

UK Research and Innovation Equality Impact Assessment Form

About your activity

Title of your activity

Advancing solutions for critical mineral production and recycling – funding opportunity and investment management

Council or business area

NERC

Aims and objectives

This investment is part of the UKRI Critical Minerals: From Research to Industry (CMR2i) programme; a £20M investment delivered through the UKRI Advanced Manufacturing priority programme. The programme aims to strengthen the UK's end-to-end critical and growth minerals value chain – spanning exploration, extraction, processing, recycling, and re mining– to increase domestic minerals capabilities and support the growth, resilience and global competitiveness of UK advanced manufacturing and other priority sectors identified within the Industrial Strategy.

This investment seeks to support ambitious projects that accelerate the development and validation of transformative solutions across the UK's critical and growth minerals value chains. This includes innovative technologies, processes and methodologies for sustainable and efficient extraction, processing, recovery, reprocessing, recycling and re-mining of critical and growth minerals.

The investment will be in 2 phases:

- Phase 1 – an open call for pump-priming projects for 12 months
- Phase 2 – a closed call to successful phase 1 projects, for additional funding for 24 months to accelerate development of the most promising technologies, processes and methodologies from phase 1

This EqlA covers the funding calls, assessment processes and investment management for both phases.

Who is affected?

- Academic/research community who apply or consider applying
- Industry/policy stakeholders (including those who become project partners on applications)
- Panel members/assessors
- Third parties with interest in critical mineral production and recycling
- UKRI staff involved in developing, commissioning and managing the investment

What data and consultation have you used?

- UKRI and NERC equality, diversity and inclusion policies and guidance
- Previous EqlAs within and outside of UKRI
- Evidence and learning from previous NERC funding opportunities, panel meeting reports, staff observations and suggestions at post-panel meetings
- Evidence and learning from previous IUK Programme 'CLIMATES'

Impact on specific groups

Are there general impacts on multiple groups?

We have identified the following general impacts on multiple groups, along with mitigating actions, as follows:

- *Impact: Some people may miss communications around the launch of the Phase 1 opportunity, including a Webinar. Phase 2 activity is a closed call, open to only those successful at the first stage. Therefore, those who are unable to apply for stage 1 are also precluded from applying to stage 2.*
 - Action: Communication of the funding opportunity will be targeted through various channels, including the NERC research community news list-server, and dissemination to relevant programme networks including through cross-UKRI colleagues.
 - Action: Webinar dates will be advertised through the Funding Finder and NERC list-server to ensure applicants have notice to attend. The webinar will be recorded and uploaded to Funding Finder for those who were unable to attend.
 - Action: Announcements and deadlines for the funding opportunities will not coincide with school breaks or major religious holidays. The open period of both calls will exceed the UKRI minimum requirements. The upcoming open call will



be included in the UKRI Future Research and Innovation Funding Opportunities page.

- *Impact: There is potential for unconscious bias to impact assessment.*
 - Action: All eligible proposals submitted will be assessed by a panel against a set of assessment criteria. The assessment panel will comprise independent experts, selected to ensure a diverse representation of the research and innovation community and end users. All panel members will receive guidance that covers issues including fairness, objectivity and unconscious bias. Panel members are supported to follow best practice in taking positive steps to safeguard funding decisions. UKRI staff will work closely with the Panel Chair(s) to agree approaches designed to minimise opportunities for bias and improve transparency of the decision-making process. This includes managing environmental conditions, such as providing appropriate breaks. Both external panel members and UKRI staff are empowered to constructively challenge potential bias where they identify it. All participants in the process are asked to inform staff if they have any additional needs to enable attendance or participation.

Impact on protected characteristics

Complete the table for all characteristics. You only need to add details if there is a positive or negative impact.

Protected characteristic	Impact (positive, negative, none or unknown)	Details of impact	Actions to reduce negative or increase positive impact
Age	Negative	There is potential for unconscious bias in the assessment with regards to the age of the applicant.	Risks will be managed through the specific actions detailed in relation to unconscious bias above. Data on applicants age will not be sourced in the UKRI Funding Service and will not be used to make funding decisions. This opportunity includes UKRI standard eligibility principles, allowing academics, technicians and research staff to be employed in the PL role. Eligibility is based on skills and experience rather than

			qualifications. The assessment criteria and panel guidance will aim to mitigate any potential negative impact by focussing on applicants' (team or individual) 'capability to deliver' the proposed research and ensuring that in assessment of this criterion, individual applicants' skills and expertise are considered relative to career stage.
Disability	Negative Positive	Potential for unconscious bias Potential for issues relating to accessibility of materials, and meetings including the panel meeting Panel members will be invited to participate remotely, through a virtual or hybrid meeting format.	Risks for unconscious bias will be managed through the specific actions detailed in relation to unconscious bias above. Web content and materials will adhere to accessibility guidelines and we will work with UKRI web team to produce funding opportunity content in accessible formats. Applicants will be given the opportunity to confidentially disclose any reasonable adjustments required to support their full participation in the process. Requests will be handled sensitively and in confidence, with adjustments implemented wherever feasible to remove barriers to engagement. Panel meetings will be held virtually. Panel members will be asked about any additional requirements participants in the panel may need to fully participate in the assessment process. Sufficient breaks will be built into the panel meeting agenda to support participation. Closed captions will be enabled.

