GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS SEEDCORN FUND

Announcement of Opportunity

Issued on: 26 March 2018
Notification of Intent: 30 April 2018
Full Proposals deadline: 4pm BST on 17 May 2018

1. Summary

The Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) invites proposals to its Global Partnerships Seedcorn Fund 2018 call.

The Global Partnerships Seedcorn Fund allows UK environmental science researchers to forge new partnerships and networks with the best international researchers wherever they are located and seed collaborations that will be sustained beyond the lifetime of the grant.

Proposals for continuation of existing mature international research collaborations and collaborations with a primary focus on research for international development (Official Development Assistance) are ineligible to apply to this scheme and should seek other appropriate sources of funding.

Supported activities may include, but are not limited to, programmes of exchange visits, scoping studies, proof of concept studies and workshops.

NERC has allocated £1.0M to this call. Additional funding is available for successful joint NERC-FAPESP proposals under the terms of the RCUK/FAPESP Memorandum of Understanding (Annex A).

Key Information:
- Standard NERC Principal and Co-Investigator eligibility rules apply. New Investigators without existing international partners are encouraged to apply.
- Awards can be up to a maximum of £100k (100% FEC) over two years.
- Proposals must include at least one International Project Partner.
- Proposals will be directly evaluated by an Assessment Panel of independent external academic experts including members of the NERC Peer Review College.
- Deadline for applications is 17 May 2018 at 4pm BST,
  - to help NERC manage the call please submit a mandatory ‘Notification of Intent to apply’, by 30 April. Full applications won’t be accepted unless NERC has received a Notification of Intent.
- Awards will be announced in July/August 2018 with grants to start from September 2018
2. Background

Environmental science is inherently global in nature. Many of the biggest environmental challenges the world faces do not respect national boundaries. Advancing our understanding of the environment and developing innovative solutions to these challenges requires UK researchers to collaborate with the best international researchers wherever they are located.

The proportion of grants across NERC funding streams including at least one international project partner has increased from 21% in 2012 to 32% in 2016. Additional analysis of publication and citation rates between 2012-2015 has shown that grants with international collaboration produce more publications at a faster rate and with greater citation impact than those without international collaboration. These observations are supported by the 2016 Elsevier report on the International Comparative Performance of the UK Research Base, which concluded that the UK rate of international co-authorship is rising.

From this analysis and others, it is clear that UK researchers benefit substantially from international collaboration, both in terms of successful funding applications and the impact of the resulting research. It is important that NERC continues to support the development of international collaborations that maintain and increase these benefits across the UK environmental science research community.

In mid-2017, NERC carried out a community consultation on its international funding provision. A large proportion of responses indicated that there was a need for more ‘seedcorn’ funding, to help researchers initiate international collaborations.

Considering the increasing importance of international partnerships for research and taking into account the feedback from our community consultation in 2017, NERC has replaced the International Opportunities Fund scheme with the Global Partnerships Seedcorn Fund. Focused on non-ODA research, the new scheme will provide better and more flexible support to enable UK researchers to establish sustainable long-term partnerships with international collaborators and reap the benefits that these relationships deliver.

3. Scope

3.1 Programme objectives

The Global Partnerships Seedcorn Fund enables UK environmental science researchers to develop new international partnerships and networks, which underpin the development of long-term sustainable collaborations.

Proposed collaborations may involve international research partner(s) from any country and in any science area within NERC remit.

The Global Partnerships Seedcorn Fund has the following objectives:

- Support new international collaborations with the best researchers wherever they are located that will result in excellent research i.e. developing new knowledge that cannot be achieved by individual national research communities alone or by existing collaborations. For example, new collaborations may enable sharing of unique or complementary data, skills, infrastructure and field sites between UK researchers and international partners to develop novel research outcomes;
- Support development of long-term partnerships with international scientists that have potential to become self-sustaining beyond the life-time of the grant. For example, through accessing new collaborative research funding opportunities;
• Pilot new collaborative research ideas with international partners or enhance existing funded research through adding an international dimension or extending the number, nationality or type of international partners already engaged.

Please note that the following international collaborations are out of scope for this call:

• Existing and mature international collaborations. Applicants should apply to NERC's usual funding schemes such as Standard or Large Grant schemes, which allow for international project partnerships.

• International collaborations whose primary focus is the promotion of economic development and welfare of countries on the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC) list. Applicants should apply to appropriate Official Development Assistance (ODA) opportunities available under the Newton Fund and Global Challenges Research Fund. However, UK researchers may still collaborate with researchers from DAC list countries through the Global Partnerships Seedcorn Fund where the research is not specifically subject to ODA compliance requirements.

