

NERC Follow-on Fund Pathfinder scheme

NERC has increased the financial support available for commercialisation activities through the Follow-on Fund to £500k per year. To support this, we have introduced a Pathfinder scheme to enable potential future applicants to the Follow-on Fund to secure small amounts of money quickly to carry out commercial activities. These activities will help to develop a clearer understanding of work required in a full Follow-on Fund application and will be beneficial to the applicant in developing a future work plan.

The award of a Pathfinder grant is not a formal requirement for subsequent applications to the full Follow-on Fund scheme, but earlier pathfinder-type work – such as a market assessment – will often be beneficial in developing the full proposal. Undertaking such early-stage work via a Pathfinder is an approach strongly encouraged by NERC's Assessment Panel, which may ask to see the results of this preliminary work before recommending a full award.

Aim

The purpose of the Pathfinder scheme is to quickly provide funding to carry out activities such as:

- market assessment to determine likely potential, competition and opportunities;
- intellectual property searches – in particular freedom to operate (but NOT to support patent filing costs);
- development of contacts with potential licensees or other interested parties – this can help to develop an understanding of needs and requirements;
- milestone 1 achievement – if the first milestone of the work is particularly risky and the success of the entire project depends upon this, funds can be sought to support this.

Providing these funds will yield additional information which will strengthen future application to the full Follow-on Fund. It will be useful in targeting commercialisation in the most appropriate manner.

Award size, duration and conditions

Applicants should have discussed with their Technology Transfer Office (or equivalent) the sort of activities that are most needed to strengthen understanding of the work or to demonstrate its potential to be commercialised - and therefore benefit from a future, full application.

It is anticipated that the amount sought will be in the region of £7-10k (FEC). There is a maximum duration of 6 months for this funding

In exceptional cases up to £20k can be requested for activities such as milestone 1 achievement; however, this would need to be strongly justified and argued and the Technology Transfer Office (or equivalent) letter of support should explain why it is unable to fund this work.

Eligibility

The fund is open to eligible researchers in UK universities and research council institutes. **Applications for Follow-on Fund Pathfinder support must build on the outputs of recent or previous NERC-funded research activity.**

Application process

Applicants should complete the standard JeS Follow-on Fund application form (see the '[Guidance to Applicants](#)' document for more information). Please notify NERC's NERC Swindon Office KE team on the day of submission at knowledge@nerc.ac.uk – this is vital to ensure the application can be accessed when there is not a current closing date for the Follow-on Fund in the JeS system.

Assessment process

Applications will be assessed in Swindon Office using expertise from the Follow-on Fund assessment panel. We expect to make a funding decision within ten working days of submission.

Closing dates

This is an open call – applications can be received at any time.

Final report and funding outcomes

Any documentation such as a market assessment, or similar, arising from Pathfinder funding should be submitted as part of the final reporting on the grant.

Applicants to the full Follow-on Fund, who have previously applied for Pathfinder funds, should consider attaching any Pathfinder funded-reports to the application form which may be beneficial (where reports are particularly large, please just attach the executive summary).

Further details:

Please see additional guidance to applicants for details.

For any queries relating to this fund please contact knowledge@nerc.ac.uk