NERC Opening up the Environment (OutE) 2025 applicant webinar Q&A.

Following the grant applicant webinar for the Opening up the Environment 2025 funding opportunity, we have captured the questions asked during the webinar and provided responses below. We wanted to maintain transparency and have addressed the questions exactly as posed to NERC in the webinar, including the order in which they were received. Where possible, and without changing the questions asked, we have removed duplicates.

A recording of the webinar and full details about the opportunity can be found on the <u>Opening up the</u> <u>Environment 2025 funding finder page</u>.

Further information about the follow-on funding, can be found on the <u>Pre Announcement: Opening</u> up the Environment 2026 funding finder page.

If you have any further questions you wish to discuss which are not answered below or in the funding finder announcement, please contact the NERC Community Engagement Team via email: <u>openingup@nerc.ukri.org</u>

Questions	Answers
Where can we access the learning	More information about this programme is available online:
and insights from the work on	'Hidden histories' informing the environmental research sector
colonial past?	https://www.ukri.org/news/hidden-histories-informing-the-
	environmental-research-sector/
Can the funding be allocated to	OutE 2025 funding opportunity is not a typical research funding
research activities on the interface	opportunity. Grants are available to support activities which
between NERC and sisters research	deliver the objectives as detailed in the funding announcement.
council?	So "traditional" research is not in scope.
	However, if there are literary reviews, or desk research type activities which form part of the action's projects wish to take which supports the delivery of the funding opportunity objectives, this is in scope.
The recording will be shared with	Yes, the recording is available on the funding finder
all attendees after the webinar.	announcement.
Thanks	
Do you allow fellows on a tenure-	Yes please see detail in the NERC Research Grants handbook,
track but not confirmed in post to	paragraphs 47-56 <u>https://www.ukri.org/wp-</u>
submit?	content/uploads/2022/11/NERC-050423-
	GrantsFellowshipsHandbook-April2023.pdf
Are postdocs with independent	Yes please see detail in the NERC Research Grants handbook,
research fellowship eligible?	paragraphs 47-56 https://www.ukri.org/wp-
	content/uploads/2022/11/NERC-050423-
	GrantsFellowshipsHandbook-April2023.pdf

Is the lecturer level about	The lecturer level requirement is focused on the grade of the
employment status (i.e.	individual.
permanent) or grade?	
In any case, given that the most	Thank you for this feedback, we appreciate the challenges
diverse population in academia are	faced by members of the research community, including the
casualised research staff, it is a	barrier to application to funding from those on short term
shame that they cannot be project	casual contracts.
leads.	
	If you are interested in applying to this funding announcement,
	but your contract is a barrier to yourself, please email us to see
	if we can provide any support and/or guidance
Generally, technicians are not in	NERC appreciates that within organisations different types of
the same grade as lecturers	roles may be subject to different banding criteria.
the same grade as lecturers	Toles may be subject to unrerent banding citteria.
	Some information taken from the eligibility guidance enline
	Some information taken from the eligibility guidance online
	provides some additional context:
	"Other senior university research personnel with appointments
	resourced from the central funds of their institutions at the time
	of application may also apply. They should carry both a level of
	responsibility and range of duties appropriate to a person with
	substantial research experiences, for example they occupy a
	post equating to at least lecturer level."
	Full detailed information around eligibility can be found here:
	https://www.ukri.org/councils/nerc/guidance-for-
	applicants/check-if-you-are-eligible-for-funding/
	If you have questions regarding eligibility please contact us for
	advice.
By project partner do you mean	Yes, project partners contribute towards the project delivery,
other than a co-lead?	but are not co-leads.
Project partners can't get any	Projects partners are expected to fund their own involvement
funding. Co-leads can.	in the projects minus some small expenses, please see the
	funding announcement for more information.
	However, they can also hold a dual role as a sub-contractor
	where they can receive funding / payment for their
	contributions.
If a project partner has a dual role,	Where project co-leads are able to claim costs associated with
can they be named as a co-lead?	delivery, we would not anticipate them needing to claim costs
	under a dual role.
	Where project partners are involved, but not named as co-lead
	we suggest investigating the option of dual roles.

