Environmental Evidence for the Future Initiative

Announcement of Opportunity: Call for environmental evidence mapping

1. Summary

The call will close at 4pm on 08 November 2018.

NERC invites proposals for systematic evidence mapping as part of the Environmental Evidence for the Future (EEF) Initiative. This mapping should be proposed in the context of the UK’s decision to leave the EU and associated Environmental Frameworks with a view to addressing the likely medium to long-term Public Policy and regulatory challenges/opportunities across the UK. Projects should be no more than £100K at 100% FEC in total, with a maximum duration of 12 months.

2. Background

The UK’s decision to leave the European Union and its associated Environmental Frameworks has significant implications for environmental policy and governance in the UK. European Union (EU) frameworks and directives have underpinned much of UK environmental policy and legislation – from agriculture to waste management. Such frameworks have provided important benchmarks around which UK scientists could design studies to help inform policy-making and implementation.

Following the vote to leave the EU, the UK faces decisions around environmental policy, legislation and regulation, some of which are required to be made on very rapid timescales. The UK also has a unique longer-term opportunity to take a fresh and innovative approach to developing and implementing policy and to the provision of evidence to inform that. The Environmental Evidence for the Future (EEF) Initiative emerged from the need to build on and strengthen the environmental evidence base in the long-term, by:

- working in close collaboration with relevant UK and Devolved Administration policy makers and agencies to identify and define crucial environmental policy challenges and opportunities that present from the UK leaving the EU;
- enabling academic freedom to propose innovative ways to inform decisions and pioneer innovative policies and solutions in response to these challenges and opportunities.

The scoping phase of the EEF worked with the policy and practice community using a futures approach to identify and define potential future environmental evidence challenges via a series of UK wide workshops. This process identified 65 environmental evidence challenges, which are provided in a summary report. The wider environmental sciences community were subsequently invited to help articulate the key knowledge gaps and evidence needs pertaining to this set of future environmental policy and practice challenges.

Responses to this ‘call for evidence’ highlighted several broad and cross-cutting themes where environmental evidence is required to address these future challenges (provided in a full and summary report). Common within all themes were the importance of long-term monitoring of the environment, the need for new - particularly interdisciplinary - research and for synthesis of existing knowledge and combining data from different disciplines. Respondents also underlined the global
nature of the environmental challenges the UK faces and hence the continued need to engage internationally.

3. Objectives and scope

To begin to address these broad environmental evidence requirements, NERC seeks to fund systematic evidence synthesis activities (specifically systematic evidence mapping) as part of the EEF. The findings will:

- inform potential future research, innovation and/or syntheses activities;
- demonstrate and develop best practice; and
- support capacity and community building,

Evidence syntheses’ refers to the process of bringing together information from a range of sources and disciplines to inform debates and decisions on specific issues. A recent Royal Society Review, Nature paper and Defra Chief Scientist blog outlined the importance of the range of possible evidence synthesis methods for informing policy development and principles to be followed in the conduct of these activities.

Systematic evidence mapping is a method of formal evidence synthesis, which collects, organises and describes the available evidence on questions of concern, which draw on diverse sources of evidence. It asks how much and what type of evidence exists rather than what the evidence suggests and identifies gaps in the evidence base as well as where a sufficient evidence exists for systematic review and more targeted synthesis (e.g. meta-analysis).

Alongside the understanding of the evidence landscape gained from the mapping activities, outcomes are expected to provide a potential focus for community building within and across the UK academic, policy and practice communities around these issues.

3.1. Proposal requirements

Applicants are invited to identify and make the case for the most pressing areas for evidence mapping in the environmental sciences in the context of the UK’s exit from the EU and its associated Environmental Frameworks. Identification of these areas should be informed (but not restricted by) environmental evidence challenge(s) or theme(s) identified as part of the EEF Initiative.

Proposals may be regional or national in focus but should consider wider UK applicability, recognising that legislative and policy drivers vary across different parts of the UK. To do so they may, for example directly draw in UK-wide stakeholders or perhaps address wider dissemination through tailored approaches. In a similar way, proposals could also recognise how UK-level evidence requirements are shaped by socio-economic, geopolitical, regulatory and technological factors arising at an international level; and how the UK may influence these in future.

It is essential that the systematic mapping topics proposed are of direct relevance to policy and practice organisations and deliver to jointly agreed priority areas. Applicants are expected to demonstrate how the involvement of end-users will be managed throughout the award.

