

Opportunity: Artificial Intelligence for Environmental Science FAQs

Theme	Question	Response
Collaboration	Is this a consortium-driven funding opportunity, or for individual applicants? Is a collaboration with other entities required/preferred?	There is no requirement for applications to be collaborative or with a consortia of any set size, nor are there any requirements on the composition of the consortium. However, we would strongly encourage you to reach out to and build consortia with relevant potential collaborators and user communities within the business, policy and third-sector, and any other sector deemed appropriate. Any collaborative, multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary applications are encouraged from across the environmental science, wider data science and other communities, including, but not limited to, industry or commercial partners, policy-related bodies or research organisations.
Collaboration	This is a collaborative project, what are requirements for project lead?	The project lead must be based at an eligible research organisation (higher education institution, research council institute, approved independent research organisation, public sector research establishment or catapult), as well as meeting the individual eligibility requirements. More details can be found on the NERC website .
Collaboration	I see that Project Partners should be listed, with contact information, and collaborative formalities to be established in the event of funding – but does this Phase I programme wish to have Letters of Support provided as part of the submission?	UKRI is moving towards streamlining and simplifying the application process, so no, we're not asking for Letters of Support as part of the submission.
Collaboration	I am interested to know if we are able to collaborate with existing companies providing this type of data and analysis.	Yes, this will be a collaborative programme and you are encouraged to form partnerships with companies where they have relevant expertise.
Collaboration	If a project were to progress to Phase two, could the project team expand to include more collaborators/contributors, as appropriate?	This would be most welcomed as it would probably be a natural process to gain more interest and collaborators as a project progresses.
Networking	Will there be a webinar?	The webinar was held on 24 October 2025 11:00am-midday. You can view the recording on UKRI's YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1YfZOyazpik
Eligibility/Networking	How can I be involved as a government body (arms-length) with shared challenges?	We would encourage UK government arms-length bodies to reach out and collaborate with eligible researchers submitting an application to this funding opportunity, or with shared interests. The

		webinar chat contents and contact details of registrants will be shared with other registrants to help aid collaborations.
Eligibility	Will you fund project partners who are NGOs?	On research grant applications the project lead may also name formal project partners, who will not receive funding directly from the award, but will have an integral role in the proposed research. Minor directly incurred costs may be requested to facilitate collaboration. Named project partners may include UK or overseas research or user organisations, but an organisation should only be named as a project partner if it is providing specific contributions (either in cash or kind) to the project. There is no limit to the number of project partners. Project partners must be separate research organisations to those submitting the application. NGOs may be eligible to be subcontractors. The inclusion of subcontractors should be justified and will be subject to peer review. Please check the NERC research grants and fellowship handbook for further details on eligibility.
Eligibility	Are SMEs allowed to apply?	Proposals for this NERC-led element can be led by eligible higher education intuitions, research institutes, NHS bodies, public sector research establishments, independent research organisations and Catapult centres. Businesses cannot be project leads on this funding opportunity, but they can be project partners. Individual organisations should check their eligibility. Check if you are eligible for research and innovation funding – UKRI.
Eligibility	Can a UK charity be eligible for funding?	Charities cannot receive funding as part of the core team (lead/co-lead). They can be sub-contracted to do a specific piece of work and be fully funded, DI other costs we pay 80% and the lead RO pays the other 20%. Charities can apply to become recognised as an eligible organisation for UKRI funding, but they need to meet the criteria and go through the application process. Once accepted as eligible organisations they can then be part of the core team and funded at 80%.
Eligibility	Is subcontracting permitted?	Subcontracting is permitted, although the case needs to be made for the subcontractor's involvement. The subcontractor needs to be providing a specific service to the project, if for example, the appropriate expertise is lacking in eligible institutions.
Eligibility	To our understanding NERC funding is generally more targeted at universities. How can businesses and SMEs engage in	Proposals can be led by eligible higher education institutions, research institutes, NHS bodies, public sector research establishments, independent research organisations and Catapult