New Investigators, who are seeking to collaborate with new international research partners, are particularly encouraged to apply to the Global Partnerships Seedcorn Fund (see section 3.3 for further details).

3.2 Proposal requirements

3.2.1 Supported activities

Activities funded under the call must align with the aims of the Global Partnerships Seedcorn Fund. Activities supported may include, but are not limited to, the following:

• Staff secondments and exchanges e.g. enabling the transfer of unique or complementary skills between UK and international researchers and developing plans for future collaborative research;
• Scoping and feasibility studies e.g. collecting preliminary data, which may depend on access to unique field sites or infrastructure;
• Workshops e.g. bringing together international expertise to share best practice and compare or develop common approaches, techniques or standards.
• Establishment of international networks around a common research theme.

It is expected that the focus of the application should lie within NERC remit. However, in addition, please note the following:

• While proposed activities can enhance and add value to current or past funded research, it is not a requirement to build on existing NERC funded research;
• Both new research activities and programmes focused on synthesis or alignment of existing research are acceptable;
• Multidisciplinary/interdisciplinary collaborations are encouraged, but it is not a requirement of the scheme although the majority of the application must be within NERC remit.

In all cases activities must be undertaken with the clear and demonstrable intention of developing long-term sustainable collaborations. Whilst some exploratory elements are permitted, the proposal must include specific scientific objectives.

Applicants should ensure the balance between partnership building activities and direct research is appropriate to achieve their project objectives.

3.2.2 International Partners
The inclusion of at least one international project partner is mandatory. To maximise the quality of the activity and its potential to develop long-term sustainable partnerships, international project partner(s) must have an integral role in the proposed work.

Applicants should note the following when considering potential partners:

- The **quality of partnership development** should be the primary criteria rather than the number of international partners;
- While existing long-standing international partners are welcome to participate, the application must involve working with **new international project partners**.

Details of the Project Partners and their contributions to the project must be recorded in the appropriate sections of the application including the Je-S form, Case for Support and Project Partner Letters of Support (see Section 5 Application Process).

### 3.3 New Investigators

Investigators at the outset of their scientific career may apply for a Global Partnerships Seedcorn Fund Grant as a New Investigator (for eligibility see Section 4 Programme Requirements). The process to allocate funding under this call is weighted to allow New Investigator led proposals an increased chance of success.

The New Investigator must be the Principal Investigator on the grant and use the prefix “NI:” in their project title to indicate it is to be considered as a New Investigator proposal in the call.

### 3.4 NERC-FAPESP proposals

Applicants who are considering international collaboration with researchers from the State of São Paulo in Brazil, should note that this call will accept joint proposals to Global Partnerships Seedcorn fund under the terms of the RCUK-FAPESP Lead Agency Agreement. Please refer to Annex A for further guidance on how to apply.

### 4. Programme requirements

#### 4.1 Programme funding

NERC has allocated £1.0m to this call. The maximum funding for Global Partnerships Seedcorn Fund proposals is **£100k (at 100% FEC) with a duration of up to two years.**

All applicants are advised to consult their institutional finance officers when completing the financial parts of the application. All applicants should enter the 100% FEC of the proposed research into the budget sections of the Je-S form. All costs should be in pounds sterling (£). Requested costs for UK research organisations will be funded at 80% of full economic costs (FEC).

All costs associated with the project must be itemised in the Je-S proforma and justified in the Justification of Resources document.

#### 4.1.1 Funding for International Project Partners

International partners are not eligible for direct funding from NERC; however, eligible UK organisations may request **up to £15k** for international partner(s) in order to support their travel and subsistence costs during visits or exchanges. Requests for support for international
partner(s) greater than £15k must be exceptional and fully justified in Justification of Resources attachment.

Costs for UK and International Project Partner organisations must be entered as separate items. All travel and subsistence for International Project Partners will be payable at 100% of the actual costs. Applicants must identify these costs as an ‘Exception’ on Je-S using the exceptions tick boxes and include the name of the International Project Partner organisation in the cost description.

**4.1.2 Ineligible costs**

The following are ineligible costs for Global Partnerships Seedcorn Fund proposals:

- Conference attendance
- Standard office computing equipment
- Equipment over £10k (inclusive of VAT)
- All international project partner costs except for travel and subsistence e.g. salary and estates costs
- Associated studentships

**4.2 Eligibility**

Standard NERC individual and Research Organisation eligibility apply for PI and Co-Is and can be found in Section C of the NERC research grant and fellowships handbook.

