



International Opportunities Fund (IOF) Pump Priming and Pump Priming Plus Awards

Announcement of Opportunity – 2017 Call

Issued: March 2017

Proposal deadline: 6 June 2017 16:00 (BST)

This call will accept joint proposals to NERC-FAPESP under the terms of the RCUK/FAPESP Memorandum of Understanding (Annex A).

1. Summary

The Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) invites proposals for Pump Priming and Pump Priming Plus grants to its International Opportunities Fund (IOF) 2017 call.

The IOF scheme allows NERC-supported researchers to forge new research collaborations with international scientists that add value to their current NERC-funded research, and which are sustained beyond the life of the grant. Mature international research collaborations should apply to NERC's Standard or Large Grant schemes, which allow for international project partnerships, or to other appropriate sources of funding.

NERC has allocated £1.0M to this call across two award sizes, Pump Priming and Pump Priming Plus. Activities that may be supported include but not limited to focused programmes of exchange visits, scoping studies/workshops or development/coordination of international programmes and networks including International Project Offices (IPOs).

Key Information:

- Applicants must be a **PI or Co-I** on an active NERC grant or a NERC Research Centre Scientist **leading** a NERC supported programme or project.
- IOF grants must include at least one international project partner.
- There are two award sizes:
 - Pump Priming Plus, max **£250k** (at 80% FEC) **over 3 three years**; and
 - Pump Priming, max **£40k** (at 80%FEC) **over 2 years**.
- Closing date for all applications is 6 June 2017 at 16.00 (no exceptions)
- PI response (Pump Priming Plus only) will be from 1 – 11 September 2017
- Awards to be announced in October 2017

2. Scope of Call

The International Opportunities Fund provides modest pump-priming funds to support the development of new long-term international collaborations which add value to existing NERC investments but are not typically supported through NERC's usual funding schemes such as NERC's Standard or Large Grant schemes.

The aim of the International Opportunities Fund is to:

- Support novel international collaborations that will lead to excellent research (i.e.

developing new knowledge that cannot be achieved by UK communities alone or by existing international collaborations). This includes activities such as data syntheses, large scale assessments, intercomparisons, etc. which often require collaborative approaches;

- Add value to current NERC-funded research projects through international collaboration (e.g. supporting access to complementary international data, skills, infrastructure, etc.);
- Support development of long-term partnerships with international scientists that have potential to become self-sustaining beyond the life-time of the grant;
- Promote partnerships with researchers in emerging or current research-leading nations (NB: *Building capacity in least developed nations is not an objective of this call*);
- Promote UK leadership in international research agendas and initiatives (i.e. through running an International Project Office)

Activities funded under both Pump Priming and Pump Priming Plus grants must be aligned with the aims of the IOF. Whilst some exploratory elements are permitted, the proposal must include specific scientific objectives. The activities must be outcome focussed and have lasting impact beyond the duration of the award. Examples of the types of activities that have been supported by IOF can be found on [Grants on the Web](#) and include, but are not limited to, the following:

- *Scoping studies and/or workshops*: in areas of science of relevance to NERC remit, in order to develop, for example, common approaches, intercomparisons and standards, etc.
 - *Collaborative secondments and exchanges*: building long-term partnerships with international centres of excellence, with a view to capacity building and accessing skills, data or infrastructure that enhance UK research capability.
 - *Development/Coordination of International Programmes and Networks*: to coordinate international effort around key regional or global environmental challenges.
 - *International Project Offices (IPO)*: to coordinate implementation of major global research programmes. These programmes, often under the auspices of the United Nations and/or the International Council for Science (ICSU), for example, develop and align international research agendas, promote excellence and leadership in science, coordinate world-wide research campaigns, and disseminate outputs to international stakeholders. NERC will normally expect (but will not restrict), IPOs to be hosted by NERC Research Centres through which the IPO's linkage with national capability can be maximised. NERC welcome proposals for distributed IPOs in partnership with international organisations.
- It is essential that applicants considering proposals for IPOs discuss the proposal with the NERC Senior Programme Manager (International), [Matthew Dobson](#), before submitting a proposal. Proposals for IPOs that have not been agreed before submission will be rejected.**
- Please contact the IOF Programme Manager (iof@nerc.ac.uk) if you are uncertain whether the activity you are planning falls within the scope of this call.