What level of research rigour is required? For example, is there a need for ethics reviews or long term quantitative data?	OutE 2025 funding opportunity is not a typical research funding opportunity, so the research rigour that you might usually expect for a research grant may not be required. It is at the discretion of your individual organisations to determine if your project will need an ethics review, NERC advises you to speak with your relevant support teams. We would encourage you to consider how your project may be formed of, and/or working with individuals who are covered by the Equality Act 2010, and any ethical considerations you may need to consider.
	We do not anticipate projects at the 2025 or the 2026 round needing to handle long term quantitative data, though appreciate some data collection and management may be required.
Why is the budget so low for the first round?	We are funding small amounts at the 2025 round with the ambition that this funding will help to support and elevate the work organisations may already be undertaking to help improve EDI in their own institutions as part of their business as usual.
	In this instance as a responsible funder, we have to take care to ensure we are not funding duplicated activities which organisations would already be undertaking, or receive funding for.
	NERC has positioned the funding at this level to also reflect the delivery timeline of projects; to ensure we provide an achievable budget spend for projects, whilst providing a foundation for partnerships to form; and allowing growth and development in the 2026 round if projects decide to apply. Also having smaller amounts per project enables us to support a wider range of applications; and by giving more projects the opportunity to bid into the 2026 round.
Interested in the leadership team requirements, it seems counter to what the call is aiming to do? Many groups are under-represented and so have 2 people with lived	Thank you for your feedback. We have carefully considered the role of the leadership team for this project (and how these fits into projects who potentially wish to apply to the 2026 round of funding).
experience would be a challenge (which is assuming why the call is in place), especially if looking through an intersectional lens? You would have a leadership team that is huge and unmanageable?	We wanted to provide guidance that removed the possibility of leadership teams having one, potentially perfunctory representation of people with lived experience (PWLE). We recognise the burden that already exists on PWLE to advocate for themselves and change within an organisation, and the additional work that being named on this project would create.

	If your project is unable to meet the requirement around this, please message us to discuss this. We also recognise that the leadership team for this project may be larger in comparison to other NERC and UKRI funded grants, we encourage you to think carefully about the roles. We have taken this approach as we hope applicants will consider the role the team can play in equitable relationship building, and also offer relevant professional development opportunities for project team members.
As an ex-teacher, 6th form interaction is too late. It needs to be years 7 - 8, or even primary school Targeting FE colleges instead of schools would be a better route	Thank you for your feedback. The partnerships listed in the presentation and funding announcement are examples of what are possible and not a definitive list. Other partnerships which focus on delivering the objectives of the funding opportunity would be within scope.
Can partners be from international institutions if the focus is improving a UK institution?	 Projects can work with the partners who are best suited towards their specific projects' concepts and contexts. All types of partnerships are in scope for this call. As long as they contribute towards delivering the aims and objectives of this funding announcement. If you wish to work with international institutions on your project, it is advised that you clearly state the rationale for this in your application. Additional information from the funding announcement which you might find useful: As NERC is the lead funder for this funding opportunity, international researchers can apply as 'project co-lead
	 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). Read more about this in the NERC eligibility guidance for applicants. (https://www.ukri.org/councils/nerc/guidance-for- applicants/check-if-you-are-eligible-for-funding/) You should include all other international collaborators (or UK partners not based at approved organisations) as project partners. This includes organisations from the business or financial sectors.