	this programme? Will it fund purely private sector collaborators, or does it have to involve an academic institution?	centres. Businesses and industry cannot be project leads on this funding opportunity, but they can be project partners. Project partners will not receive funding directly from the award, but will have an integral role in the proposed research. NERC grant holders are permitted to sub-contract aspects of their work to non-eligible institutions (including start-up companies).
Eligibility	NERC eligibility guidelines include reference to 'short-term contracts' but doesn't specify what the parameters are.	Your contract must last the duration of the grant. If the RO is successful and requests an extension, the RO must ensure that you have employment cover for the additional duration. The award from this opportunity will run for 18 months from 1st July 2026 to 31st December 2027 provided no extensions are requested.
Eligibility – external to UK	Is it limited to projects in the UK?	International researchers can apply as 'project co-lead (international)' subject to the eligibility criteria set out in the NERC eligibility guidance for applicants . We do not fund overseas organisations, except for specific costs for project co-leads from Norway and the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA). You should include all other international collaborators (or UK partners not based at approved organisations) as project partners, but they must fund their own involvement. This includes organisations from the business or financial sectors. Please note that UKRI has a ' Trusted research ' policy and there are now 17 areas of National Security (which includes artificial intelligence, advanced robotics and data infrastructure) which covers the use or transfer of technology (assets, IP and knowledge) outside of the UK.
Eligibility – external to UK	Is it possible to have overseas partners? Can or should the project be in collaboration with international partners?	Project co-leads may be based outside the UK, but you may include international project partners who will need to be self-funded. Please check UKRI eligibility as an individual .
Eligibility – external to UK	Can staff based in UK overseas territories be funded?	Overseas project partners can receive some essential T&S costs (for necessary fieldwork/project meetings etc. but not for conferences or non-essential costs). Overseas Territories are considered the same as other overseas countries, so are eligible for some T&S costs as project partners only (not leads/co-leads).
Eligibility – external to UK	Can fieldwork be carried out abroad and is it possible to provide funding for overseas academics not employed in a UK institution?	International fieldwork is eligible to be funded, as long as the complex environmental challenge being tackled is something the UK faces as well as worldwide. Please note that this opportunity will not fund projects solely or majorly focused on data gathering, the novel AI and data science approaches developed or used should be the

		main focus of projects. The limits of the call may dictate the amount of international work etc., but in terms of standard Ts&Cs international field work is covered. Some field assistants, translators, local field guides, drivers etc. may be employed locally, and these costs are included in either DI T&S Field work costs, or DI Other – Field work costs. We do not fund overseas organisations, except for specific costs for co-leads from Norway and IIASA. All other international collaborators should be listed as project partners and must fund their own involvement (except for minor incidentals such as necessary travel for fieldwork and project meetings, but not conferences). The only way that international academics could be funded is if they came to work in the UK as a visiting researcher.
Funding/Eligibility	We have been successful with a UKRI grant for a different project. Will that affect our chances?	Your application will be assessed by the panel using the criteria set out in the funding opportunity details. Applications for the same research project cannot be submitted to more than one Research Council. Any support sought or received, in the last three years, from any source for research in the same field as the application must be detailed in the “Related Applications” or “Other Support” sections of the application form. Please check the NERC research grants and fellowship handbook for further guidance.
Funding/Eligibility	I am applying as Project Lead to another opportunity funded by a different UKRI council. Is there any conflict regarding this?	No, you wouldn't be disadvantaged by being a Project Lead on two different programmes in regards to this funding opportunity, but you may want to check with the other council in regards to the other funding opportunity. A researcher cannot apply to lead on two projects within the AI4ES programme, but they may lead on one and co-lead on a second. If you are applying to both funding opportunities, the same research project cannot be submitted for both, the two projects need to be substantially different from each other.
Funding	When will be funding become available?	The assessment panel aims to meet in March 2026 and decisions will be communicated within two months. Programme activities must commence by 1 July 2026.
Funding	Can the funding be used to cover compute costs of the research?	Yes, we haven't excluded this.
Funding	Is there any bias to PDRA/PhD funding?	For this opportunity we will not fund associated studentship costs, including PhD studentships. Please check the specific guidance on eligibility . In the new role descriptions, postdoctoral research