Applicants who are considering international collaboration with researchers from the State of São Paulo in Brazil, should note that this call will accept joint proposals to NERC-FAPESP (the State of São Paulo Research Foundation) under the terms of the RCUK-FAPESP Lead Agency Agreement. Further information is provided in Annex A.

3. Funding

NERC has allocated £1.0M to this call. The IOF is an annual call which supports two types of grants:

(i) IOF Pump-Priming grants

These aim to help researchers establish and develop new, collaborative links with international partners.

Up to £40K (at 80% FEC) is available for up to 2 years duration.

(ii) IOF Pump Priming Plus grants

These are to support establishment of novel international collaborative links, as for the IOF Pump Priming grants, but allow for development of partnerships that require more resource. Such partnerships will be exceptional, and the additional resources must be well justified. Examples of where such resources may be appropriate include:

- UK leadership of large scale, multilateral, international efforts
- Piloting the deployment of UK infrastructure outside the UK.
- International Project Offices (IPOs) where there is a clear UK need (an explanation of how the project office will coordinate world-wide scientific research and promote excellence and leadership in science must be provided)

Up to £250K (at 80%FEC) is available for up to 3 years duration.

4. Eligibility

In addition to standard NERC eligibility requirements (see Section B of [Research Grants Handbook](#)), proposals will only be accepted from Principal Investigators (PI) or Co- Investigators (Co-I) who are currently in receipt of NERC funding, through one of the following mechanisms:

- NERC Discovery Science grant
- NERC Strategic Research Programme grant
- NERC Innovation Programme grant
- NERC grants with co-funding from other research councils (where NERC is the lead council) e.g. RCUK Newton Fund and Global Challenges Research Fund grant
- Research Scientist at one of the NERC Centres leading a NERC supported programme or project (NERC Research Centre applicants should contact the IOF Programme Manager iof@nerc.ac.uk if they are uncertain about their eligibility)
- Current recipient of NERC Independent Research Fellowship.

NERC will not accept the following:

- Proposals that build on IOF grants as the existing NERC funding
- Proposals that build on Studentship training grants as the existing NERC funding
- Proposals submitted by Researcher Co-Investigators of current NERC grants
- Mature research collaborations, which can be supported through NERC Standard and Large Grant schemes.
- Proposals for IPOs that have not been agreed for submission by the NERC Senior Programme Manager (International).

The associated NERC grant or Centre programme or project must have *started before the proposal deadline and must not have expired before the start of the IOF award.* It is acceptable for the proposed project to outlast the associated research grant; however, proposals may be uncompetitive if there is little overlap between the projects.

Individuals can only be named as a Principal Investigator on one proposal (either a Pump-Priming or Pump Priming Plus proposal) and as a Co-Investigator on up to two proposals across the two types of awards (Pump-Priming, Pump Priming Plus or both).

We strongly encourage the involvement of early career researchers; however proposals will not be accepted where support for early career researchers is the primary aim of the project. Participation by students is welcome as long as this doesn't interfere with their studentship. The project should not rely on students to achieve its objectives. Associated studentships as part of IOF Pump Priming or Pump Priming Plus proposals will not be accepted.

5. International Partners

In line with the aim of the IOF to build international collaborations, **the inclusion of international project partners is mandatory**. In order to maximise the quality of the activity and its potential to develop long-term, sustainable partnerships they should have a significant and integral role in the proposed work.

Because of the pump priming nature of the grants, NERC recognise that some aspects of the collaboration may not be sufficiently mature to attract substantial co-funding and/or in-kind contributions from international partners. However, letters of support should provide evidence of sufficient 'buy-in' and material contributions to the proposed project such that it is clear that substantive collaboration will go-ahead if funded.

