Opportunity: OPP1337 Research Infrastructure Renewal

Frequently Asked Questions

ELIGIBILITY AND REMIT

Q: Who is eligible to apply?
This funding opportunity is open to organisations with standard UKRI eligibility - Check if your organisation is eligible. Details about individual eligibility can be found in Individual eligibility – UKRI.

Q: Is this a funding opportunity for NERC-owned facilities, or for infrastructure capabilities that have previously received NERC or UKRI funding, or that are included in the UKRI Infrastructure Portal?
A: This is not exclusively a funding opportunity for NERC-owned facilities. Previous NERC or UKRI funding is not a requirement. The opportunity is not restricted to infrastructure capabilities that appears on a particular NERC or UKRI list.

Q: Am I eligible to apply if the research infrastructure is based overseas?
A: No, applications for infrastructures that are based outside of the UK are not eligible for this call.

Q: Are businesses eligible to apply?
A: Businesses are not eligible for this NERC funding opportunity (please also refer to https://www.ukri.org/publications/organisation-eligibility/). We would encourage you to look for Innovate UK opportunities, which are open to UK-registered businesses.

Q: Can an institution submit more than one application?
A: Applications must be submitted on behalf of the infrastructure, facility, platform or capability that will receive the investment. NERC expects a single coordinated application from each infrastructure, facility, platform or capability seeking investment through this funding opportunity. If genuinely distinct infrastructure capabilities exist within the same institution or research organisation, separate applications may be reasonable.

Q: Can multi-node or multi-supersite facilities submit more than one application?
A: Multi-node and multi-supersite facilities are allowed to submit one single application for the whole facility, not for each node or supersite.

Q: Can you clarify what are the indicators for a distinct infrastructure capability?
A: For an infrastructure capability to be considered distinct, NERC would expect it to have its own established access or application process and already be available to users beyond the host institution or their direct collaborators. NERC would also expect the facility or infrastructure to have a website that clearly describes its capabilities and how external users can access it. Other indicators of a distinct facility may include dedicated management and support staff, a separate user community, independent operational and governance arrangements, and a clearly differentiated scientific or technical capability. In this funding opportunity NERC is interested in supporting established infrastructure capabilities and services that already exist

and are already available to the community. We are not seeking to fund the creation of entirely new facilities or major new infrastructure.

Q: Are facilities funded by or that typically deliver research within the remit of other research councils eligible to apply?
A: Yes, as long as the infrastructure capability is also accessible to and delivers significant benefits for the environmental science community. Assets that deliver benefits for environmental science but are not available to the environmental science community are not eligible. Expanding accessibility to the environmental science community may be eligible, although the panel may see this as a risk compared to other facilities that are already available and already provide benefits to the environmental science community.

Q: How much enhancement is acceptable before it becomes "new research infrastructure"?
A: NERC recognise that replacement and enhancement projects often involve significant improvement compared with existing infrastructure. However, the investment must be anchored in a capability that visibly already provides a service. NERC would expect applicants to demonstrate that the infrastructure capability already exists and delivers, or is intended to deliver, significant benefit to the wider environmental science community.

Q: Are fully digital infrastructure eligible?
A: Fully digital infrastructures are acceptable

ROLES AND PARTNERS

Q: Can you give more detail about roles and partners?
A: Details about individual eligibility, roles and partners can be found in Roles in funding applications: eligibility, responsibilities and costings guidance – UKRI and Individual eligibility – UKRI

Q: Can a research technician be listed as a Project Lead?
A: Technicians can be Project Leads. For further information about roles please refer to Roles in funding applications: eligibility, responsibilities and costings guidance – UKRI.

Q: Are project partners and letters of support required?
A: Project partners and letter of support are not a requirement for this funding opportunity. Advisory boards or steering committees should not be considered project partners. Information about advisory boards and steering committees should be included in the Approach section.

COSTS, EXPENDURE PROFILE AND PROJECT MATURITY

Q: Will costs be funded at 100%?
A: Yes, NERC will fund costs at 100%.

Q: What are the expected expenditure profiles?
A: The opportunity has been designed to favour investments that are sufficiently mature. Applications must provide confidence that projects can proceed rapidly to procurement and implementation following award.

NERC is expecting most projects to be structured so that the principal capital commitment occurs in financial year 2026/27. The later stages of delivery may legitimately continue beyond that point. Procurement, ordering and major capital commitment should happen before 31 March 2027, while delivery, installation, integration, commissioning and embedding into services can happen during the financial year 2027/28. Projects can last for between three and 12 months and applicants must demonstrate readiness for delivery within the required timescales. The project duration is the timeframe required to bring the asset into an operational state.