		assistants are now referred to as research and innovation associates. Research and innovation associates involved in the development of the application can be included as a researcher co-lead. Please check the guidance on roles in funding applications .
Funding	Can we include research technical professionals on the team?	We encourage the inclusion of digital research technical professionals such as research software engineers and data scientists in applications. We encourage successful applicants to foster knowledge exchange and collaborative working between the research technical professionals involved in the delivery of projects.
Funding	What is the proportion of funding that should be directed at the three objectives?	There is no set level of funding that should be directed at the three objectives.
Funding	I would be interested in details of how it could be synergistic with existing funding/ongoing project work to leverage existing learning but amplify benefits.	Collaboration and synergies with other ongoing projects in order to amplify benefits would be acceptable. However, the grant holder should not have already received competitively obtained research or support funding from any sources for the same research project the grant by UKRI has been awarded to support. Please check the standard terms and conditions of UKRI grants .
Funding	Will I be able to request a no-cost extension if needed?	We would like projects to run for 18 months from 1 July 2026, so the end date should be 31 December 2027. Applications for phase two of the programme should close around five months before the end of phase one, and successful phase two applications should be able to demonstrate evidence of impact to date and their potential to deliver further transformation, as well as deliverability of plans for a further phase of funding.
Funding	Can you provide some more details on phase two of the programme?	Phase two support will be awarded to the most successful teams in phase one, following assessment of a phase two application and the outputs of phase one activities. If successful, phase two funding will be for an additional forty-two months. The phase two challenge will open approximately five months before the end of phase one and applications will be assessed before the end of phase one. Successful phase two applications will be expected to have demonstrated evidence of the following during phase one: the impact to date of their innovative approach to bringing data science and AI to bear on key environmental challenges

		• their potential to deliver further transformation in the use of data science and AI to address environmental challenges with further funding • the real-world usability of the tools or technologies or approach that will be developed, in line with user needs • deliverability of plans for a second phase, including the appropriateness of the team, collaborators and partners to maximise impact This will allow us to prioritise funding transformative ideas that have the greatest potential for meaningful and lasting contributions to environmental science. Further details on what can be applied for in the second phase will be given to successful phase one applicants in due course. Phase two will be a closed funding opportunity only open to those project lead applicants successful at phase one. The deadline for applying will be around five months before the end of phase one, in summer 2027. If successful, the phase two grant should start on 1 January 2028.
Funding	Will the funding opportunity fund costs for ship and marine equipment (SME)?	Given the objectives of the programme, we do not anticipate that project leads will request substantial use of our ships and marine facilities. The use of SME is not an option for phase one of the programme. However, SME costs may be requested for phase two of the programme and these would need to be costed in by the project leads within their application.
Logistics – apply	How long will the programme last?	The entire programme will last for five years. Within this, phase one will last 18 months and phase two a further 42 months.
Logistics – apply	What are the requirements for submitting an application?	The full requirements can be found on the funding opportunity webpage , including eligibility, scope and assessment criteria.
Logistics – apply	Must the Approach section include a Gantt chart?	A Gantt chart is optional.
Logistics – apply	When is the deadline for this round of applications?	The deadline for this opportunity is 4pm on 11 December 2025.
Logistics – apply	Will there be any institutional caps or expected internal sifts to limit applications?	You, as an individual, may be involved in no more than two applications submitted to this funding opportunity. Only one of these can be as project lead. For this opportunity we have set a cap of four

