

# **NERC International Opportunities Fund 2011 Call**

## **Guidance for Applicants**

<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
1. Summary	2
2. Background	2
3. Aims of the Scheme	2
4. Activities Supported	3
5. Project Partners	5
6. Eligibility	7
7. Application Process	8
8. Assessment of Proposals	10
9. Reporting Requirements	11
10. Timetable	11
11. Contact	11
 Annex A. Joint Proposals to NERC-FAPESP	 12

**Deadline for declaration of intention to submit: *Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> August 2011***  
**Closing date for full proposals: *Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> September 2011 at 16.00***

## 1. Summary

The aim of the IOF Scheme is to facilitate international collaboration that is significantly aligned with NERC strategic priorities and will add value to existing UK environmental research and knowledge exchange capability. It aims to support activities that are **not** typically supported through NERC's usual funding schemes. This may include, for example, international programmes and networks; collaborative secondments and exchanges; major international workshops or conferences; pump-priming to attract inward investment to UK research institutions; or international project offices.

The total amount of funding available for this Call is anticipated to be approximately £1.3M. A maximum of £300K (100% FEC) per award may be requested and NERC anticipates funding up to 4-6 awards.

Applicants considering international collaboration with researchers from São Paulo State, 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.

## 2. Background

In 2009/10 NERC conducted a review of its recent and current funding schemes that support international activities. One of the aims of the review was to ensure that future investments target gaps where international activities are not typically supported through NERC's 'usual' funding schemes. Based on the results and recommendations of the review, the International Opportunities Fund (IOF) was re-launched to support **international collaborative activities** that are not typically funded through other NERC funding schemes.

The IOF 1<sup>st</sup> Call was launched in October 2010, with six awards made in spring 2011. Further details about the successful awards can be found on the [IOF awards web page](#).

## 3. Aims of the scheme

Successful awards will have **substantial international partnerships** at the core of their approach, to deliver outputs that cannot be achieved by the UK alone. NERC encourages international partnerships as part of its usual funding schemes. Therefore the IOF Scheme is not aimed at supporting typical research or knowledge exchange projects with international partners. Applications to the IOF Scheme should go beyond the approach that is usually allowed, seeking to add value to existing UK capability, through leadership of significant international initiatives.

Activities are expected to be outcome focused and have lasting impact beyond the duration of the award (i.e. exchanges, networks, workshops, etc. will not be supported as an end in themselves).

The specific **IOF Scheme objectives** are as follows:

- to fund high impact, outcome focused, collaborative activities in areas of NERC strategic themes and challenges as expressed in the NERC Strategy 2007 - 2012, [Next Generation Science for Planet Earth](#)
- to fund activities that require **international collaboration at the centre of their approach**, supporting UK leadership internationally, adding value through collaboration to UK capability and delivering outcomes that cannot be delivered by the UK alone
- to fund activities that have lasting outputs that are expected to have benefits beyond the duration of the IOF award (e.g. establishing long-term collaborations, pump-priming for ongoing, self-sustaining activities, and/or developing high-impact knowledge)
- to fund activities that are not typically supported through other NERC funding schemes
- to promote collaboration between UK researchers and those from NERC target countries as represented in the Belmont Forum of Global Environmental Change Research Funders and RCUK Overseas Offices<sup>1</sup>. (Collaborations with countries not represented on the Belmont Forum or with RCUK Overseas Offices will be considered, but a clear rationale for their prioritisation should be given.)

#### 4. Activities supported

IOF awards may be up to 3 years in duration. The duration of the activity should be appropriate for the anticipated deliverables/impact of the activity as expressed in the proposal.

IOF proposals may request a **maximum of £300k** (100% FEC) per award from this call. The NERC funding contribution will be 80% of FEC (with the standard exceptions paid at 100% FEC). The total amount of funding available for this call from NERC is £1.3M. We anticipate funding up to 4-6 awards.

On an exceptional basis, proposals requesting total funding from NERC exceeding £300k will be accepted for joint funding between the IOF Scheme and other NERC funding streams. This provides an opportunity for NERC to support larger projects that, through international collaboration, directly deliver specified priority NERC challenges such as those expressed in Theme Action Plans, Programmes of NERC Research Centres, [NERC Knowledge Exchange Strategy](#), etc. The funding available from the International Opportunities Fund will be limited to £300k (100% FEC). Such proposals for cross-scheme funding will need to be developed in close collaboration with NERC and will not be accepted without prior agreement from NERC Head of International, who should be contacted in good time to enable deliberation with appropriate NERC colleagues.

