 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

4.1 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 Roccatto (chamada_nerc@fapesp.br).

4.2 Proposals must be submitted only through NERC by the UK PI, following the procedure described in the corresponding Announcement of Opportunity.

The Case for Support must:

- a) state that the RCUK-FAPESP Lead Agency Agreement is being applied by the applicants;
- b) 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;
- c) identify the number of the ongoing FAPESP Grant led by the PI in the State of São Paulo;
- d) clearly define the budget requested to FAPESP, within the limits set out above.

4.3 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 4.2 (above).

4.4 A specific Proposal Form for this Call must be attached by UK PI to his application as a supporting document:

FAPESP-NERC Pump Priming Proposal Form

4.5 No documents should be sent directly to FAPESP at the submission stage. After the submission deadline, further documentation will be timely requested by FAPESP to enable the processing of proposals, following the usual procedures for Regular Research grants. This will include detailed budget forms, budget justifications, research team description, etc.