		applications per research organisation. The research organisation should ensure that no more than four applications are submitted. Additional applications will not be accepted. Due to the high anticipated demand for this opportunity, research organisations should not feel obliged to fill their quota. We are trialling this approach due to the level of investment available, and manages the impact on the community in assessing the large volume of applications anticipated. Your application to this funding opportunity won't affect the calculations for the numbers of applications you are permitted to make to other funding opportunities applying demand management. For this opportunity UKRI has not set any specific expectations about the selection process to be followed by research organisations. Research organisations are encouraged to ensure the applicant(s) they support can demonstrate their ability to meet the expectations detailed in the 'What we are looking for' section. Research organisations are asked to actively use an inclusive approach to selecting and maximising the diversity of candidates they intend to support. UKRI expects that host organisations consider diversity broadly to include discipline, backgrounds, career paths, thought and approach as well as protected characteristics. See more information on good selection processes. There is no requirement to report on the characteristics of potential versus selected applicants. In the event of this funding opportunity being substantially oversubscribed as to be unmanageable, we reserve the right to modify the assessment process as needed, for example, by adding a sift process prior to assessment.
Logistics – apply	In terms of demand management, at what level will this be applied within STFC e.g. departmental level (RAL) or organisational level (STFC)?	The demand management will apply at the STFC Laboratories level.
Logistics – apply	Will it be a two-stage application process?	It will be a one-stage application process. Eligible applications will be assessed by an independent panel of experts against the criteria to assess the quality of your application and rank it alongside other applications, after which the panel will make a funding recommendation.

Logistics – apply	Will there be a strand within this funding for early career researchers?	For this opportunity funding is not available for associated studentship costs. Other early career researchers are welcome to be part of project teams but please check the specific guidance on eligibility . In the new role descriptions, postdoctoral research assistants are now referred to as research and innovation associates.
Logistics – apply	Are we required to be full time?	There is no requirement of a set amount of staff time that should be spent working on the project.
Logistics – apply	As AIRR cannot currently be costed onto UKRI grants, how should we indicate we would like to use the facility?	Please just state your intention to access and use AIRR as part of your project planning. Use the Gateway route to apply independently for AIRR time.
Logistics – after	I wanted to clarify if applications are required to (or an expectation to) use supercomputers? Will applications be at a disadvantage if they do not include use at a supercomputer facility?	No, applications will not be at a disadvantage if they do not include use at a supercomputer facility.
Logistics – after	How many projects will be funded? What is the expected success rate?	With a total fund of £4,800,000 and award limits between £200,000 and £400,000 we expect to fund between 12 to 24 projects. It is not known how many applications are likely to be received for this opportunity but we anticipate demand to be high.
Logistics – after	How long is the assessment period? When will the result be announced?	The assessment panel is likely to be held in March 2025 and awards are likely to be announced one to two months after.
Logistics – after	It would be nice to go through the criteria of how the proposals will be reviewed in some detail. Particularly, is it prioritised on higher risk technology or systems thinking to delivering long term monitoring programme of suits of parameters?	The criteria against which your application will be assessed are: • vision • approach • applicant and team capability to deliver • ethics and responsible research and innovation (RRI) Further details can be found in the funding opportunity text. We do encourage the submission of projects with high levels of adventure, risk and novelty.
Logistics – after	Will there be a monitoring officer?	If you are successful in getting funding, you will need to report your research outcomes through a service called Researchfish. This is required annually and continues for up to five years after funding ends. Find out about UKRI reporting requirements . Additionally, biannual reporting to NERC will be expected.
Logistics – after	What occurs if new IP is generated, is the IP shared between all the applicants?	It is NERC's policy that any such intellectual property generated from NERC supported research should be exploited. However, NERC's