---

<sup>1</sup> Belmont Forum members are from the following countries/regions: Australia, Austria, Brazil, Canada, China, European Commission, France, Germany, India, Japan, Norway, South Africa, UK, and USA. Additionally, there are RCUK Overseas Offices in Europe (Brussels), China, India and USA.

**Substantial co-funding and/or in-kind support from overseas or international partners is a requirement** of an IOF proposal, in order to maximise scope of the activity, leverage the UK contribution, and demonstrate the commitment of partners. For further information, please see the Project Partner section below (Section 5).

There is no minimum award size restriction. However, the size of the award should be appropriate to the activity that is being proposed, and only substantial projects that deliver high and lasting impact, and that leverage NERC funding, will be considered during the assessment process.

Broad guidelines on the types of activities that are supported are given below. These are for illustrative purposes and applicants should **not** feel restricted to these types of activities.

- **Coordination of International Programmes and Networks:** leading international programmes and/or networks to coordinate international effort around key regional or global environmental challenges. Networks and Programmes enable the exchange of people and knowledge, mutual research directions to be defined, and efficiency of existing capability to be maximised.
- **Collaborative secondments and exchanges:** building long-term partnerships with overseas centres of excellence, with a view to capacity building and accessing skills, data or infrastructure that enhance UK research capability.
- **Major international workshops or conferences:** these can provide an effective way for researchers (and end-users) to come together to exchange knowledge and skills that are vital for their activities and enhance national capability, state-of-the-art understanding of key issues, and dissemination of knowledge through high-impact scientific and/or policy publications.
- **Attracting inward investment to UK research institutions:** pump-priming activities to develop collaborative responses to major funding opportunities from overseas or international funding agencies.
- **International Project Offices:** 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. ***NB:*** The IOF will normally fund up to one IPO each year. NERC will normally expect IPOs to be hosted by NERC Research or Collaborative Centres, through which the IPO's linkage with national capability can be maximised. NERC will welcome applications for distributed IPOs in partnership with overseas organisations. **Because of these expectations it is essential that applicants considering proposals for IPOs discuss the proposal with the Head of International before submitting an application.**
- **Other ideas:** we welcome other ideas that you may have for activities that deliver high impact outcomes through international collaboration. Please contact the IOF Programme Officer ([iof@nerc.ac.uk](mailto:iof@nerc.ac.uk)) to discuss these ideas if you are uncertain whether the activity you are planning falls within the scope of this call.

## 4.1. Ineligible activities

Activities that do not involve UK leadership of international collaboration that adds value to existing UK environmental research and knowledge exchange capability, at the centre of their approach, will not be considered for funding through the IOF Scheme.

Proposals for IPOs or joint-funding with other NERC schemes that have not been agreed for submission by the NERC Head of International will also not be accepted.

In addition, in order to ensure that the IOF is targeted at international collaborative activities that are not typically supported by other funding schemes, the IOF will not accept proposals for:

- projects with traditional research projects as the substantial part of their approach, as these are typically supported through NERC Responsive Mode and Research Programme grant schemes
- projects that are more appropriately supported through Research Centre budgets
- projects that can be supported through NERC KE schemes.

Project studentships are **not** permitted with IOF Call proposals.

## 5. Project Partners

The main focus of the IOF Scheme is **international collaboration**. Therefore all projects **must** include **substantive co-funding and/or in-kind support from overseas or international partners** to maximise leverage and scope, and demonstrate the commitment of partners. Applicants must provide the names of these international partner organisations (and their representatives) in the 'Project Partners' section of the Je-S form.

Project Partners have a significant and integral role and should be actively involved in the proposed work and have a clear input to the process, in order to maximise the quality of the activity. Project Partners can be involved with a proposal in several ways - some examples are given below - and are expected to contribute materially to the project. A full description of each Project Partner's contribution to the project should be included in the Case for Support. Details of the financial and in-kind contributions should also be provided in the 'Project Partners' section of the Je-S form.