So, in this call, we are not funded to do scientific research (e.g. the	Yes, this is correct
environmental impact of textile	
fibres) as such, but focus only on	
ways to increase diversity in people	
who could contribute to the above	
mentioned research?	
Why are we still focusing on	Thank you for your feedback. NERC recognises and values the
providing evidence there is a	existing evidence and research that exists around the barriers
problem. We know there's a	for individuals accessing, sustaining, being included and
problem. We've known for years -	welcomed into environmental science research careers and
this money could have been better	careers across the wider research and innovation landscape
directed. And you cannot deliver	that contributes towards environmental solutions.
impact in 9 months - a theory of	
change would show you that.	This funding opportunity is encouraging individual institutions
	and partnerships to reflect on their own contexts; as we
	recognise each individual situation will be unique in terms of
	barriers, and how best to mitigate and/or remove these.
	Opening up the Environment 2025 offers successful applicants
	the access to resource and support to undertake this
	meaningful exploratory activity, and for applicants develop
	their own evidence-based approach to change; developed from
	the findings of their funded activities.
	NERC also recognises that impact can take time, and for this
	specific funding opportunity, we anticipate that there may be
	only emerging impact from projects, or impact appropriate to
	the scale of funding. For example, one impact may be that a
	department is now considering using different and/or new
	recruitment websites to post job opportunities.
Could diversity be in forging new	For this funding opportunity projects should focus on UK
international links with a view to	audiences. Projects should set out equitable, inclusive plans to
increasing opportunities from	identify and include a broader diversity of people in the UK
underrepresented foreign national	environmental solutions workforce of the future, contributing
groups?	to increasing diversity and inclusion in the NERC community
	within the UK.
	Your project will undertake emerging work to test, scope and
	pilot approaches that showcase a broader range of people and
	skill sets to inspire those who have the potential to be part of the UK future talent pipeline and contribute towards delivering
	environmental science solutions.
	If there is a link with international organisations / project
	partners, it must be made clear in your proposal how this links
	to the UK focus.

What is the Kristal reference number for the fund?	NERC does not issue Kristal reference numbers for this funding; we suggest you reach out to your grant support teams within your organisation to see if they can help with this
I find it problematic that researchers cannot declare their own positionality for this work given that the focus is on furthering	Thank you for your feedback. NERC and UKRI recognises and values diverse applicants and teams for any of our funding opportunities.
diversity and equity in the field as this is important in evaluation of the programme of work	For Opening up the Environment 2025 we are not stopping applicants in declaring their own positionality for this work, as we see how this can be intrinsically linked to the work delivered. We have offered advice on how applications may wish to adapt the writing style used to help contribute towards the shared effort of reducing unconscious bias in the application process.
	However, this is not a mandatory requirement and up to the individuals writing the proposals. The assessment panel will be prepared and supported to assess responsibly and take care to avoid unconscious bias.
Do projects have to cover all three objectives?	Yes
Is there a limit to the number of applications that a project partner or e.g. subcontracted EDI specialist can be involved in?	We can confirm that as per our definition of project partners and subcontractors in the UKRI FED Grant Terms and Conditions <u>https://www.ukri.org/wp-</u> <u>content/uploads/2024/04/UKRI-020424-</u> <u>FECGrantTermsConditionsApril2024.pdf</u> there is no limit to the number of applications they can be involved with
Can we charge overheads (indirects and estates) for professional (non- academic) roles.	Yes, please apply for funding as you would for a scientific research role
What about Independent Research Fellows?	In terms of an Independent Research Fellows eligibility to be project lead, this is dependent on their contract and grade. If they are at the same grade as a lecturer in an organisation, then they would be eligible to apply, for more details please see paragraphs 47-56 <u>https://www.ukri.org/wp- content/uploads/2022/11/NERC-050423-</u> <u>GrantsFellowshipsHandbook-April2023.pdf</u>
What is the difference/relationship between 2025 call and 2026 call?	In short the 2025 round is small pots of money to help the formation and development of partnerships, and self- assessment and reflection of what needs to be done to help increase diversity of representation attracting a wider talent pool into NERC science.
	The 2026 round is a significantly larger sum, where successful applicants will receive the funds that will deliver the identified changes needed in the 2025 round, and elevate learnings and

