

# Statement of community need: NERC scientific support and facilities

**Opportunity status:** Open

**Funders:** [Natural Environment Research Council \(NERC\)](#)

**Funding type:** Other

**Publication date:** 11 February 2021

**Opening date:** 2 March 2021

**Closing date:** 22 June 2021 16:00 UK time

*Last updated: 30 March 2021*

## Submit your statement of community need

Tell us what you need from the next generation of NERC's scientific support and facilities (S&F).

We want to hear about S&F ideas that are essential to the delivery of environmental science over the next five to 10 years.

These could be ideas for:

- new facilities
- current facilities
- evolving current facilities to provide new or enhanced capabilities.

To share your ideas with us you must submit a statement of community need. Only ideas submitted to NERC via this opportunity will be considered for inclusion in the future S&F portfolio.

We want to hear from:

- eligible UK higher education institutions
- NERC research centres
- independent research organisations.

No direct funding will be available through this opportunity. A successful outcome will be a future funding opportunity.

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## Who can apply

The lead applicant must be eligible for NERC research grant funding as a principal investigator and can be from one of the following eligible organisations:

- UK higher education institutions (HEIs)
- independent research organisations (IROs)
- NERC research centres.

Find out more about [research grant eligibility](#).

The statements of community need must be lead by an individual but be co-created by the research community, and thus must include at least five co-authors. At least three of these co-authors must be from different eligible organisations. The remainder can be either from an eligible organisation or government, industry or third sector.

The statement must show the strength and breadth of need for a capability for the UK environmental science community. NERC values equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) across all its funding programmes, and actively encourages ideas from diverse groups of researchers.

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## What we're looking for

NERC is currently reviewing its S&F portfolio and considering what facilities will form the next generation of NERC S&F.

This is an opportunity for statements of community need for facility ideas to support environmental science research over the next five to ten years. Such a portfolio may include new S&F, current S&F or an evolution of current S&F to provide new or enhanced capability.

## NERC S&F

A NERC S&F is defined as a provider which delivers a unique and in-demand capability to the UK's environmental science community, typically over a minimum period of five years, of which measurement facilities and sample repositories are examples.

Through their centralised national provision S&F deliver a critical mass in operation, technical innovation and financial efficiency. S&F are distinct from other types of NERC national capability investments, such as large-scale research infrastructure and strategic capital investments.

NERC S&F are expected to be forward-looking, national centres of excellence that provide capacity building and enable world-leading research through which the UK scientific community can meet short- and long-term ambitions of NERC and UKRI.

NERC expects S&F to demonstrate a commitment to continuous innovation and improvement of the capability they provide and act as champions for [\*\*UKRI's sustainability priorities\*\*](#) and other [\*\*government research priorities\*\*](#). NERC expects the provision of S&F to be accessible, as a minimum, to the UK environmental research community, and to support research from all NERC funding streams.

Statements of community need should be led by an individual eligible for NERC research grant funding such as a principal investigator and co-created by a research community.

The statement must include at least five co-authors, three of which must be from different eligible organisations, the remainder can be either from an eligible organisation or government, industry or third sector.

Research communities must submit one statement of community need only for any facility idea.

Individuals must not lead on more than one statement of community need and will appear (in a lead or co-author capacity) in no more than two statement of community need.

Statements of community need must present convincing evidence of strong engagement and community support for this facility idea, and as such the strength and breadth of need for a capability for the UK environmental science community, and where applicable other scientific disciplines. It must be clear how the facility idea complements and adds value to the existing and future research landscape and is guided by timely and excellent scientific questions.

The statement should also describe how it aligns with [\*\*NERC's strategy and goals\*\*](#) as well as broader policy initiatives.

We require the statement of community need and the assessment panel to address responsible research practices as part of the assessment process. Responsible research practices detailed within statement of community need should seek to:

- protect or enhance the environment (for example, through energy efficiency, waste minimisation and protection of wildlife)
- benefit local and research communities for example, through local engagement activity and inclusive work practices
- promote an open and inclusive approach to research activities that recognise the benefits of diversity (for example, through consideration of EDI in recruitment).