Organisations which benefit from, and have an interest in, the proposed work, but do not materially contribute to it, may be included as 'Supporters' of the application. Supporters should be detailed in the Case for Support, and Pathways to Impact where appropriate, but should not be listed on the Je-S form. Supporters may include end users, stakeholders, and others where they are not actively involved or contributing financial or in-kind support.

Whilst existing co-funding and ongoing collaborations can be included as part of the Project Partners' contributions, stronger proposals will be those that find powerful new ways to add value through new partnerships. Support provided by the international partners will be considered as part of the evaluation.

There is no limit to the number of Project Partners or Supporters allowed. However, applicants should bear in mind that, for example, evidence of substantial involvement and commitment from one or two Project Partners may be reviewed more positively than weak evidence of commitment from many Project Partners.

Details of the 'added value' of both Project Partners and Supporters should be described fully in the Case for Support. There are two distinct ways successful projects need to add value:

- the project as a whole needs to add value to existing UK capability; and
- the partners need to add value (make a material contribution to) the project.

All Project Partners must provide a Letter of Support (see section 5.1 below). Supporters may also provide a Letter of Support, but this is not a requirement.

Guidance on the costing of Project Partner contributions is given in section 5.2, below.

### Partner Involvement

Project Partners can be involved with a proposal in several ways; examples are provided in the following list, but it is by no means exhaustive.

1. Providing facilities or data not otherwise available to the applicant, or available at a cost;
2. Provision of staff time;
3. Input of scientific or technical expertise and/or advice;
4. Contributions to outputs (e.g. publications);
5. A commitment to make practical use of the project's outputs;
6. A commitment to the project beyond the period of NERC support
7. Hosting seconded staff.

## **5.1 Letters of Support**

Applications must include a detailed Letter of Support from each Project Partner, and may also include Letters of Support from any Supporters. Each Letter should be on headed paper (providing contact details, including country, of the partner organisation/representative) and should be dated and signed by the representative. Letters should be up to 2 sides of A4.

Letters must also contain the following information:

- A benefit statement from the Partner describing how the proposed activity will benefit him/her and his/her organisation (what the organisational drivers are that underpin the Partner's involvement in the proposal, what the Partner's objectives are that the proposed activity will help meet, what the likely outcomes/impacts of the activity will be for the Partner, etc.).
- The nature of the collaboration, how the Partner will be involved in the work and provide added value.
- What contributions (cash, project support, etc.) the Partner will make and an assurance that the Partner is committed to the project for its duration and that those contributions will be made.

- For applications proposing a **secondment or exchange**, the Letter of Support should also demonstrate the commitment of the Partner organisation to host the secondee.
- In the case of a **network**, Letters of Support are required to demonstrate the level of involvement of the Partner in the organisation and running of the network.

Letters of Support will be taken into account in the assessment process. They will help reviewers assess the strength of the relationship between the researcher and the Partner(s), and therefore the potential for the proposal to achieve its own aims and those of the Scheme as a whole.

Further information can be found in the [Research Grants Handbook](#).

## 5.2 Costing of Project Partner contributions

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.

## 6. Eligibility

Usual NERC eligibility criteria for investigators on research grants apply.

International partners are not eligible for direct funding from NERC. However, eligible UK organisations may submit a proposal that includes limited support for international partners; for example, there may be aspects of support (e.g. travel or hosting visiting researchers) provided from the UK award.

Individuals may submit no more than one application as Principal Investigator or Co-Investigator to this call.

Further information on eligibility is available in the [Research Grants Handbook](#).

NERC grants may be held at the following: approved UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), approved Research Institutes (RIs) and approved Independent Research Organisations (IROs). Full details of approved RIs and IROs can be found on the RCUK website at: <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/research/Pages/Eligibilityforrcs.aspx>.

Potential applicants should contact NERC well in advance of the submission deadline if they have any queries concerning their eligibility.

## 7. Application Process

General guidance for completing and submitting applications, and links to forms, is available at <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/application/information.asp> and in the [Research Grants Handbook](#).

### 7.1 Registering your interest

**Lead applicants must register their intention to submit** by contacting the IOF Programme Officer ([iof@nerc.ac.uk](mailto:iof@nerc.ac.uk)) by **Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> August 2011**.