	influence change at a national level. Please see the funding announcements for both rounds for full details.
Can you talk us through how you'd see the internal review element and the external partnership	It is up to the individual projects as to how this may work, as we recognise each project and partnership has its own unique context.
element co-existing together within the pilot period; particularly when working with external partner. Where have you seen this done well?	One way in which this could work is that individual organisations in the partnership individually undertake the self- assessment (internal review element), and then may wish to collaborate together to share learnings (i.e. where one has strengths and another has areas for improvement), work together on areas which both organisations need to improve, and/or potentially collaborate in sharing learnings and supporting others where strengths are shared.
	The National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) has an EDGE tool
	https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/resources/guide/assess-
	your-institutional-culture-introducing-edge-tool which,
	although is not explicitly designed for this funding opportunity, is a good example of self-assessment work.
For eligibility, Is a Research Fellow	In terms of an Independent Research Fellows eligibility to be
equivalent to a Lecturer level?	project lead, this is dependent on their contract and grade. If
	they are at the same grade as a lecturer in an organisation,
	then they would be eligible to apply, for more details please
	see paragraphs 47-56 <u>https://www.ukri.org/wp-</u>
	content/uploads/2022/11/NERC-050423-
Online, the eligibility requirements	<u>GrantsFellowshipsHandbook-April2023.pdf</u> Relevant information from the funding announcement page as
mentions 'For this NERC funding	follows:
opportunity, project co-leads may	
also be based at UK businesses,	"including project co-leads from business, third sector or
third sector or government	government bodies for details of eligible organisations and
organisations.' Could you please	costs. Note that costs associated with project co-leads from a
give some more details on this?	UK business, third sector or government organisation's contribution to a project must not exceed 30% of the overall
	cost of the grant at 100% FEC. Additionally, eligible costs differ
	amongst organisation types, for example, for government
	organisations we will only fund travel and subsistence."
	More information can be found here:
	https://www.ukri.org/publications/including-project-co-leads-
	from-business-third-sector-or-government-bodies/
	If you have any further questions around this please email us

Just to be clear - can researchers on a fixed term contract lead?	The Principal Investigator must have a contract of employment that extends to beyond the duration of the proposed grant (or if not employed by the submitting organisation, a formal non- salaried arrangement as described above that extends to beyond the duration of the proposed grant); Or an assurance from the submitting organisation that, if the application is successful, the pre-existing contract of employment, (or pre- existing formal commitment to provide support if not employed at the organisation), will be extended beyond the end date of the grant.
	Please refer to paragraph 52 in the NERC Research Handbook for more details <u>https://www.ukri.org/wp-</u> <u>content/uploads/2022/11/NERC-050423-</u> <u>GrantsFellowshipsHandbook-April2023.pdf</u>
Do the leadership team all need to be at lecture level?	No, NERC welcomes a diverse leadership team; diverse in the widest meaning including across seniority levels within an organisation and individuals at any stage in their career
Can a partner be with a multilateral organisation like UNESCO in the UK?	Yes
Is it correct the project co-lead should be from same organisation?	No this is not required. However, the project lead and co-lead must be from eligible organisations (https://www.ukri.org/publications/organisation-eligibility/)
Can this fund recruitment of someone to look into and deliver upon the objectives (including partnerships management)?	Yes, NERC recognises that organisations and partnerships may not have the staff and/or expertise to deliver some of this work, so funds can be used to recruit someone.
	We would urge you to consider the EDI considerations around recruitment of short-term contracts, and also the challenges around undertaking recruitment activity (through from publication of role, to individual starting work) within a short delivery timeframe.
	You may wish to consider sub-contracting as an option and/or recruitment of freelancers
Only allowing successful applicants of round 1 to be able to apply to round 2 is in itself not inclusive and limits diversity	Thank you for your feedback. NERC recognises that the 2026 round being invite only is a barrier in itself. However, we are taking this approach following through consultation in the design phase of this programme, including with our governance structures. We have also taken learnings from previous NERC investments to inform this approach.
	We hope that by having a cohort of projects from the 2025 funding opportunity, we are able to fully support these projects to develop their proposals (through training, skills development and the funding itself) to the 2026 round - if they wish to apply.