In addition, a number of specific criteria apply to the Global Partnerships Seedcorn Fund scheme:

- Investigators may only submit one proposal as either a PI or Co-I;
- Investigators who hold an active Global Partnerships Seedcorn Fund grant either as PI or Co-I at the time of the call closing date are ineligible;
- Resubmission of proposals is not permitted under this call.
- New Investigators must meet the eligibility requirements for the New Investigator’s scheme in NERC standard grant (see Section C paragraphs 57-59 of the NERC research grants handbook).

**4.3 Implementation and delivery**

Projects should be no longer than 24 months in duration and start no earlier than September 2018 and no later than December 2018.

**4.4 Data Management**

The NERC Data Policy must be adhered to, and an outline data management plan produced as part of proposal development. NERC will pay the data centre directly for archival and curation services, but applicants should ensure they request sufficient resource to cover preparation of data for archiving by the research team.

**4.5 NERC Facilities**

Prior to submitting a proposal, applicants wishing to use a NERC service or facility must contact the facility to seek agreement that they can provide the service required. Please refer to the NERC services and facilities page on the NERC website for further information.
4.6 Reporting requirements

As for all NERC grant holders, there will be a requirement to report through the RCUK reporting system, ResearchFish; this is required annually and continues for up to five years after funding ends.

5. Application process

5.1 How to apply

Closing Date: 4pm (BST) 17 May 2018

Refer to Annex A for additional guidance on the application process for joint NERC-FAPESP proposals.

5.1.1 Notification of Intent

To help NERC manage the call a mandatory ‘Notification of Intent’ to apply to the 2018 Global Partnerships Seedcorn fund is required, using the online form, no later than Monday 30 April. This includes the names of the applicant, their international collaborator(s) and the main research area(s) of the work. Full applications will not be accepted unless NERC has received a Notification of Intent.

5.1.2 Full Proposal

The full proposal 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 International' and the Call – 'Global Partnerships Seedcorn Fund 2018'.

Applicants should ensure that their proposal conforms to all eligibility and submission rules, otherwise their proposal may be rejected without peer review. More details on NERC’s submission rules can be found in section F of the NERC research grant and fellowships handbook and in the submission rules on the NERC website.

Please note that on submission to NERC, ALL non PDF documents are converted to PDF, the use of non-standard fonts may result in errors or font conversion, which could affect the overall length of the document. Additionally where non-standard fonts are present, and even if the converted PDF document may look unaffected in the Je-S System, when it is imported into the Research Councils Grants System some information may be removed. We therefore recommend that where a document contains any non-standard fonts (scientific notation, diagrams etc.), the document should be converted to PDF prior to attaching it to the proposal.

The inclusion of at least one international project partner is mandatory. Applicants must include the name, institution and country of all international project 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. In-kind contributions from the Project Partner(s) must 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. Completed Je-S forms without a recognised international project partner will be office rejected.

In addition, applications to the Global Partnerships Seedcorn Fund require the following mandatory documentation, uploaded as attachments:
a) **Case for support**; consisting of the following three sections clearly labelled:

i. **Previous Track Record** not exceeding 2 sides of A4, covering standard NERC requirements 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);
   - Summarised CVs of Project Partners;
   - **New Investigators** must demonstrate they are the proposal leader and will be responsible for its direction.

ii. **Description of the Proposed Activity** not exceeding 3 sides of A4, covering standard NERC requirements and in addition, how the activity will deliver against the aims of the 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.
   - The specific intellectual and material contribution of each Partner.
   - The expected outputs and impact of the project

iii. **Potential for Long-term Partnership**, not exceeding 1 side of A4, which must describe the potential durability of the collaboration including plans for further long-term collaboration, and clarify the following:
   - How the new research collaboration is expected to develop beyond the duration of the grant;
   - Identification of appropriate potential future funding opportunities and how the proposed activity will facilitate future funding bids.

b) **Project Partner Letter of Support**, each not exceeding 2 sides of A4. Letters of support should be signed on headed paper and provide evidence of sufficient contributions to the proposed project such that it is clear that substantive collaboration will go-ahead if funded. These letters will be a key consideration of the panel at assessment and should complement the Case for Support effectively.

c) **Pathways to Impact**, not exceeding 1 side of A4, covering standard NERC requirements. An acceptable Pathways to Impact is a condition of funding. Grants will not be allowed to start unless unacceptable Pathways to Impact are enhanced to an acceptable level within 2 months of notification of the panel outcome.

d) **Outline Data Management Plan**, see section 4.4 above for details and link to form.

e) **Justification of Resources**, not exceeding 2 sides of A4. For information on what to include in the Justification of Resources, see section E in the NERC Research Grants Handbook.