**If you fail to register your interest by this deadline, your proposal will not be accepted.**

At this stage, a very brief (1-2 sides of A4 maximum) outline of what you plan to cover in your proposal and an indication of the partners to be involved is all that is required. Information should include:

- the potential PI and Co-Is, UK Partners, International Partners, and Supporters (including countries); and
- an outline of proposed objectives, activities and outcomes.

### 7.2 Submitting proposals

Applications must be submitted using the Research Councils' Joint Electronic Submission system (Je-S). Please select Proposal Type '**Standard Proposal**' and then select the Scheme '**International Opportunities Fund**' and the Call '**IOF Call 2**'.

To use the Je-S system, the applicant's Research Organisation must be registered as a Je-S user. Full details are available on the Je-S website <https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk>. Further information can also be obtained by contacting the Je-S Helpdesk by email at [JeSHelp@rcuk.ac.uk](mailto:JeSHelp@rcuk.ac.uk) or by telephone on 01793 444164.

Applicants must ensure that their application is received by NERC by 4pm on the closing date. Applicants should leave enough time for their application to pass through their own organisation's Je-S submission route before this date. Any application that is incomplete, received after the closing date, or does not meet NERC's eligibility criteria will be returned to the applicant and will not be considered.

**The Principal Investigator(s) must submit form Je-SRP1 (NERC) together with supporting information.**

Je-SRP1 (NERC) consists of a number of structured sections to be completed, including investigator details, summary and objectives, and the financial request.



### 7.3 Supporting Information for IOF Call applications

Guidance on generic requirements for the supporting information is available at the webpages referred to above.

**Additional guidance that is specific to the IOF scheme is below.**

The **case for support** should consist of the following two elements:

i. Previous Track Record not exceeding **2 sides of A4**, covering:

- Evidence of experience and leadership in an international context including details of any past collaborative work that is relevant to the current activity and information on any activities where co-funding has been awarded (especially from an international partner).
- A summary of recent research in the science area covered by the proposal, providing the context for the international activity.
- References to relevant NERC and non-NERC funded work.
- Specific expertise and capability available for the proposed activity at the host organisation.

ii. Description of the Proposed Activity not exceeding **8 sides of A4** (including all necessary tables, references and figures), addressing the following points:

- Background to the proposed activity.
- Project objectives, to include a justification of the contribution of the activity to delivery of the NERC Strategy, [Next Generation Science for Planet Earth](#). The project objectives must be described in such a way that provides a **clear link to how they deliver against the objectives of the IOF Scheme** (see Section 3).
- **The significance of the international collaboration to the projects' objectives must also be clear.** Applicants should also demonstrate how the proposed international collaboration adds value to any relevant existing UK environmental research and knowledge exchange capability (see Section 5).
- **The specific material contribution of each Partner** should also be made clear (see Section 5).
- A plan of activities, to include targets and milestones, should be made clear.
- Deliverables, to include anticipated outputs that will result directly from the activity.
- Outcomes and impacts, to include how the outputs are expected to benefit the UK and, where appropriate, international science communities.

A **Justification of Resources** should be attached to the application; this can be up to 2 sides of A4. Refer to the [Research Grants Handbook](#) for details on completing a justification of resources.

An example of a well written Justification of Resources can be found here: [http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/application/documents/justification\\_eg.pdf](http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/application/documents/justification_eg.pdf)

A **Pathways to Impact Plan** should also be attached to the application; this can be up to 2 sides of A4. For further information and guidance on what to include in a Pathways to Impact plan, please see:

<http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/application/pathwaystoimpact.asp>

## 7.4 Resubmission

NERC policy for resubmission within responsive mode grant schemes applies to the IOF Scheme, and is described in the [Research Grants Handbook](#). Note that unsuccessful proposals can be resubmitted after a period of at least nine months from the closing date of the original submission.

## 8. Assessment of proposals

### 8.1 Assessment criteria

IOF proposals will be primarily assessed on the projects' **Fit to IOF Scheme** objectives (see Section 3) and **Excellence**.

All proposals must clearly define how the project objectives deliver against the IOF Scheme objectives in the '**Case for Support**' documents in order for this to be assessed. If proposals fail to demonstrate a strong link between the project objectives and the IOF Scheme objectives they will be considered ineligible for funding.