May I ask what types of environments are we talking about? natural, green , blue spaces emotional? Has an Equality Impact Assessment been done on this funding opportunity to look for barriers of engagement?	For the environmental focus and remit for this funding opportunity, we mean any area under NERC remit. You can find more information here: <u>https://www.ukri.org/councils/nerc/remit-programmes-and- priorities/</u> Yes, we have undertaken a thorough Equality Impact Assessment and consultation for the Opening up the Environment programme, to help shape our approach for 2025 and 2026 round.
For Research Institutes do we put in a co-PI application to meet funding requirements (as we do with other NERC grants)?	If you are an eligible research organisation you can apply as project lead (see details on eligibility here: https://www.ukri.org/publications/organisation-eligibility/) if you have any further questions around this, please email us to discuss
Can we specify costs (in terms of staff time) for partners in budget?	Project partners do not get staff time covered (please see the Research Grants handbook, paragraph 74 - 76 for more details: <u>https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/NERC-</u> <u>050423-GrantsFellowshipsHandbook-April2023.pdf</u>). You may wish to consider partners being named as sub-contractors using the dual role option
How many people can be within the leadership team and are the two representatives with lived experience have to be the principal applicants?	It is up to the individual projects as to how many people are within the leadership team. The two representatives of people with lived experiences do not have to hold the lead or co-lead roles on the project.
I'm actually slightly more confused than I was a minute ago. Can you clarify, please: if two academics at 2 universities collaborate to deliver a programme (such as a doctoral training programme) and apply for funding to tackle DEI issues with that programme, only one of them can be a lead; the other is a project partner and cannot be funded directly by the grant. Is that correct?	In this instance, one of the academics would be a lead, and the other academic, the co-lead.
So even if we are involving a partner, say a charity are we developing our institution only or the partner?	Projects can focus on developing their institution and/or a partner. We suggest making clear in your application which you hold the ambition to do, and the rationale as to why.
PLEASE answer the questions re: the NERC Independent Research Fellows being eligible to apply and be Project leads.	In this instance we recommend you review your Independent Research Fellow terms and conditions alongside the details provided in the NERC Grants handbook, for more details please see paragraphs 47-56 <u>https://www.ukri.org/wp-</u>

Also, postdocs and lectures on AC3 that will be employed past the duration of the project.	<u>content/uploads/2022/11/NERC-050423-</u> <u>GrantsFellowshipsHandbook-April2023.pdf</u>
Why not do a positive action scheme to attract diverse researchers to apply for funding? They often partner with local communities anyway.	Thank you for your feedback. We recognise the role that positive action has in addressing inequalities. For the ambitions that we hold for this funding opportunity, and following consultation in shaping this programme it was decided that positive action was not the best approach in this instance. However, if organisations wish to trial positive action as part of their funded work, they are welcomed to do so.
Will Opening up the Environment 2025 will be a entry point for Pre- announcement: Opening up the Environment 2026?	Yes, to be eligible to apply for Opening up the Environment 2026, you must have been awarded funding from Opening up the Environment 2025.
So if about diversifying future NERC community *workforce* is this about training and capacity building?	Training and capacity building may be some of the actions you choose to take to address in facilitating a broader diversity of people in the environmental solutions workforce of the future, contributing to increasing diversity and inclusion in the NERC community. There is not a requirement to deliver training and capacity building.
How will this work impact funding policy at NERC?	Within the NERC community engagement team we pride ourselves with trailing new and innovative approaches to funding public engagement and diversity and inclusion projects. As part of this we work collaboratively with funding policy teams within NERC and wider UKRI to help us as a funder to consider ways in which we can make the funding process more inclusive, accessible and equitable. All collaborative work and learnings from this programme will feed into these discussions to help influence positive change.
Is their an opportunity to receive feedback on your application before submitting?	Unfortunately, we are unable to offer specific feedback before you submit an application to this funding opportunity. We suggest reaching out to critical friends within your network, your institutions grant support teams and also EDI professionals within your organisation.
	If your organisation also has public engagement professionals, they may also be able to offer some useful feedback in terms of equitable partnership building and other methods such as co- design and development which is common practice in that space.
I still disagree - NERC have been told time and again what the issue is. This needs to be bigger than single organisations doing a spot of navel gazing.	Thank you for your feedback. NERC takes on board all the feedback which we receive (for this call and more widely). To develop this call we have drawn from consultation including our collaborative inclusivity round tables (https://www.ukri.org/news/nerc-publishes-collaborative-

