

NERC PUSHING THE FRONTIERS OF ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

RHUL INTERNAL PROCESS

NERC has changed their portfolio and the *Standard Grant Mode and New Investigator grants have been replaced for two new schemes*:

- [Pushing the Frontiers scheme](#) will fund researchers to pursue ambitious, high-risk / high-reward science with a NERC investment of up to £1 million. This scheme is subject to NERC demand management measures therefore a RHUL internal process is required.
- [Exploring the Frontiers scheme](#) will invest up to £100,000 in supporting researchers to explore and test ideas. There are two stages for this call- notification of intent and full proposal. This call is open for applications once a year and NERC will confirm the process for 2023 in due course. We will inform academics as soon as these details become available.

Pushing the Frontiers

The scheme's purpose is:

To invest in excellence, challenging researchers to be adventurous and ambitious; to exploit new technologies and approaches; and to explore new ideas that will push the boundaries of environmental science leading to the future scientific discoveries

The scheme will:

- Support outstanding researchers to pursue curiosity-driven, ambitious, high-reward research
- Enable ambitious proposals that are likely to change the future scientific landscape of a discipline
- Reduce unnecessary applicant and reviewer bureaucracy
- Run 2 calls per annum

Award details:

- Funding up to £1m (at 100% FEC, of which we pay 80% FEC) per award
- No fixed duration of award – proposal dependent
- Named Co-Investigators will be allowed

Application and assessment:

- 5 page proposed research; 2 page narrative capability to deliver
- Peer review and discipline-based panel assessment
- Demand management continues to apply
- Reduced scoring scale (1-3). Excellence in proposed research will be weighted higher than the team (to inform panel ranking)

Exploring the Frontiers

The scheme's purpose is:

To invest in excellence, challenging researchers to be adventurous and ambitious; to exploit new technologies and approaches in a more dynamic way leading to an exploration of new and exciting areas of environmental science that might initiate further exploration or lead to impactful outcomes in themselves

The scheme will:

- Support outstanding researchers to initiate the pursuit of curiosity-driven, ambitious research ideas
- Support the dynamic exploration of ideas that lead to future paths of discipline-shifting discovery or lead to impact in and of themselves
- Be bureaucracy-light by design
- Run 1 call per annum, the first year a pilot to be reviewed

Award details:

- Funding up to £100k (at 100% FEC of which we pay 80% FEC) per award
- No fixed duration of award – dependent on proposal
- Named Co-Investigators will be allowed

Application and assessment:

- 2 page proposed research; 1 page narrative capability to deliver
- Panel review and assessment, no further review/reply stages
- No demand management (review after 1 year)
- Reduced scoring scale (1-3). Excellence in proposed research will be weighted higher than the team (to inform panel ranking)

Please note that for both funding opportunities the **requirements for what can be submitted through Je-S have changed considerably** from previous standard schemes. **They have reduced the requirement for many of the attachments to reduce bureaucracy.** The calls' website and [NERC research grants and fellowships handbook](#) provide more details about what you are expected to submit and how.

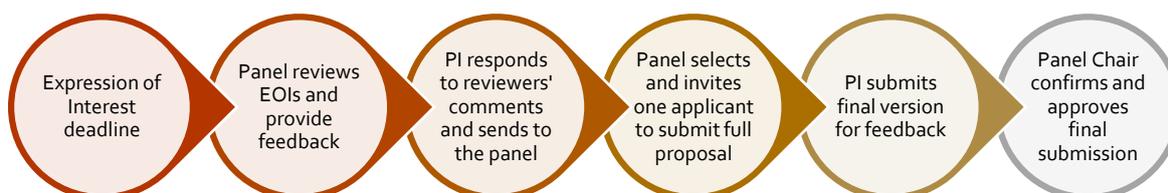
Get familiar with NERC's changes and both funding opportunities so you can comply with the new requirements. Please contact marcela.acunarivera@rhul.ac.uk if you have further queries.