If a proposal clearly demonstrates the projects' Fit to IOF Scheme objectives and Excellence, it will then be assessed against the secondary criteria:

- Pathways to Impact<sup>2</sup>

For detailed descriptions and further information on the standard NERC assessment criteria, please see the following NERC webpage:

<http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/assessment/assesscriteria.asp>

### 8.2 Assessment process

The IOF Call proposals will be reviewed by an Assessment Panel consisting of members of the NERC Peer Review College and other experts with extensive experience of international collaborative environmental science and research. Proposals will not be sent out for external peer review.

NERC staff and advisors, including Theme Leaders and Science and Innovation Managers will, where appropriate, be asked to advise the Assessment Panel on fit to priorities within NERC strategic themes.

The Assessment Panel will make funding recommendations to NERC.

Feedback on applications will be available on request, after decisions have been made.

---

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/application/pathwaystoimpact.asp>

## 9. Reporting Requirements

Award-holders must provide information on the outcomes of their work each year as part of NERC's annual Output and Performance Measures exercise. Principal Investigators are also required to submit a Final Report within three months of the end of the award (detailed requirements for both reports are included in the [Research Grants Handbook](#) (see Section G)). NERC reserves the right to approach Project Partners on funded grants to understand their benefits from the grant.

## 10. Timetable

The **deadline for declaration of intention to submit** will be ***Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> August 2011***.

The **closing date** for receipt of full proposals will be ***Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> September 2011*** at 16.00.

The Assessment Panel meeting is expected to be held in early December.

## 11. Contact

To discuss proposal ideas or eligibility issues, please contact the IOF Programme Officer at [iof@nerc.ac.uk](mailto:iof@nerc.ac.uk).

## **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.

### **Context**

In 2009 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](#).

### **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):

- 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 \(BIOTA\)](#).
- 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).
- 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).
- activities that promote collaboration between researchers in São Paulo, Brazil, and those from FAPESP target countries as represented in the Belmont Forum of Global Environmental Change Research Funders and any of the FAPESP agreements with universities in the UK.

### **Activities Supported**

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

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

- 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.

- 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 Mr. Alexandre Roccatto ([ARoccatto@fapesp.br](mailto:ARoccatto@fapesp.br)) before submission, to discuss and obtain permission to submit a proposal focusing outside of the preferred geographic area.
- 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

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

FAPESP funding for the selected proposals will be through a Regular Research Grant with duration of up to three years that will be “related” (i.e. FAPESP terminology for proposals that complement and build upon another ongoing grant) to an ongoing FAPESP Thematic Grant. Therefore, eligible applicants from the State of São Paulo are Principal Investigators (or Co-Principal Investigators) of ongoing Thematic Projects funded by FAPESP.

Brazilian applicants may request up to £150K from FAPESP. This must be applied in consumables, small research equipment, workshops (transportation, per diems, location), short term (up to 3 months) scientific exchange visits, and Technical Capability fellowships. The FAPESP contribution is in addition to the support that can be sought directly from NERC.

## **Application Procedure**

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 Officer ([iof@nerc.ac.uk](mailto:iof@nerc.ac.uk)) before submitting a proposal.

Brazilian Principal Investigators should contact FAPESP’s representative for matters related to this joint Call, Mr. Alexandre Roccatto ([ARoccatto@fapesp.br](mailto:ARoccatto@fapesp.br)) and find the matching AO on the FAPESP website.

Proposals must be submitted only through NERC, by the UK PI, following the procedure described in the Section 7 (above).

The Case for Support must:

- state that the RCUK-FAPESP Lead Agency Agreement is being applied by the applicants;
- 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;
- identify the number of the ongoing FAPESP Thematic Grant led by the PI in the State of São Paulo;
- clearly define the budget requested to FAPESP, within the limits set out above

The Brazilian applicants should be included as Project Partners on the JeS form and their role should be described in the Case for Support, following the guidelines in Section 5 (above).

The FAPESP-RCUK Proposal Form and Consolidated Budget Spreadsheet must both be attached to the application as supporting documents. These may be downloaded from the links below or from the [RCUK website](#).

- [FAPESP-RCUK Proposal Form](#)
- [FAPESP-RCUK Consolidated Budget Spreadsheet](#)

Further documentation may be requested by FAPESP to enable the processing of proposals, following the usual procedures for Regular Research Grants. This will include work plans for fellowships and detailed budget forms.