A document outlining the relevant policies and/or evidence interests of Defra, Scottish Government, Welsh Government and DAERA is provided for reference. These organisations will work – without prejudice - with successful applicants as appropriate post-award and there is no need to seek formal engagement (e.g. letters of support) from them at the proposal stage.
Proposals must answer a question relevant to the environmental sciences evidence base and within NERC remit but should also draw on disciplines from outside the environmental sciences as appropriate, to produce mapping which reflects the interdisciplinary nature of the themes and challenges outlined. Proposals should also address issues that are relevant at medium to long-term timeframes rather than that which is required to address immediate evidence requirements.

Applications should follow best practice with regard to systematic evidence mapping methodology e.g. that outlined by the Collaboration for Environmental Evidence (CEE) in their Guidance and Standards. Other approaches will be accepted but must be justified in the proposal. As part of this applicants should include a mapping protocol (see CEE Guidelines for example) as part of their Case for Support which details the approach planned and which will be used to assess the quality of the review by the assessment panel.

Applicants are expected to outline the breadth of evidence mapping proposed and scale this as appropriate within the time and financial constraints of the call, fully justifying the approach taken. CEE provide guidelines for formulating an appropriate question for a systematic evidence mapping exercise on their website which applicants may wish to refer to. Applicants are also expected to explicitly justify their work in context to other evidence mapping and synthesis activities in order to ensure timeliness, avoid duplication and overlap.

4. Programme requirements

4.1. Programme Funding

£400K is available to fund evidence mapping as part of this call. NERC is inviting applications for awards of up to £100K at 100% Full Economic Cost (FEC) paid at with a maximum duration of 12 months. NERC will pay 80% FEC for UK research organisation costs.

Applications must be submitted through the Je-S. The call closes at 4pm (local time) on 8 November 2018.

Successful proposals are expected to start on or by 2 January 2019.

4.2. Policy and practice relevance and engagement

The relevance of evidence mapping proposal to policy and practice organisations across the UK is a central aim of the call. Whilst NERC is not stipulating how end-users should be involved, it is essential that they are involved and that applicants outline how this will be achieved and managed appropriately throughout the award.

Given the policy and practice focussed nature of the call a Pathways to Impact (PtI) document is not required as part of the application.

All funded projects may also be required to engage with programme-wide KE activities for which NERC will provide additional funding as appropriate.

4.3. Programme Management

NERC wants to create a coherent programme of work that fosters shared learning and community and capacity building. In this way successful grant holders are expected to share objectives and where appropriate results with other EEF grant holders, NERC and the Programme Advisory Group.
Successful applicants are expected to attend two meetings, one at the start and one at the end of the funding period to discuss their projects. Additional funds will be provided by NERC for award-holders to participate in these events i.e. they do not need to be included as part of the application costs. The first meeting will take place in February 2019, exact date and location to be confirmed. The final meeting will be scheduled in due course, according to the timescales of funded awards.

The Collaboration for Environmental Evidence (CEE) is working with NERC to support successful award holders as part of this call. CEE helps organisations commission systematic reviews and maps to achieve high standards of independence and rigour and - as part of this call – can provide expert advice to successful applicants in the conduct of their evidence mapping particularly as part of the initial programme meeting. Please note that whilst applicants should refer to CEE Guidelines in formulating their proposals – individual CEE representatives will not be available to provide advice pre-award.

Applicants are expected to work with the EEF Advisory Group (AG) on an ongoing basis in the development and conduct of their awards, including providing updates to the AG required as part of their meetings.

4.4. Reporting Requirements

As with all NERC grant holders, there will be a requirement to report through the Research Councils’ reporting system; this is required annually and continues for up to five years post grant end

5. Application process

Closing Date: 4pm (local time) 8 November 2018

Proposals must be submitted using the Research Councils’ Joint Electronic Submission system (Je-S). Applicants should select Proposal Type - ‘Standard’ and then select the Scheme – ‘Innovation’ and the Call – ‘Environmental Evidence for the Future 2018 ’.

The ‘Environmental Evidence for the Future 2018’ call will close on JeS at 4pm GMT on 8 November 2018 and it will not be possible to submit to the call after this time. Applicants must ensure that their proposal is submitted to NERC by 4pm on the closing date and should leave enough time for their proposal to pass through their organisation’s Je-S submission route before this date. Any proposal that is incomplete, or does not meet NERC’s eligibility criteria or follow NERC’s submission rules (see NERC Grants Handbook), will be office rejected and will not be considered.

