



Natural
Environment
Research Council

GUIDANCE FOR REVIEWERS OF APPLICATIONS TO NERC'S URGENCY FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

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Scope of NERC's Urgency Funding Opportunity

The NERC Urgency Funding Opportunity is intended to provide funding for unexpected and transient scientific opportunities created by unpredictable natural events such as earthquakes, droughts, floods, or ephemeral events in ecosystems.

Projects can be up to one year in duration and are expected to focus on urgent data collection and essential initial analysis only. Applicants must have a clear strategy for taking the research forward once the urgent phase has been completed.

NERC reserves the right to limit the number of Urgency applications considered or supported relating to the same event or location.

Details of the opportunity, including information about what is **outside** the scope of this scheme can be found at [NERC urgency funding – UKRI](#).

Please note that, given the nature of this funding scheme, NERC aims to complete the assessment process within six weeks of receiving a full application.

Conflicts of Interest

Before you complete a review, please ensure that you do not have a conflict of interest with the application. NERC follows the UKRI [Declaration of interests: guidance for assessors, reviewers and panellists](#). We ask that you make yourself familiar with the policy and let us know as soon as possible, via email to urgencygrants@nerc.ukri.org, if you have – or are unsure whether you have – any conflicts of interest with the application you have been asked to review.

Guidance for Reviewers

Confidentiality

NERC has a policy of feeding back reviewer comments to applicants anonymously. Your personal details and your expertise will not be fed back to applicants or their organisations. **You must avoid comments that could identify you or your level of expertise.** For example, if you need to cite your work then say “the” rather than “my” paper. All comments made should be in a manner suitable to be fed back to the applicant. If you think a particular comment could be misinterpreted or cause offence, please do not include it.

Following [UKRI's use of generative AI policy](#) (2024), Reviewers must not use AI tools as part of assessment activities, including generating panel feedback, in part as this would be a breach of confidentiality.

Unconscious bias

Please have regard to the [Equality Act 2010](#) and be careful to avoid any unconscious bias in your assessment on the grounds of a protected characteristic such as age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage/civil partnership, pregnancy/maternity, race, religion/belief, sex or sexual orientation.

Principles of Assessment

Reviewers and moderators must adhere to the [San Francisco declaration on research assessment](#), which recognises the relationship between research assessment and research integrity.

Find out about the [UKRI principles of assessment and decision making](#).

Expertise

Please only complete the review if you consider that you have medium or high expertise in the area.

For multidisciplinary applications, you might not be familiar with all aspects of the proposed research. You may have been approached as a reviewer because of your particular expertise in one aspect of the application, but additional reviews will also be sought from experts on the remaining aspects. If you only feel confident to comment on particular elements of the application, please inform us by email (urgencygrants@nerc.ukri.org) that this is the case and restrict your comments within the review to these areas. This will greatly assist the Moderator in placing your comments in context. Furthermore, multidisciplinary research may necessitate a researcher moving disciplines. You should review the applicant and their team's capability to deliver the project within the framework described, ensuring that you are convinced that the appropriate logistical support is in place (including training where necessary).

Assessment Criteria

Reviewers are asked to assess Urgency applications against all four assessment criteria (see below) that are set out in this [Funding Opportunity](#) and score them accordingly, providing a single overall score between 1 and 6 that takes into consideration all the assessment criteria (see **Annex A** for score definitions).

Please note that NERC will only fund excellent research through this funding opportunity if it meets the specific requirements of this scheme with regards to the urgent nature of the work, which reviewers are asked to comment on specifically (further details are provided under 'Fit to Scope' below).

The assessment criteria to be considered for this opportunity are as follows (these are standardised UKRI criteria used in all UKRI funding calls – they should be considered in the context of the scale and scope of this scheme).

Vision

To what extent has the applicant demonstrated that the proposed work:

- is of excellent quality and importance within or beyond the field(s) or area(s)
- has the potential to advance current understanding, or generate new knowledge, thinking or discovery within or beyond the field or area
- is timely given current trends, context, and needs
- impacts world-leading research, society, the economy, or the environment

And to what extent has the applicant:

- identified the potential direct or indirect benefits and who the beneficiaries might be
- provided justification for the urgency of the proposed work and explained why applying through other available funding opportunities would result in a missed opportunity to undertake environmental research of high scientific importance (i.e. why this application is a good 'fit to scheme')

Approach

To what extent has the applicant designed their approach so that it:

- is effective and appropriate to achieve their objectives
- is feasible, and comprehensively identifies any risks to delivery and how they will be managed
- uses a clear and transparent methodology (if applicable)
- summarises the previous work and describes how this will be built upon and progressed (if applicable)
- will maximise translation of outputs into outcomes and impacts
- describes how their, and if applicable, their team's, research environment (in terms of the place and relevance to the project) will contribute to the success of the work.

And to what extent has the applicant:

- demonstrated access to the appropriate services, facilities, infrastructure, or equipment to deliver the proposed work
- demonstrated a clear strategy for taking the research forward once the urgent phase is complete

Applicant and team capability to deliver

To what extent has the applicant and their team demonstrated they have:

- the relevant experience (appropriate to career stage, see **Annex B**) to deliver the proposed work
- the right balance of skills and expertise to cover the proposed work
- the appropriate leadership and management skills to deliver the work and their approach to develop others
- contributed to developing a positive research environment and wider community

Reviewers should bear in mind that it is the team's capability to deliver, and whether they have the necessary skills for this application, not the excellence of individual applicants that is being assessed. Reviewers should not be tempted to lower their score where the applicants do not have a long-standing track record in the research area (e.g., early career researchers, a researcher who is changing disciplines, novel and cutting-edge research) if sufficient evidence of suitable support mechanisms have been provided. Base your assessment on the application and not on your previous knowledge of, or the reputations of, the applicants or their host organisations. Please be careful to avoid any unconscious bias in your assessment on the grounds of a protected characteristic.