For expenditure to be recognised in financial year 2026/27 NERC would expect that the award recipient will have entered into a binding commitment before 31 March 2027 in relation to the capital purchase being funded. This could include a signed supplier contract, accepted purchase order, or equivalent evidence demonstrating that the capital commitment has been made, even if delivery and payment occur in a later financial year.

Uploading quotes is not a requirement for this funding opportunity. However, applicants must provide a high-level delivery plan showing key procurement, implementation and commissioning milestones, and an expenditure profile showing planned expenditure by financial year and explaining any expenditure proposed beyond 2026/2027 financial year. Awarded projects will be required to submit the evidence of binding commitment before 31 March 2027.

Q: Are items that are already being procured via internal funding that has been committed this financial year eligible?
A: This opportunity is intended to support new investments made through the award and is not intended to cover expenditure that has already been incurred or committed through alternative funding sources.

Q: Should the application costs include VAT?
A: Yes, applications should be inclusive of VAT where applicable.

Q: Can applications request funding outside the stated range?
A: Proposals are expected to be in the range £300k - £1m. Proposals falling slightly above or under that range (by ~ 5%) might be eligible. As stated in the published funding opportunity, applicants should submit a request to NERC via email by 21 September 2026 (researchfacilities@nerc.ukri.org). Requests should include a brief description of the proposed investment, costs and justification for it to be outside the range, and must have NERC approval prior to submitting the application.

Q: Can a bid comprise more than one item?
A: Yes, bids can be comprised of more than one item but the total should be in the range of £300k to £1M and each item must meet the criteria for capital funding.

Q: Are items expected to have gone through a tender?
A: There is no expectation for items to go through a tender process. However, where host institutions require a formal tender process, this should be reflected in delivery plans, including any preparatory activity needed to ensure procurement can be completed within the required timescales.

Q: What costs can I include in my application?
A: Please refer to the "what we will fund" and "what we will not fund" sections of the funding opportunity for the costs that can be included, and to the criteria for capital funding. All costs must be included as capital costs. This capital opportunity may include costs where the

capitalised costs are directly attributable to delivering the capability and bring it into operation. It must be clear within the application that it would be impossible to install or safely operate the infrastructure without the works included. Some specific examples of eligible and ineligible costs are provided below.

- Space refurbishment required to bring the capability into operational use or for accessibility purposes is in scope. However, these costs need to have a strong case demonstrating that the asset would be unusable without those costs. While these costs may be eligible for funding through the call, the panel may view the most competitive applications to be those that minimise those costs through the call and instead leverage them from their host institution.

- Equipment Service Level Agreements may be eligible where they form part of the initial acquisition and implementation of a new or renewed infrastructure capability and are directly attributable to bringing that capability into operational use. Ongoing maintenance, servicing or support contracts associated with routine operation of infrastructure are not eligible.

- Training costs from the supplier for facility technicians are eligible as one-off costs.

- Booking system upgrades are potentially eligible where they form part of the infrastructure capability itself and are directly required to improve community access, utilisation, sharing or management of the funded infrastructure. Generic administrative or business-management systems would not normally be eligible.

- Costs for engagement, promotion and knowledge exchange events are ineligible

Q: Are staff costs eligible?
A: Staff costs are eligible only if needed to bring the capability into an operational state and they need to be included as capital costs. Please also refer to the “what we will fund” and “what we will not fund” sections of the funding opportunity for the costs that can be included, and to the criteria for capital funding.

Q: Which cost category should be used on TFS?
A: All costs must be costed under the Exceptions Equipment category.

ASSESSMENT AND DEMAND MANAGEMENT

Q: How will applications be assessed by the panel and who will make the final funding decision?
A: Applications will be assessed by an expert panel against the published assessment criteria within vision, approach, applicant and team capability to deliver, ethics and responsible research and innovation (RRI), resources and cost justification. The assessment panel chair will oversee the assessment process and support consistency across applications and assessment areas. The panel will make funding recommendations to UKRI. The final funding decision for this funding opportunity will adopt a portfolio approach to select a diverse range of projects in accordance with How we make decisions, balancing strategic relevance, potential for impact and maturity in such a way that is appropriate to the funding opportunity aims.

Q: When are outcomes expected to be communicated and when is the earliest grant start date?
A: Outcomes are expected to be communicated in December. The earliest grant start date would be January, following award set up

Q: How is demand management being applied?
A: Each individual based at an eligible organisation may submit only one application as project lead and one application as project co-lead. Standard eligibility checks and fit to call checks based on the published requirements within the Scope section may be applied.