## **Successful outcomes**

No direct funding will be available through these statements of community need. A successful outcome will be a future funding opportunity.

The statements of community need will be assessed by an independent and diverse working group with representatives from all of NERC's remit areas and a range of sectors who will make recommendations to NERC on priority ideas for future S&F investment.

Following the recommendations of the Advisory Group and input from other relevant NERC advisory groups and others as appropriate, NERC will identify which facility ideas should be taken forward for commissioning. Focus groups will be convened for each priority S&F idea to inform NERC on the capability needs, commissioning route and development of an opportunity.

There is no guarantee that funding for the facility would be awarded to the lead author(s) of the statement of community need nor that every submitted statement of community need will be developed into a funding opportunity. The lead authors of successful statement of community need will be notified of the outcomes of the panel. Author(s) and title of ideas which have been identified for further scoping will be published on the UKRI website.

In the statement of community need, we ask for an indicative estimate of the likely cost, taking into account current existing capabilities of equipment. Requirements should be split into resource to provide the service and capital.

Find out more about [capital funding guidelines](#).

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## How to apply

You submit your statement of community need using our SurveyMonkey form.

### [Submit your statement of community need](#)

The form must be submitted by 22 June 2021 16:00.

Applicants should carefully read the guidance provided on this page and address all the questions and assessment criteria, using language for a broad audience.

We expect facility ideas to be developed from single ideas, however, two ideas may be matched up at assessment stage if they provide similar capability or lie in the same science area.

There is no benefit in submitting multiple very similar ideas.

You are welcome to contact NERC at [sfmt@nerc.ukri.org](mailto:sfmt@nerc.ukri.org) if you want to confirm whether your facility idea is within the scope of the NERC S&F portfolio.

## Completing the form

The areas you will be asked about when filling in the statement of community need template are as follows.

## **Vision**

Applicants must describe the facility including an indication of what technologies, services and capabilities are required to maximise its benefit to the research community. Also, information on the likely type and number of staff required for this facility.

Applicants must also describe why this capability is needed and will be needed over the next five to 10 years.

Ideas must demonstrate how the facility is innovative and forward thinking, considering emerging areas, interdisciplinary research and opportunities for national and international collaboration.

(3000 characters)

## **Quality**

Applicants are expected to explain the relevant research areas the facility will serve and provide evidence of how this idea will address the long-term research priorities of NERC and UKRI.

The statement of community need should outline what excellent science will be achieved, specifically the research questions this idea will enable the community to address, focusing on those questions that cannot be answered without this facility.

If this idea would enable cross-disciplinary research, please state which other council's remit(s) this would fall.

(2000 characters)

## **Users and community engagement**

The statement of need must present convincing evidence of strong community engagement and support during the development of the idea.

As such, applicants should strive to include evidence on each of the following:

- a list of those who were directly involved in writing the statement of community need, including their name, organisation and research interests
- how EDI have been considered in the canvassing of community needs and the writing of the statement of community need
- the process of how this idea was developed, including the level of community engagement throughout
- a description of the national and international communities that will benefit from the usage of the facility (for example, expected number of users, type of users and type of sectors)
- projected growth of the user base over the next five years
- information on key research groups, including emerging or current research leadership.

(2500 characters)

## Importance and context

The statement of need must present a clear explanation of the existing UK and international landscape, in terms of the available facilities and equipment, and how this will address a genuine UK need.

It should also highlight **existing facility capabilities** and how the capability and/or facility would add value to the landscape or how a new investment will enhance the landscape if none currently exist in this area.

The facility should deliver against short and long-term objectives of NERC (as included in the [\*\*NERC delivery plan \(PDF, 2.6MB\)\*\*](#)), UKRI (as included in the [\*\*research and development roadmap\*\*](#)) and other national strategic aims as well as unlocking further opportunities for national and international collaborations.