We provide additional guidance on how reviewers' expectations of a strong capability to deliver could be

adjusted to consider individual team members' career stage in **Annex B**. This list is by no means exhaustive, nor is it expected that every team member will be able to illustrate each example.

Please remember that the streamlined application process may limit detailed capability to deliver narratives and full track records for all team members cannot be expected.

Ethics and responsible research and innovation (RRI)

To what extent has the applicant and their team considered the following:

- the relevant ethical or responsible research and innovation considerations
- how they will manage these considerations
- environmental responsibility, following [UKRI's environmental sustainability strategy](#), including preventing environmental harm and enhancing environmental benefit, as well as social responsibility including equality, diversity and inclusion, in line with [NERC's responsible business statement](#)

If the applicant is collecting or using data, they must have identified:

- any legal and ethical considerations of collecting, releasing or storing the data including consent, confidentiality, anonymisation, security and other ethical considerations and, in particular, strategies to not preclude further reuse of data
- formal information standards with which your study will comply.

Fit to Scope

It is essential that applications meet the scope of the scheme (see Scope of NERC's Urgency Funding Opportunity at the start of this document).

Reviewers must consider the extent to which the applicant has:

- provided justification for the urgency of the proposed work and explained why applying through other available funding opportunities would result in a missed opportunity to undertake environmental research of high scientific importance
- demonstrated a clear strategy for taking the research forward once the urgent phase is complete.

These aspects of the application are addressed as bullet points under the project vision and approach assessment criteria, and it is important that the overall score reflects the extent to which these criteria have been met – it is expected that any application recommended for funding would be considered to have a good fit to the scope of NERC's Urgency scheme.

Annex A

Scoring scheme used by Reviewers

You must provide a single overall score for the application between 1 and 6 that takes into consideration all the assessment criteria. You should allocate your overall score according to the following scoring definitions:

Score	Definition
6	Exceptional: The application is outstanding. It addresses all of the assessment criteria and meets them to an exceptional level
5	Excellent The application is very high quality. It addresses most of the assessment criteria and meets them to an excellent level. There are very minor weaknesses.
4	Very Good The application demonstrates considerable quality. It meets most of the assessment criteria to a high level. There are minor weaknesses.
3	Good The application is of good quality. It meets most of the assessment criteria to an acceptable level, but not across all aspects of the proposed activities. There are weaknesses.
2	Weak The application is not sufficiently competitive. It meets some of the assessment criteria to an adequate level. There are, however, significant weaknesses.
1	Poor The application is flawed or of unsuitable quality for funding. It does not meet the assessment criteria to an adequate level.

Supporting comments

Please ensure that you fully justify the score given by providing clear and comprehensive comments which refer to the assessment criteria. Reviewers' comments on the application should be entered into the available text box in The UKRI Funding Service (TFS) and should be structured under the assessment criteria subheadings: Vision, Approach, Applicant and Team Capability to Deliver, and Ethics & RRI. Your overall score should also be entered into TFS.

Annex B

Career-stage considerations in Applicant and Team Capability to Deliver

Early career	Established career (in addition to those indicated for early career)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• has an ability to generate new ideas, technologies, or methodologies, with examples of previous breakthroughs, the initiation of ground-breaking discovery, or advancements in a relevant field of environmental science research.• has an ability to deliver and communicate excellent research, with examples of relevant outputs that are considered of international quality, such as open data sets, publications, conference presentations, policies, patents etc.• has a high level of expertise, with examples of the previous application of relevant key skills or training received, or evidence that they are, or have the capability to become, a recognised leader in the field.• has capability to successfully execute the project, with examples, relevant to the needs of the proposed research, of effective project management, team leadership and collaborative relationships.• understands the importance of the development of team members and demonstrates the capacity and experience for supervision, training, teaching, or mentoring, including students and post-doctoral researchers.• shows evidence of engagement with the wider research community, including contributions to improving research culture and integrity, with examples of peer review commitments, committee memberships, and positions of community responsibility• shows evidence of engagement with broader society and knowledge exchange across sectors, with examples of public outreach, or contributions to policy development, new practices, or business innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• has made a significant contribution to the generation of new ideas, technologies, or methodologies, with examples of previous breakthroughs, ground-breaking discovery or advancements that have transformed a field of environmental science research.• has delivered and communicated excellent research, with examples of a significant volume of contributions that are of international quality that has widely influenced the research agenda.• has a very high level of expertise, with examples of contributing to the advancement of techniques or training given, or evidence that they are recognised as a world-leader in the field.• has capability to successfully execute the project, with examples of effective project management, visionary leadership in shaping the direction of a team or organisation, or significant collaborative networks.• has made significant contributions to the support and development of other researchers, recognised as a role model for the community.• shows evidence of significant engagement with the wider research community, with examples of advocacy roles for research culture and integrity, utilising influence to shape broader policy across the research and innovation landscape.• shows evidence of significant engagement with broader society and knowledge exchange, with examples of public advocacy roles, championship, engagement with high-level policy makers, or business community

You may find it helpful to read [UKRI's core team roles in funding applications](#).