Gender reassignment	Negative	Potential for unconscious bias	Risks for unconscious bias will be managed through the specific actions detailed in relation to unconscious bias above. We will use gender neutral pronouns (they/them) if we haven't been informed of someone's pronouns. We will work to ensure the use of gender-neutral language in our documents.
Marriage or civil partnership	None	We do not ask any disclosure on their marriage or civil partnership status.	N/A
Pregnancy and maternity	Negative	The short duration of the phase 1 grants may pose barriers for applicants on leave or with childcare responsibilities. Completion of the application may be affected by different types of parental leave, both in terms of those in research organisations as well as partner organisations. Childcare responsibilities could also be a barrier to application submission or in terms of application assessment.	Provision for parental leave are covered in UKRI terms and conditions. The opportunity will be open for at least 8 weeks for applicants to have sufficient time to prepare their applications. UKRI terms and conditions relating to no-cost extensions will apply and exceptions can be granted for parental leave.
Race	Negative	Applicants are not asked to disclose their race. However, there is potential risk of unconscious bias by reviewers against an applicant based on name and perceived race. Participants for whom English is their second	Risks will be managed through the specific actions detailed in relation to unconscious bias above.

		language may be negatively impacted.	
Religion or belief	Negative	Potential for unconscious bias. Participation may be affected if activities, including key assessment stages, coincide with religious holidays.	Risks will be managed through the specific actions detailed in relation to unconscious bias above. We will ensure that religious observances are taken into account when planning funding opportunity timelines, including scheduling key dates to avoid major religious festivals where at all possible.
Sex		Potential for unconscious bias – possibility of discrimination against a panel member, research applicant or research participant based on their perceived gender and/or sex. Potential panel members may be disadvantaged and/or unable to attend meetings if they have caring responsibilities. Research suggests that caring responsibilities fall disproportionately across genders, with more women typically taking on caring roles. Use of language can present a barrier to participation.	Risks will be managed through the specific actions detailed in relation to unconscious bias above. We will consider the start and end times of the panel to account for any carer responsibilities panel members may have e.g. school drop off and pick up times. Dates will be publicised as early as possible to ensure participants/applicants/panel members can plan ahead. Gender neutral pronouns will be used to refer to applicants in proposal assessment. Panel guidance will be written to ensure no bias is introduced at the assessment stage. NERC/UKRI peer review best practice guidelines will be followed at all times and panelists will be encouraged to identify and challenge any potential bias, to enable it to be addressed appropriately
Sexual orientation		Potential for unconscious bias	Risks will be managed through the specific actions detailed in relation to unconscious bias above.

Impact on additional characteristics

Complete the table for all characteristics. You only need to add details if there is a positive or negative impact.

Additional characteristics	Impact (positive, negative, none or unknown)	Details of impact	Actions to reduce negative or increase positive impact
Geographical location and place	Unknown	This funding opportunity is open to those organisations with standard eligibility. Potential panel members may be less likely to participate if significant travel is required.	There is no requirement to travel for assessment (applicants or panel members) which mitigates geographic risks.
Socio-economic status	Unknown	This call includes UKRI standard eligibility principles, allowing academics, technicians and research staff to be costed into the application.	
Education background	Unknown	This call includes UKRI standard eligibility principles, allowing academics, technicians and research staff to be costed into the application.	
Parent or guardian responsibilities	Negative	Individuals with parental/guardian or other caring responsibilities may have less time to prepare proposals or attend meetings.	The call will be open for minimum of 8 weeks to allow sufficient time to applicants. Individuals will be invited to attend the panel meeting virtually. Meeting times will consider potential conflicts with parental/caring responsibilities, such as avoiding early



			mornings/evenings and school drop off/pick up times.
Carer responsibilities	Negative	As above	
Political opinion (Northern Ireland only)	N/A		
Other characteristics			Applicants can contact the NERC programme mailbox to disclose any additional information that NERC need to consider.

Final decision

Make a decision on whether to proceed with the activity

State which one of the following outcomes applies and give a reason for your decision.

1. No negative or positive impact identified therefore, activity will proceed

2. Adapt or change the activity in a way which will eliminate negative impact or promote equality

The activity has been adapted based on the actions described above in this document.

3. Stop the activity because the evidence shows bias or negative impact towards one or more groups.

4. Barriers and impact identified, there appear to be no other proportionate ways to achieve the activity. Proceed with caution with this activity knowing the impact

Review and sign off

How will you monitor and review the impact of your activity?

This EIA will be monitored regularly during the management of the funding opportunity by the project team. Responsibility for this will rest with the Opportunity Senior Programme Manager.

The EqIA will also be reviewed and updated if any additional concerns are raised by applicants, assessors or the community

What is the EIA review date?

01/08/2027

Contact

Charlotte Hawkins (charlotte.hawkins@nerc.ukri.org)

Will the EIA be published?

EIAs should be published alongside relevant funding activities for example funding opportunities and events

EqIA to be published alongside the funding opportunity and saved in the internal NERC Equality Impact Assessment library

Who has this been signed off by?

Sarah Turner, Associate Director Strategic Programme Generation and Delivery, NERC
(19/08/2026)

Submitting the form

You need to [submit the form to the central repository](#)

EIAs for the International Science Partnership Funds should be emailed to: ISPF@ukri.org

Change log

Include changes as you've reviewed the EIA. For example, based on input received from x at the announcement of opportunity stage, x was added

Name	Date	Version	Change
		1	

		2	
		3	

Action plan

Add the actions you intend to take (or have taken) to address the negative impact you have identified. Actions should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound).

Action	Deadline	Owner	How will it be monitored?	What is the outcome?