6. **Assessment Process**

6.1 **Assessment Criteria**

All proposals must clearly define how the project objectives deliver against the Global Partnerships Seedcorn Fund objectives in the ‘Case for Support’. If proposals fail to demonstrate a strong link between the project objectives and the Global Partnerships
Seedcorn Fund Scheme objectives they will be office rejected on poor fit to scope of the call.

Global Partnerships Seedcorn Fund proposals will be assessed on their excellence, including how well they meet the scheme objectives, and given a single score by the panel.

The following considerations will be included in assessment:

- Development of new research collaborations and the extent to which this will promote excellence. Some aspects of the proposed research collaborations may be more speculative and exploratory than is expected for NERC Standard Grants. Consideration of excellence will take into account both the duration of the grant and the potential to achieve further excellence in the longer term. Please refer to the NERC definition of excellence criteria for more information.
- The level of unique or complementary contribution and expertise of the UK team and the international partners, i.e. why the proposed project objectives require collaboration between the UK and international partners.
- The potential for long-term sustainability of the collaboration, including routes for further collaboration beyond the duration of the seedcorn fund grant.
- The level of the contribution made to this award from other sources including the UK institutions and international potential partners.
- The balance between partnership building activities and direct research activities is appropriate to achieve the objectives of the grant.

6.2. Assessment panel

Proposals will be directly reviewed by an Assessment Panel of independent experts including members of the NERC Peer Review College.

The panel will make funding recommendations to NERC via a single ranked list of proposals (including New Investigators). NERC will use the recommendations of the assessment panel along with the overall call requirements and the available budget in making the final funding decisions. New Investigator status will be taken into consideration, as previously described.

Panel Feedback will be provided to both successful and unsuccessful applicants following the funding decision.

7. Timetable

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<td>‘Notification of Intent’ (to apply)</td>
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<td>Assessment Panel</td>
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8. Contact

For all enquiries, please contact:

Dr Weihao Zhong
Programme Manager

international@nerc.ac.uk or +44 (0)1793 41 3172
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 (RPGCC) and FAPESP’s Virtual Institute for Biodiversity Research (BIOTA), as described in item 3.1 below.

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 NERC Global Partnerships Seedcorn Fund 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

3.1 The Global Partnerships Seedcorn Fund aims to support UK environmental science researchers to develop new partnerships and networks with the best international researchers, which underpin the development of long-term collaborations.

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 Global Partnerships Seedcorn Fund Announcement of Opportunity (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 Carolina Costa (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 from 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 Funding Conditions:

Funding from FAPESP will be in addition to the funding awarded by NERC.

Applicants can request up to £30K for up to two (2) years in duration including at least one international workshop to be held in São Paulo.

3.5 Proposals must be “related” to an ongoing FAPESP grant (i.e. complement and build upon another confirmed grant). Thus, researchers regarded as eligible to submit proposals are:

a) 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) or Engineering Research Centres (CPE).

b) Co-Principal Investigators (PPs) of ongoing Thematic Projects, RIDCs or PITEs or CPEs.

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.

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 NERC Programme Manager (international@nerc.ac.uk) before submitting a proposal.

Brazilian Principal Investigators should contact FAPESP’s representative for matters related to this joint Call, Carolina Costa (chamada_nerc@fapesp.br).

5. How to apply

Proposals must be submitted only through NERC by the UK PI, following the procedure described in the main text of the corresponding Announcement of Opportunity, and attaching the forms listed below.

5.1 The Brazilian applicants should be included as Project Partners on the JeS form and their role should be described in the Case for Support.

5.2 A specific Proposal Form for this Call must be attached by UK PI to his application as a supporting document, using attachment type ‘Non-UK Components’: FAPESP-NERC Research Proposal Form.

5.3 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 limit set at Item 3.4 above.

5.4 No further 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.

6. Intellectual Property

6.1 In case of approval, a Letter of Agreement between the Partner Host Institution and the Host Institution to which the PI from São Paulo is affiliated, establishing how Intellectual Property rights, confidentiality, and publications will be treated jointly, in observance of the policies of each funding Party. The Letter of Agreement is not mandatory for the submission of proposals, but no approved project will be contracted before the presentation of a copy of the signed Agreement.