Details of the Project Partners' contribution to the project must be included in the proposal in the following ways:

- Include the name, institution and country of all international partners in the 'Project Partners' section of the Je-S form, along with the financial and/or in-kind support they are providing to the project.
- In-kind contributions from the Project Partner(s) should be carefully costed to ensure there is no double accounting. Access to data already freely available in the public domain cannot be counted as in-kind support and care should be taken so as not to over-value in-kind contributions.
- A full description of each Project Partner's contribution to the project should be detailed in the Case for Support.
- All Project Partners must provide a signed Letter of Support on headed paper (see section 6 below), which confirms their commitment and clearly states their contribution to the project.

International partners are not eligible for direct funding from NERC; however, eligible UK organisations may request limited support for international partners in order to support visits or exchanges in both directions where necessary. Requests for such support must be well justified, since an objective of the IOF is to promote partnerships that add value to NERC funded research, consequently with an expectation of significant contributions from the international partners.

Further information on NERC funding for visiting researchers and international travel is provided in Section E of the [Research Grants Handbook](#).

6. Application Process

Refer to Annex A for additional guidance on the application process for joint NERC-FAPESP proposals.

Proposals must be submitted using the Research Councils' Joint Electronic Submission system (Je-S). Applicants should select Proposal Type - 'Standard Proposal' and then select the Scheme – 'Directed' and Call, either:

- International Opportunities Fund 2017 – Pump Priming; or
- International Opportunities Fund 2017 – Pump Priming Plus

Applicants must ensure their proposal conforms to all eligibility and submission rules and is received by NERC by 16:00 on the closing date. Applicants should leave enough time for their proposal to pass through their organisation's Je-S submission route before this date.

Any proposal that is received after the closing date, is incomplete, or does not meet NERC's eligibility criteria or follow NERC's submission rules (see NERC [Research Grants Handbook](#) and ['how to apply'](#) webpage), will be returned to the applicant and **will not be considered**.

All attachments, with the exception of letters of support and services/facilities/equipment quotes, submitted through the Je-S system must be completed in single-spaced typescript of minimum font size 11 point (Arial or other sans serif typeface of equivalent size to Arial 11), with margins of at least 2cm. Please note that Arial narrow, Calibri and Times New Roman are not allowable font types and any proposal which has used either of these font types within their submission will be rejected. References and footnotes should also be at least 11 point font and in the same font type as the rest of the document. Headers and footers should not be used for references or information relating to the scientific case. Applicants referring to websites should note that referees may choose not to use them.

Please note that on submission to council ALL non PDF documents are converted to PDF, the use of non-standard fonts may result in errors or font conversion, which could affect the overall length of the document. We strongly recommend that where a document contains any non-standard fonts (scientific notation, diagrams etc.), the document should be converted to PDF prior to attaching it to the proposal.

Joint Je-S proposals will only be accepted for IOF Pump Priming Plus grants.

All proposals must include the Je-S application form, which consists of a number of structured sections to be completed, including investigator details, summary and objectives, and the financial request (requirements as set out in Section F of [Research Grants Handbook](#)). This application form must be supported by the following additional documentation, uploaded as attachments:

- a) **Case for support**; which consists of the following **three mandatory elements** that must be clearly labelled:
 - i. *Previous Track Record* not exceeding **2 sides of A4**, covering standard NERC requirements and **in addition**:
 - Evidence of any experience and leadership in an international context including past collaborative work that is relevant to the current activity and activities where co-funding has been awarded (especially from an international partner);
 - ii. *Description of the Proposed Activity* not exceeding **3 sides of A4 for Pump Priming Grants or 8 sides for Pump Priming Plus grants**, covering standard NERC requirements and in addition, how the activity will deliver against the aims of the IOF Scheme (see Section 2). In addressing the scheme objectives the case for support should make clear:
 - The significance of the international collaboration to the projects' objectives.
 - The specific intellectual and material contribution of each Partner.
 - The potential durability of the collaboration, including routes for further long-term collaboration.
 - iii. *Value added to existing NERC-funded research*, not exceeding **1 side of A4**, which must contain the following:
 - Reference number and title of current NERC grant or identification of the NERC Research Centre activity to which the proposed work will add value.
 - A clear description of how the proposed activity will build on and add value to the specified existing NERC grant or Research Centre activity.
- b) **Justification of Resources**; not exceeding **2 sides of A4**.
- c) **Letters of Support**, each not exceeding **2 sides of A4**. All proposals must include an international project partner. Proposals must include a detailed Letter of Support from each

named Project Partner, and may also include letters of support from any other relevant individual or organisation. Letters of support must be on headed paper, signed and dated.

- d) **Pathways to Impact Plan**, not exceeding **2 sides of A4**, is only required for Pump Priming Plus grant proposals. Further guidance on what to include in a [Pathways to Impact plan](#) is available on the NERC website.
- e) **CVs**, up to **2 sides A4** for each named PI, co-I, research staff post and Visiting Researcher. CVs for project partners will not be accepted.
- f) **Outline Data management plan**, not exceeding **1 side A4**. The [NERC Data Policy](#) must be adhered to and further guidance on [outline data management plan](#) is provided on the NERC website. NERC will pay the data centre directly on behalf of the programme for archival and curation services, but applicants should ensure they request sufficient resource to cover preparation of data for archiving by the research team.
- g) **Facilities form/Technical Assessment** for access to [NERC Services and Facilities](#) (if applicable). Applicants who wish to apply for logistic support from NERC British Antarctic Survey (BAS) for fieldwork in Antarctica must submit a 'Preliminary request for Antarctic logistic support' form which can be downloaded from the BAS Preliminary request for [Antarctic Logistics webpage](#) and must be submitted via email to the Polar Funding Office at BAS (afi@bas.ac.uk) by 16:00 (BST) on 9 May 2017. **Any funding applications that request Antarctic logistic support without having obtained prior logistic approval will not be accepted by NERC.**

7. Assessment Criteria

All proposals must clearly define how the project objectives deliver against the IOF objectives in the 'Case for Support'. If proposals fail to demonstrate a strong link between the project objectives and the IOF Scheme objectives they will be office rejected on poor fit to scope of the call.

IOF proposals will be assessed on:

a) Excellence

IOF grants should promote excellent research that cannot be delivered by the UK alone. The pump priming nature of the grants means that some aspects of the research will be more speculative and exploratory than is typical for NERC Standard Grants.

Full-realisation of science benefits may not always be possible at the pump priming stage. Therefore, where appropriate, IOF proposals will be assessed on both the excellence to be achieved in the duration of the grant and the potential to achieve further excellence in the longer-term.

In the case of IPOs, excellence is identified as a clear need for the coordination of world-wide excellent scientific research that demonstrates UK leadership and adds value to NERC science.

Please refer to the NERC [definition of excellence criteria](#) for more information.

b) Fit to IOF Scheme objectives, including;

- Novelty of the research collaborations and the extent to which this will promote excellence.
- Added value to NERC-funded research through the international collaborative activity, especially to the specified current grant/NERC Centre led activity.
- Unique contribution and expertise of the international partners i.e. why these partners above any others around the world or within the UK.

- Potential durability of the collaboration, including routes for further collaboration.
- Potential to promote UK leadership of international research agenda's and initiatives.
- Level of the contribution made to this award from other sources including the UK institutions and international potential partners.

Assessment of Pump Priming grants

Proposals for the Pump Priming grants will be directly reviewed by an Assessment Panel, without an external peer review stage.

Assessment of Pump Priming Plus grants

Proposals for Pump Priming Plus grants will undergo external peer-review. The applicant will have an opportunity to respond to reviewers' comments (PI response); the panel will then moderate the evidence in front of them (reviews and PI response) and make recommendations for funding.