NOTE: This RHUL guidance is for the *Pushing the Frontiers scheme* which is open for applications twice a year (go to NERC's website for more details).

RHUL Internal Selection Process for PUSHING THE FRONTIERS FUNDING CALL

Due to our latest success rates, RHUL is out of NERC's demand management and we can now submit as many good quality applications as we need to this round. However, in order to maintain the required success rate (20%), we will continue running our internal review process for the Pushing the Frontiers call only.

We have **two internal deadlines per year** based on NERC's submission deadlines – July and January.



*Note: This process is for applications where RHUL is the lead. There is no limit to the number of applications where RHUL is a co-applicant (in these cases RHUL **cannot** have a separate Je-S form). If RHUL were a co-applicant with a separate Je-S form this would count towards the RHUL quota, therefore it would need to be included on Je-S form of the lead applicant. Please see the following link for further clarification: <https://nerc.ukri.org/funding/available/researchgrants/demand/>).*

Timetable for Next Internal Rounds 2023

Stage	Round January 2023	Round July 2023
Deadline for Expression of interest (EOI)	12 Sept 2022	24 April
Applicants receive feedback to EOI	26 Sept	03 May
Applicants' response to reviewers' comments	03 October	10 May
Internal review meeting	10 October	12 May
RHUL selected applicant (s) submits full draft proposal	14 November	14 June
Reviewers' feedback to full proposal (meeting with the panel)	30 November	23 June
Final application*	06 January 2023	10 July
Panel Chair confirms final submission*	Mid-Jan 2023	Mid-July
Funder submission deadline *	Mid-Jan 2023	Mid-July

**Some dates may be subject to change depending on funder's submission deadline. We will inform applicants the final dates as soon as these become available. This timetable will be updated accordingly.*

If you have any further questions about this process please contact researchservices@rhul.ac.uk

Applying to Round (January 2023)

Expression of Interest (EOI)

- PIs planning to submit an application to NERC Pushing the Frontiers scheme are requested to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) to researchservices@rhul.ac.uk The format of the EOI can be found in *Annex I*.
- EOIs received are sent to the review panel for their comments.
- **Don't include web links or any additional information outside the EOI.** Reviewers will only assess the information submitted in the EOI.

Applicants receive reviewer's feedback

- EOIs will be reviewed by an internal College review panel.
- Applications will be assessed using both the NERC assessment criteria (*Annex II*) and the evaluation form presented in *Annex III*.
- Before final decisions are made, PIs will receive anonymous feedback to their EOI and will be invited to respond to any comments or questions raised*. Responses should be sent to researchservices@rhul.ac.uk

* subject to change as required.

Selection meeting (as required)

- The review panel will meet to review responses received, rank proposals and select the application(s) to be developed further to full proposal stage. PIs will be informed their results shortly after the selection meeting.

Note: number of applications selected will be based on NERC's demand management measures. We will inform applicants as soon as NERC let us know each year.

RHUL Full invited proposal

- The EOI selected at the previous stage should be developed as a draft proposal.
- The PI is requested to submit a complete draft to researchservices@rhul.ac.uk including all sections of the Je-S form, attachments and a budget.
- The draft proposal will be sent to the review panel for their comments.

Review Panel provides feedback to full proposal

- The review panel will review and meet applicants to provide feedback. The panel may require the applicant to send them an updated version of their application for further review and before final submission.
- PI is requested to incorporate reviewers' comments and submit the final draft. The proposals should be ready to submit.
- The Chair will confirm that the applicant has incorporated all comments and will give a final yes/no **decision by email** whether the application is of sufficient quality to be submitted.

Submission to NERC

Please allow enough time for internal approvals before final submission.

If you have any further questions please contact researchservices@rhul.ac.uk

NOTES

Applicants should adhere to the deadlines and guidelines set out in this document. Proposals that are received out of these dates or that exceed the number of words/pages allowed will not be considered for evaluation.

We strongly recommend that applicants discuss their proposals with their Director of Research, Head of Department and/or Head of School, and have their proposal peer reviewed before they submit to the internal panel. This will increase their chances of success.