(2500 characters)

## Impact

What potential impact will the facility have on the research community and wider community? How will it work to maximise those impacts? For example:

- scientific or academic
- people
- economic
- skills and training
- socio-economic
- environmental.

There should be a clear pathway for expanding the user base and accelerating the identified impacts. How can such a facility support training of skilled people or enable potentially transformative research with impact on society, the economy or the environment, including through adoption of sustainable research practices?

(2500 characters)

## Justification

Please provide an explanation for how this links and/or is different from other available capabilities, for example, other facilities, large scale laboratories, institutes, etc.), and if appropriate, why such capability does not exist already.

Justify why this model is the most appropriate, as opposed to other approaches (such as local provision or strategic equipment). Reasons to be considered may include:

- the need for specialised expertise in the technique
- a new technique that is still at the early stages
- unique capabilities (rather than just extra capacity)
- efficiencies of scale
- fostering new communities
- any other well founded and clearly explained justifications for a facility.

(2000 characters)

## Responsible research

The statement of community need is expected to detail how the facility would meet both:

- [the UKRI sustainability strategy \(PDF, 1.5MB\)](#)
- [NERC's commitment to responsible research \(PDF, 462KB\)](#).

Responsible research is defined as reducing harm or enhancing benefit on the environment and society through effective management of research activities and facilities.

NERC seeks to actively promote responsible research practices. Responsible research practices seek to:

- protect or enhance the natural environment, for example through energy efficiency, waste minimisation and protection of wildlife (where relevant)
- benefit or minimise harm to local and research communities, for example, through engagement activity
- promote an open and inclusive approach to research activities that recognises the benefits of diversity (for example, through consideration of EDI in recruitment).

Describe how the facility idea could enhance or create social, environmental or economic benefits, including through adoption of sustainable research practices.

(2500 characters)

## Indicative resources

There will be future steps to establish the scope and scale of any funded activity. At this point, we require indicative costs only over five years of operation. These should be split into [capital requirements](#) and yearly resource costs. NERC considers capital to be the creation or purchase of an asset that has a useful life exceeding one year and that costs more than £10,000. Any costs that do not meet the definition of a capital investment are considered resource. A list of potential resource investments, although not all-encompassing, may include:

- staffing costs related to operation and maintenance of assets
- small items of equipment or instruments (under £10,000)
- service or maintenance contracts for large pieces of capital equipment
- travel and subsistence
- other costs, such as consumables, books, purchase/hire of vehicles
- routine replacement and repair of assets, such as building repairs, maintenance and scheduled replace of standard equipment, or costs related to rendering of assets.

In cases where there are existing UK capabilities or equipment that the activity could utilise, the statement of community need should describe both:

- the costs of supporting this facility if the existing capabilities or equipment did not exist
- the costs of this facility if it were to use existing capabilities and equipment.

(2000 characters)

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## How we will assess your application

All statements of community need will be assessed by an independent NERC Strategic Need group and prioritised based on strategic need assessment criteria

NERC will then make the final decision about which facility ideas will be taken forward for commissioning and inclusion in the future S&F portfolio.

Focus groups will be convened to specify the requirements of the facility ideas.

## Assessment process

An assessment panel covering a wide range of expertise, across the NERC remit will meet in July 2021 to assess the statement of community need for future facility ideas, using the assessment criteria published below.

The panel members will receive the statement of community need in advance of the panel. The panel will meet to produce a prioritised list of statements of community need.

Following the panel, NERC will decide which statement of community need will be taken forward for commissioning. The authors of successful statements of community need will be notified and published on the UKRI website.

## Assessment criteria

The panel will prioritise the statement of community need using the following criteria:

### A. Vision

The statement of community need should clearly describe what the facility will do and why it is needed. It should demonstrate how the facility is innovative, forward thinking and has the potential to unlock opportunities for national and international collaborations.