All attachments, with the exception of letters of support and services/facilities/equipment quotes, submitted through the Je-S system must be completed in single-spaced typescript of minimum font size 11 point (Arial or other sans serif typeface of equivalent size to Arial 11), with margins of at least 2cm. Please note that Arial narrow, Calibri and Times New Roman are not allowable font types and any proposal which has used either of these font types within their submission will be rejected. References and footnotes should also be at least 11 point font and should be in the same font type as the rest of the document. Headers and footers should not be used for references or information relating to the scientific case. Applicants referring to websites should note that referees may choose not to use them.

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 the NERC research grant and fellowships handbook and in the submission rules on the NERC website.

Proposals for this call should complete the JeS proforma and attach the following documents in the format outlined in Section F of the NERC research grant and Fellowships handbook:

1. **Case for support (up to 10 sides of A4 total)** – Please provide a case for support outlining the project and its desired outcomes, including previous track record (up to 2 sides of A4) and a description of the proposed work (up to 8 sides of A4).

   As part of the ‘description of the proposed work’ applicants are required to include a mapping protocol which details the approach planned and which will be used to assess the quality of the review by the assessment panel (see CEE Guidelines for example). Up to 2 sides of A4 (of the 8 allowed for the ‘description of proposed work’) can be used for this protocol.

2. **CV (up to 2 sides A4 per CV)** – Please provide a CV for each applicant and named research staff involved in the project.

3. **Justification of Resources (Up to 2 sides of A4)** - A full justification of the resources requested within the proposal. The Justification of Resources should explain how the resources requested (staff time, travel and subsistence costs, and accommodation) are appropriate for the proposal and represent value for money, in reference to the project objectives.

4. **Letters of Support (up to 2 sides of A4 per partner)** – only IF included. Please provide a letter of support for each project partner.

   Please note that Pathways to Impact and Data Management Plan attachments are not required as part of this call.

On submission to council 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.

No associated studentships can be requested under this call.

The required start date for projects funded under this Announcement of Opportunity is 2 January 2019.

6. **Assessment**
   6.1. Assessment process

   Proposals will be assessed at a Panel meeting according to the assessment criteria. The Panel will involve both academic and end-user experts. Please note that there is no formal refereeing or PI response stage for this call.

   6.2. Assessment criteria
The Assessment Criteria used will be as follows:

- **Excellence** - in the context of this call is based upon both the quality of the proposed mapping approach and its potential to inform high quality research, innovation and impact activities.
- **Fit to Scheme** – applications to the EEF call must satisfy the objectives and scope of the call, specifically:
  - answer a question relevant to the environmental sciences evidence base and within NERC remit which is;
    - a priority evidence area(s) in relation to the UK’s exit from the EU and associated Environmental Frameworks; and
    - of direct relevance to environmental policy and practice post EU exit.

The Panel will make funding recommendations to NERC via a ranked list of the proposals. In making the final funding decision, NERC will take into consideration the research questions to avoid duplicating effort between projects and to ensure a balanced portfolio of activities. These decisions will be made in all cases according to the quality of the applications and financial limits of the call.

Applicants will be given feedback from the Panel summarising the reasons why the proposal was successful/unsuccesful. No further feedback will be available.

### 6.3. Eligibility

Normal individual eligibility applies and is in Section C of the [NERC research grant and fellowships handbook](https://www.ukri.org/). Research Organisation eligibility rules are in Section C of the handbook.

NERC research and fellowship grants for all schemes may be held at approved UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), approved Research Council Institutes (RCIs) and approved Independent Research Organisations (IROs). Full details of approved RCIs and IROs can be found on the UKRI website.

Investigators may be involved in no more than two proposals submitted to this call and only one of these may be as the lead Principal Investigator.

### 7. Call timeline

- **Call opens in Je-S**: 14 September 2018
- **Call closes**: 8 November 2018
- **Assessment panel**: December 2018
- **Announcement of Awards**: December 2018
- **Project start date**: 2 January 2019

### 8. Contacts

Potential applicants are encouraged to speak to the NERC National Partnerships team regarding any queries about the EEF Initiative and can be contacted by email [UKPartnerships@nerc.ukri.org](mailto:UKPartnerships@nerc.ukri.org).