Applicants are required to incorporate the panel's feedback or justify why this has not been taken into consideration.

Format for NERC internal Expression of Interest Pushing the Frontiers Call

1. **Scheme:**
Pushing the Frontiers of Environmental Science Research
2. **Title of the proposal**
3. **Name of RHUL PI and Co-I(s)**
4. **Capability to deliver as per NERC's guidance and assessment criteria** (max 150 words overall)
Please provide a short description to demonstrate the ability of the team to conduct ground-breaking innovative research and your suitability to undertake and deliver high quality, innovative science
5. **Type of proposal**
 - a. *Is this a joint/ collaborative application? If so, with which other HEI/collaborator?*
 - b. *Joint NSF/NERC proposal?*
6. **Objectives** (max 200 words)
List the main objectives of the proposed research in order of priority
7. **Summary of the project** (max 1,000 words)
A brief version of the Case for Support; please include the expected impact.
8. **Resource summary** (max 1 side of A4)
Please give a ballpark summary of the resources to be requested. Please also consider the following:
 - *Will any equipment >£10k be requested that requires match funding?*
 - *Are there any costs incurred that may not be eligible, e.g. refurbishment of existing equipment?*
 - **Please contact R&E researchservices@rhul.ac.uk for assistance with costing**

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA for *Pushing the Frontiers Call*

Proposals will be scored against two criteria:

- research excellence
- capability to deliver.

Each proposal will receive a score from the reviewer from one to three, where one is non-competitive and three is outstanding, for both elements of the assessment.

Proposals are assessed considering NERC assessment criteria and review comments should consider:

Research excellence

To what extent:

- does the proposed research address an important environmental challenge, and involve objectives that are ambitious and beyond the state-of-the-art (for example, novel concepts and approaches or development between or across disciplines)
- does the proposal push the frontiers of knowledge and have the potential to lead to ground-breaking, high-risk, high-reward, innovative scientific discovery
- is the outlined scientific approach feasible, bearing in mind that the proposed research is high risk or high gain?

Capability to deliver

To what extent:

- has the team made an outstanding contribution to the generation of new understanding and demonstrated the key skills required to do this
- does the team demonstrate appropriate expertise and capability to successfully execute the proposed project, including evidence for capacity to support and mentor researchers involved as appropriate
- does the team demonstrate capability to contribute to the wider research community (for example, contributions to improving research culture or advocacy for better research integrity)
- does the team demonstrate capability to contribute to broader society (for example, through engagement)?

Pushing the Frontiers scheme – Assessment Form

This form should be completed by the nominated reviewer(s) assigned to each proposal.

Feedback provided will be anonymised and shared with applicants.

Please return the form to researchservices@rhul.ac.uk

Name of Researcher (PI):

Department / School:

Evaluation Criteria

Please provide comments on the extent that the proposal meets the criteria assessed in each question. Use the NERC assessment criteria provided in Annex II.

<p>1. Capability to deliver Please comment on the appropriateness, capability and skills of the PI and the team to conduct ground-breaking, innovative research and that they have the capability to successfully execute the project</p>
<p>2. Objectives <i>Please state if objectives of the proposal are ambitious, beyond the state-of-the-art and have been clearly formulated.</i></p>
<p>3. Summary of the project <i>Please comment on the research excellence of the proposal. For example: does the proposed research address an important environmental challenge and pushes the frontiers of knowledge and have the potential to lead to ground-breaking, high-risk, high-reward, innovative scientific discovery; is the outlined scientific approach feasible? Comment on the quality and feasibility of the research proposal including research methods; significance and quality of the work</i></p>
<p>4. Resource summary <i>Please comment on the resources requested. Are all the costs requested required for the research proposed, and sufficiently justified?</i></p>
<p>5. <i>Please comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed research, the risks associated with the research, the resources requested and the value added by any project partners</i></p>

Overall Assessment score for research excellence (Tick just one option)

Outstanding	Modest	Not competitive	Non-scoring
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