There will be one Panel responsible for assessing and moderating all proposals submitted to the call. The panel will make funding recommendations to NERC via a ranked list of the proposals, which NERC will use to fund the projects that best meet the aims of the programme within the available budget. The Pump Priming and Pump Priming Plus proposals will be ranked separately.

Feedback will be provided on all proposals following the funding decision.

8. Timetable

Stage	Date
AO publication	March 2017
Closing date for applications	6 June 2017
Peer Review (Pump Priming Plus)	May – August 2017
PI Response	1 – 11 September 2017
Assessment/Moderating Panel	September 2017
Announcement of Awards	October 2017

9. Contact Details

For all enquires please contact:

Dr Weihao Zhong
 IOF Programme Manager
iof@nerc.ac.uk or +44 (0)1793 41 3172

Annex A: joint proposals to NERC-FAPESP

Applicants considering international collaboration with researchers from São Paulo State, Brazil, should note that this Call will welcome proposals jointly prepared and submitted by PIs from the UK and São Paulo State, Brazil, under the terms of the RCUK-FAPESP (the State of São Paulo Research Foundation) Lead Agency Agreement.

1. Context

In 2009, the United Kingdom Research Councils (RCUK) and FAPESP signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to strengthen the existing research links between the UK and Brazil and to help encourage and support proposals that involve international collaborative teams. The MoU provides for a Lead Agency Agreement whereby UK and Brazilian researchers may apply for funds from both countries through the UK Research Councils' funding schemes. Further information is available from the [RCUK website](#).

2. Aims

FAPESP will consider proposals from PIs eligible for FAPESP funding and that demonstrate excellence in one or more of the following characteristics (international collaboration is a must):

2.1 develop research with high impact and outcome focused on areas of interest for **FAPESP's Research Program for Global Climate Change (PFPMCG)** and **FAPESP's Virtual Institute for Biodiversity Research (BIOTA)**.

2.2 activities that place international collaboration at the centre of their approach, adding value to Brazilian capability and delivering outcomes that cannot be delivered by scientists in São Paulo alone (FAPESP's standard requirement that the PI must be a scientist affiliated to a research organization in São Paulo still applies to the Brazilian side of the collaboration).

2.3 activities with lasting outputs that are expected to have benefits beyond the duration of the IOF and the FAPESP award (e.g. establishing long-term collaborations, pump priming for ongoing, self-sustaining activities and/or developing high-impact knowledge).

NOTE: Applications to multiple FAPESP-NERC programmes with similar applications are not allowed.

3. Activities Supported

3.1 The NERC International Opportunities Fund aims to facilitate international collaboration for research and research-related activities that are aligned with NERC strategic priorities.

3.2 Requirements and conditions for any FAPESP-funded elements of submissions under this optional collaboration between the UK and Brazil are as follows.

a) The São Paulo, Brazil part of the proposal must have a research content consistent with the "collaborative secondments and exchanges" section of IOF AO, i.e., building long-term partnerships among Brazilian and UK centres of excellence, with a view to capacity building and accessing skills, data or infrastructure that enhances Brazil and UK research capabilities.

b) FAPESP is especially interested in proposals in which the geographic focus of the collaboration is South America and the adjacent oceans, particularly the Amazon and the South Atlantic. Other geographies can be considered, pending analysis by FAPESP of the justifications given. Therefore, applicants from São Paulo, Brazil, must contact Bruna Musa (chamada_nerc@fapesp.br) before submission, to discuss and obtain permission to submit a proposal focusing outside of the preferred geographic area.

c) The focus of the São Paulo, Brazil-UK partnership will be in Earth System Science and Global

Environmental Change research, and the research collaboration will address one or more of the topics below:

- (i) facilitate links between scientists in both countries, building on existing partnerships, but also widening to other groups of both countries;
- (ii) develop groundbreaking techniques for communicating scientific outcomes to stakeholders;
- (iii) engage directly with the wider Earth System Science community.