### B. Quality

The statement of community need must explain in language suitable for a broad audience the scientific excellence, world-leading and interdisciplinary science that will be enabled by any investment. The statement should clearly describe how the funding of such a facility in the noted research area(s) will lead to new scientific progress, be of central importance to the research community and achieve NERC and UKRI short- and long-term ambitions.

## **C. Community demand or use**

The statement of community need must demonstrate a strong community demand and that there has been sufficient engagement with the community to substantiate and focus the need for a facility. The appropriate breadth of interested users and potential for further users should be evident, including an assessment of how the user base may grow and develop. The statement of community need must be presented as a document developed with the community. The backing of the statement of need must be convincing and of a scale required to justify the potential for funding as a NERC S&F.

## **D. Importance and context**

Taking into account the existing research landscape, the statement of community need must justify and provide evidence of a genuine UK need and alignment to NERC and UKRI strategic priorities. It will justify that any investment will, or will continue to, provide added benefit to the existing landscape, and what the timeliness and urgency of any investment might be. There should be a clear description of how the potential facility will unlock further national and international collaboration.

## **E. Impact**

The potential impacts should be clearly identified and described. This investment is expected to have benefits beyond the core science community, for example support training of skilled people, aiding collaborations with international partners, industry and the third sector, or enabling potentially transformative research with impact on the society, economy and environment, including through adoption of sustainable research practices, including EDI.

## **F. Justification**

The statement of community need is expected to show the need for specialised expertise in the technique, any new techniques that are still at the early stages and will enable new science, unique capabilities (rather than just extra capacity), efficiencies of scale, and the potential to foster new communities. The statement must explain why such a facility must be funded via NERC national capability (for example, national provision needed, unique, not readily available anywhere else in UK) and why other funding routes (such as strategic equipment, university support) do not offer the best support to the scientific community and represent value for money.

## **G. Responsible research practice**

The statement of community need is expected to take into consideration the impacts, both positive and negative, of the facility on the environment, community or society. The purpose of the question is not to assess environmental or social performance but to ensure the statement of community need has actively given consideration to potential consequences and that actions have been taken where reasonable and practical, as NERC S&F are expected to be a leader for

responsible research practices. This is intended to recognise and encourage good practice.

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## Contact details

Email: [sfmt@nerc.ukri.org](mailto:sfmt@nerc.ukri.org)

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## Additional info

### Supporting documents

- [delivery plan: the best environment for research \(PDF, 2.6MB\)](#)

### Webinar

NERC held an information webinar on the statement of community need opportunity on 18 March.

[Watch the recorded webinar.](#)

### Background

A NERC S&F is defined as a provider which delivers a unique and much in-demand capability to the UK's environmental science community, typically over a minimum period of five years, of which measurement facilities and sample repositories are examples.

Through their centralised national provision S&F deliver a critical mass in operation, technical innovation and financial efficiency. S&F are distinct from other types of NERC national capability investments, such as large-scale research infrastructure and strategic capital investments.

The current portfolio of NERC's S&F are listed here: [NERC list of facilities](#).

NERC expects the provision of S&F to be accessible, as a minimum, to the UK environmental research community, and to support research from all NERC funding streams.

UKRI provides access to other research facilities. Find out about access to:

- [EPSRC facilities](#)
- [STFC facilities](#)
- [MRC facilities](#)
- [BBSRC facilities](#)

### EDI

UKRI have a clear ambition for the UK to be the most diverse, inclusive and fair research environment in the world and EDI is an important part of NERC's responsible business commitments.

## Sustainability

We aspire to embed sustainability across our entire investment portfolio; from within our centres to how we operate our S&F. This is in line with the core values of our research community who have a strong desire to ensure we deliver our world leading environmental science in a world leading way.

Find out more about [\*\*NERC as a responsible business\*\*](#).

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## Timeline

 **2 March 2021**

Opening date

 **18 March 2021 09:30**

Information webinar

 **22 June 2021 16:00**

Closing date

 **Week commencing 12 July 2021**

Panel review