



Improve environmental science research through new equipment (NERC Strategic Capital Call 2022)

Webinar Q&A

This document provides answers to the questions asked at the NERC Strategic Capital Call 2022 webinar, held on 28th February 2022. Most questions were answered live during the webinar and are repeated in this document. Some questions could not be answered live due to time constraints, and these are answered here.

The ordering of the questions has changed in this document from the order they were asked at the webinar to group similar questions.

Call details

1. Do the £350k to £750k limits include VAT?

Yes, the limits include VAT.

2. What is the total budget and how many proposals are expected to be funded?

The total budget for the call is £6.5 million. The number of proposals funded will depend on the value of the proposal submitted, but with the defined call limits the number of funded proposals will be between 8 and 18.

3. What is the maximum number of proposals allowed per institution?

The maximum number of proposals allowed per institution is two at a maximum funding of £750k per proposal which will be a maximum funding of £1.5m per institution.

4. Where can I find the case for support proforma?

The Case for support proforma is the last item under the Additional info section of the Funding Opportunity. Please download and complete either the word or the pdf version.

5. What do you expect to be reported at the end of 2024? What are the expected outcomes?

Successful proposals will complete by 1st March 2024. NERC will send successful applicants a reporting template every six months after the project completion for two years. This is to ensure that the project achieves its objectives and is providing value for money. The reporting requests information on installation and equipment setup, the use of equipment, environmental sustainability, equality, diversity and inclusion, science outcomes and achievements and any issues faced.

Types of equipment that can be funded

6. Does this call cover replacement of outdated equipment, where the loss of capability would have high local or national impact?



Yes, this call covers equipment replacements and equipment for enhancing capability. Applicants need to demonstrate the impacts of loss of capability and that purchasing the new equipment will enhance UK environmental research and innovation.

7. Can proposals apply for older equipment or reuse of equipment that may have limited specifications?

This is acceptable as long as it provides new capability for and enhances UK environment science. This will also have benefits from a sustainability perspective.

8. What if the equipment is not necessarily ground-breaking or novel, but it is being applied in a novel way to carry out research with environmental impact?

The purpose of the call is to provide a step change in research capability. If the proposed equipment supports a step change, then it will be eligible for this call. The first assessment criterion is for equipment that “creates or supports a step change in world-class environmental science capability”, so this must be justified in any proposal to be favourably reviewed at panel.

9. What happens if there are two high-rated proposals for the same equipment and similar projects?

This has happened in the two previous capital calls NERC have run. First, NERC encourage collaboration and equipment sharing, so would encourage a single community proposal, rather than multiple proposals for the same equipment.

If two similar proposals are submitted, the panel will rank the proposals. If they are both ranked within the funding frame, then we can hold back funding for one of the proposals and seek further information from the community whether two sets of the equipment are needed (taking into account the capacity, capability and science output requirements) before releasing funding for the second set of equipment.

Eligible costs

10. Would infrastructure estates and facilities costs related to equipment installation be eligible?

No, this call is only to fund equipment and not estates and facilities. However, if there is an estates or infrastructure upgrade needed to make the equipment a usable asset, then that would be a legitimate cost. For example, if you are purchasing a heavy piece of equipment and needed to reinforce the laboratory floor to support the equipment’s weight, that would be a legitimate cost. If you have specific questions on the eligibility, please contact capitalrequirements@nerc.ukri.org.

11. Can proposals request labour costs or salaries for named investigators?

Labour costs are permissible if it is to get the asset to a usable state; this is a capital cost. It doesn't matter who provides the labour, so if it is a named investigator, that is an eligible cost.

Salaries are typically resource costs and so would not be eligible on this call. However, if an individual was employed solely to get the asset to a useable state and 100% of their time was used to get the asset to a useable state, then this would be a capital cost and the salary could be requested through the call. A more likely scenario is that a proportion of an

individual's time would be used to get the asset to a useable state, say one day of their working week, and so the proposal could request labour costs for one day a week for that individual.

12. Are ongoing maintenance and servicing plans allowed? e.g. as part of supplier quote/contract?

This call supports capital funding only. Ongoing maintenance, servicing and warranties are classed as resource funding, so are not eligible costs. Capital expenditure is classified as costs to get an asset to a usable condition.

13. The call Funding Opportunity says proposals need sign off from the institution's Finance Director - how do we demonstrate this?

The only case where sign-off from Finance Director or equivalent is required, is where the institution is providing financial input to the equipment. For example, the proposal might be for a piece of equipment that is £1m, but the limit on the call is £750k, so the institution will provide the additional £250k funding. If additional funding is being provided, a letter of support is required from the institution's Finance Director or equivalent to confirm the institution's commitment. Alternatively, if an institution will provide funding for ongoing training or staffing, then a letter of support would be appropriate.