	Can commercial partners retain IP from the projects or is the objective for outcomes to be public domain?	policy requires that intellectual property rights be properly conferred on all parties. It is the responsibility of project leads to respect the intellectual property of others when used in their research (e.g. models) and to accord it all appropriate recognition. Further guidance on exploitation and intellectual property is covered in the NERC Grants Fellowship Handbook and the programme Grant Terms and Conditions . Please read UKRI's trusted research policy.
Logistics – after	I would like to understand more about requirements for sharing data collected under this funding opportunity.	Please check NERC's Data Sharing Policy for more information, which includes detailed guidance notes.
Scope	Are freshwaters out of scope, or are they subsumed within “terrestrial”?	Freshwater ecosystems will not be included in the scope of the opportunity. We are talking only about land-based ecosystems. (i.e. forests, grasslands, and deserts, and all the interactions between their living organisms (plants, animals, microbes) and their non-living environment (soil, air, water, climate). It also focuses on the flow of energy, the cycling of nutrients like carbon and nitrogen, and the distribution of biodiversity across different terrestrial biomes). Terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems are distinct disciplines, within the ecosystem category and this call will focus only on terrestrial within this the theme of ‘Terrestrial ecology’.
Scope	How will you ensure interdisciplinary review, e.g. that a data-driven approach will be accepted by the application community (e.g. ecology) and not dismissed for being different from traditional statistical methods?	We will be looking to get together a cross-disciplinary assessment panel of experts with broad expertise, and not just assessors from environmental research areas. We will need to be able to assess the breadth of the criteria so will need a panel can think about the environmental challenges as well as others we can think about the novelty and adventure in the AI.
Scope	Does the call include pollution/toxicology predictions?	To some extent it's up to you to make the case of how your proposed research addresses the scope articulated in the funding opportunity. The panel will be asked to take a view on whether your proposed research addresses that scope, and the information they will have is the same information that has been published within the funding opportunity text.
Scope	Does the environmental hazards and human health theme require research on the health aspect?	We suggest that you need to demonstrate some applicability to the natural environment or environmental challenges, and there does need to be a link to the impacts on people and human health.
Scope	In this call, is there more of a focus on developing novel AI solutions, or in applying AI solutions to environmental	The language in the funding opportunity around this has been carefully chosen. We envisage that applicants will develop or use or develop and use novel AI and data science approaches to tackle the

	problems to have a greater impact in environmental science?	environmental challenges above in a range of different ways. We have tried to articulate that both are important to us and that we're seeking applications across that spectrum. We do not have a particular weighting on one or the other.
Scope	Does the fact that it can involve hybrid/multi modal approaches mean the grant can be used to collect that data (ie. can part of the proposal for the budget/project be funding the field and lab work to get the data to enter into a model or training of AI)?	The project should not be solely about gathering data, but some data gathering is permitted. We also want to see what will be done with that data - so we do allow that, yes.
Scope	Does one proposal have to address all three areas (Environmental hazards and human health, Terrestrial ecology and Oceans and climate)?	No - it can be one, two or all three.
Scope	How will government strategies and missions be assessed in the call? Nice to have or essential?	What we're looking for is real world impact and relevance. So part and parcel of that is referencing some of the aims and objectives of those sort of documents. We want the research undertaken to be as relevant as possible.
Scope	In light of the comments about data gathering (and the relative inconsistency and scarcity of certain types of environmental data), would the use of AI to generate high-quality synthetic environmental datasets for the training of other AI systems be welcomed?	These methods are not excluded in the published text; we are considering a broad range of approaches and outcomes for this funding opportunity.
Scope	Can we work on existing indicators developed by organizations such as the World Bank or WHO, potentially in collaboration with them as project partners?	We are accepting applications using a broad range of methods, and working on existing indicators has not been excluded. Please make sure you are meeting the objectives of the programme and your project falls into at least one of the three areas (environmental hazards and human health, terrestrial ecology, oceans and climate). We want applications to be as adventurous as possible, hence we are not over-specifying exact approaches, methods or outcomes.
Scope	Do you see a distinction between AI and machine learning?	This funding opportunity is open to all AI and data science approaches – the funding opportunity text has intentionally been framed broadly. It will be up to applicants to articulate the novelty.

Scope	Could you please confirm whether the intended scope covers environmental hazards in the broader sense, including anthropogenic risks such as air and water pollution, urban heat, and exposure pathways, or whether it is focused primarily on natural hazards such as flooding and drought?	Ultimately it will be the job of the expert assessment panel to decide on how well applications meet the scope of the funding opportunity and NERC remit. However, we are taking a broad definition of 'hazard' (by virtue of having used 'environmental hazard' and 'natural hazards in the call text) and this may include anthropogenic risks. However, we suggest that you need to demonstrate some applicability to the natural environment or environmental challenges, and there needs to be a link to human health.
-------	--	---