3.3 Only proposals that are not typically supported through other FAPESP funding schemes will be considered.

3.4 Funding Conditions:

Funding from FAPESP will be in addition to the funding awarded by NERC.

- a) For the Pump Priming Award: Applicants from the State of São Paulo may request up to £20K from FAPESP for each proposal for up to two (2) years duration.
- b) For the Pump Priming Award Plus: Applicants can request up to £30K for up to three (3) years in duration including at least one international workshop to be held in São Paulo.

3.5 Proposals must be “related” (i.e. FAPESP terminology for proposals that complement and build upon another grant) to an ongoing FAPESP grant. Thus, researchers regarded as eligible to submit proposals are Principal Investigators of ongoing research projects funded by FAPESP within the following funding lines: Regular Research Awards, Thematic Projects, Young Investigators, Research, Innovation and Dissemination Centers (RIDC/CEPID), Public Education Research Program, Research in Public Policies and Research Partnership for Technological Innovation (PITE).

Co-Principal Investigators (PPs) of ongoing Thematic Projects, RIDCs or PITEs are also eligible to apply.

3.6 FAPESP will provide the selected proposals with funds to cover short-term scientific exchange visits to UK (travel, accommodation, living expenses and health insurance), workshops (within the rules of FAPESP) and small research expenses (consumables, services, low cost research equipment). Research and Infrastructure overheads are not applicable.

3.7 FAPESP will only accept one application per related ongoing research project. Likewise, each Principal Investigator can present only one proposal to this Call. The ongoing FAPESP research project linked to this proposal must have a minimum of six months left at the scheduled beginning of the mobility project.

3.8 The FAPESP contribution is in addition to the support that can be sought directly from NERC.

4. Additional Application Procedures for joint FAPESP – NERC proposals

4.1 Applicants considering applying under this Agreement must read the Operational Guidelines available from the [RCUK website](#). Please note that there are specific guidelines for applicants to NERC within these RCUK Guidelines.

UK Principal Investigators of potential collaborative proposals should, in this case, contact the IOF Programme Manager (iof@nerc.ac.uk) before submitting a proposal.

Brazilian Principal Investigators should contact FAPESP’s representative for matters related to this joint Call, Bruna Musa (chamada_nerc@fapesp.br).

5. How to apply

Proposals must be submitted only through NERC by the UK PI, following the procedure described in the corresponding [Announcement of Opportunity](#).

5.1 The Brazilian applicants should be included as Project Partners on the JeS form and their role should be described in the Case for Support

5.2 A specific Proposal Form for this Call must be attached by UK PI to his application as a supporting document: [FAPESP-NERC Pump Priming Proposal Form](#) (Available from the corresponding Announcement of Opportunity webpage).

5.3 The Case for Support must:

- a) state that the RCUK-FAPESP Lead Agency Agreement is being applied by the applicants;
- b) mention the PI in São Paulo and other members of the research team affiliated to research and higher education institutions in São Paulo, including summarized CVs for each participant;
- c) identify the number of the ongoing FAPESP Grant led by the PI in the State of São Paulo;
- d) clearly define the budget requested to FAPESP, within the limits set at Item 3.4 above.

5.4 No further documents should be sent directly to FAPESP at the submission stage. After the submission deadline, further documentation will be timely requested by FAPESP to enable the processing of proposals, following the usual procedures for Regular Research grants. This will include detailed budget forms, budget justifications, research team description, etc.

6. Intellectual Property

6.1 In case of approval, a Letter of Agreement between the Partner Host Institution and the Host Institution to which the PI from São Paulo is affiliated, establishing how Intellectual Property rights, confidentiality, and publications will be treated jointly, in observance of the policies of each funding Party. The Letter of Agreement is not mandatory for the submission of proposals, but no approved project will be contracted before the presentation of a copy of the signed Agreement.