	inclusivity summary report() which halped to inform our
	<u>inclusivity-summary-report/</u>) which helped to inform our Diversity and Inclusion Living Action Plan
	(https://www.ukri.org/publications/nerc-diversity-and-
	inclusion-action-plan-2022-2025/).
	We recognise that some of the challenges faced by the research and innovation community around EDI is much wider and more systematic than what can be addressed in a single funding opportunity and a single research council.
	We hope that providing funding like Opening up the Environment, we can provide funding to support the community to pilot approaches, build on work which might otherwise not be deliverable due to lack of funding, and help to support "on the ground" changes in moving us towards a more inclusive future. Using our funding in this way also sits alongside our wider strategic ambitions and work which we undertake as an organisation to address EDI challenges.
Would you mind sharing what the	NERC will reply to this question, on the assumption this
issues are? I'm new to this and	question is referring to EDI issues which members of the NERC
interested in what we know so far	community may face. We appreciate that there is a large number of multifaceted challenges which contribute towards the lack of diversity in the environmental science solutions sector.
	Some useful links:
	UK Parliament Enquiry; Diversity and Inclusion in STEM All Party Parliamentary Group on D&I In STEM reports Advancing equity, diversity and inclusivity in the environmental sciences. Collaborative Inclusivity Roundtable Series: Summary Report (August 2021, NERC)
Is the focus on the pipeline for people working in environmental sciences (i.e. students) or in retention of the pipeline (such as postgrad, ECR, midcareer onwards)?	For this funding opportunity focus can be on any part of "the pipeline". Focusing on encouraging people into STEM careers and supporting individuals to stay in STEM careers are both appropriate focuses for projects.
Will all unanswered questions be	Yes, we hope this document has provided answers to the
answered offline and circulated?	questions from the webinar
What does the lecturer level look	This is up to the individual host organisation, we suggest
like as professional services role? Thank you	looking at the pay levels / bands. For example if a lecturer is a "band 5" in an organisation, the individual in professional services role would also need to be a "band 5".
·	

please answer this: generally, technicians are not in the same	NERC recognises this barrier. Where a project lead is not a lecturer, individuals should carry both a level of responsibility
grade as lecturers, so how are you	and range of duties appropriate to a person with substantial
encouraging the technical	research experiences, for example they occupy a post equating
workforce to apply when they are	to at least lecturer level. This is based down to the individual
not eligible?	research organisation. If you are unsure if as project lead, or co-
	lead you meet this requirement, please contact us to discuss
Can this fund be used to pay for a	Yes. We would urge you to consider the EDI considerations
research assistant from the	around recruitment of short-term contracts, and also the
underrepresented group.	challenges around undertaking recruitment activity (through
	from publication of role, to individual starting work) within a
	short delivery timeframe. You may wish to consider sub-
	contracting as an option and/or recruitment of freelancers
Can you clarify the eligibility of	All projects will be assessed on their own merit. Where this
non-research staff as project lead?	funding opportunity does not require research activity,
How is this assessed if their grading	applications are not required to be written in that style. The
does not match to academics?	panel will not be assessing an individuals writing style, but
	looking at the idea concept and its fit to the funding objectives.
	The NERC community engagement team will be working closely
	with the team who undertakes eligibility checks to ensure that
Is that really right that a NERC	applicants are eligible for this funding. Eligible organisations can be co-leads on the project.
eligible organisation has to be a	Unfortunately if your organisation is not eligible you are unable
project partner if they are not the	to be a lead or co-lead.
lead? The call page says:	
Project co-leads (previously co-	
investigator) can be based at a UK	
research organisation eligible for	
NERC funding. For this NERC	
funding opportunity, project co-	
leads may also be based at UK	
businesses, third sector or	
government organisations.	
It doesn't stipulate that non-lead	
eligible orgs have to be project	
partners?	
Do you have to apply for this round	Yes, Opening up the Environment 2026 is only open to
to be able to apply for the 2026	successful applicants from the 2025 round.
round? There are a number of valuable	Unfortunately, we are unable to best a specific question and
questions raised here that we	Unfortunately, we are unable to host a specific question and answer session, we do hope the publication of this Q&A list is
won't have time to address - a Q&A	helpful. If you have any further questions, please do contact us
would be very much welcomed.	neiprai. It you have any further questions, please do contact us
would be very much welcomed.	