It is important to note that these letters of support will not be used in the peer review process and will only be used by NERC to ensure the proposal is financial sustainable.

Quotations

14. If there are less than three suppliers, what do proposals need instead of three quotes?

If there is one supplier, then you please provide a quote from that supplier and then for the other two documents please provide a sentence or two on a word document or PDF explaining why there's only one supplier.

15. If you are applying for multiple bits of equipment less than £138k that form an asset greater than £138k, do you need three equipment quotations?

UKRI request quotations on single items of equipment over £138k in order to obtain value for money on large equipment purchases. The £138k limit was previously linked to procurement limits in the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU); although the limit is no longer linked to the OJEU value, UKRI have retained the £138k threshold. For assets made of multiple components that are less than £138k, individual quotations are not mandatory for each part of the equipment, but you may wish to provide quotations to give a robust justification of the proposal costs and demonstrate value for money. Further information can be found in Paragraph 157 of [the NERC Grants Handbook](#).

Equipment sharing and community support

16. How can proposals ensure the equipment is a community resource?

The equipment should be available and accessible to the community to use or data from the equipment could be made available to the community. This will be specific to individual



proposals, for example equipment providing ongoing environmental monitoring could be considered a community resource if the data collected is made freely available.

17. What is meant by equipment sharing? Should equipment be shared by various groups within the institution or should any or all institutions in the UK should have access to that piece of equipment?

NERC want to maximise the use of funded equipment. As there is only £6.5m available through this call, NERC cannot fund every bit of equipment needed by all of the community, so want to ensure equipment use and science output is maximised.

If the equipment will be used 100% of the time within the host institution, that would be considered a valuable investment, as it is maximising science output. However, if there is additional or spare capacity, then there should be opportunities for the wider community to use the equipment. Maximising the use and science output may be achieved by the host institution using the equipment 100% of the time, but may be improved by many communities and individuals coming together in collaboration to use the equipment.

18. Proposals can refer equipment to NERC facilities and their nodes. Are NERC facilities limited to two proposals they are involved in, or two proposals they submit themselves?

Lead institutions are limited to two proposals. In this call, NERC facilities are considered as an institution, so can submit two proposals. Additional proposals that support NERC facilities but are led by other institutions (let's call them University X for reference) will not count within the NERC facilities' two proposal limit, but do count towards University X's limit of two proposals. If there is uncertainty in whether a proposal falls within the two proposal limit (for example if a proposal is submitted by a University that is linked to a NERC facility and the equipment is supports the facility), please contact capitalrequirements@nerc.ukri.org for further discussion.

Remit and impact

19. Should the application focus on one project or use case and mention potential users, or should a proposal focus on a wider variety of projects or use cases in less detail?

This will be different for different bits of equipment and proposals. One of the assessment criteria is to demonstrate the asset's capability to generate wide impacts, including social, environmental and economic benefits. Some proposals might have a clear, single, focussed benefits route while other proposals could serve many areas of research. The proposal should reflect the specific case and the outcomes of the equipment will provide.

It is also a requirement of this call that proposals cannot be for equipment that supports a single user or single project.

20. If a facility will primarily be used for environmental research, but may also have other applications beyond this (e.g. testing engineering solutions) or teaching, can it be included in this call?

If the equipment is primarily used for environmental research, it is eligible for this call. The call is aiming to enhance the UK science, research and innovation landscape, so will support equipment with a training component too. But the first assessment criterion is for equipment that "creates or supports a step change in world-class environmental science capability", so this must be the equipment's focus.



21. How do you handle equipment which is focused on NERC-funded research, but which has use cases outside of the NERC remit?

As in the previous question, one of the assessment criteria is to demonstrate the asset's capability to generate wide impacts and this is one way to demonstrate that. NERC work with other research councils to support the broader breath of UK science, research and innovation and this will help that aim. However, this is a NERC call, so proposals have to fit within the NERC remit first and foremost. If a proposal is 51% within the NERC remit and 49% in other remits, that is fine as well.

22. Is there a mechanism to fund an asset from multiple UKRI research councils? Could the majority of funding be provided by NERC, with additional costs for small fraction of usage from other research councils?

Proposals in this capital call will be funded by NERC. There is currently no mechanism for co-funding between research councils as each council's equipment calls are independent and co-funding between different calls is not possible. If the funding requested is above the £750k limit, then evidence is required from the institution that they will cover the additional costs.