



UKRI National Interdisciplinary Circular Economy Hub (CE-Hub)

Feasibility Studies - First Call for Proposals

Closing Date: 12th July 2021 at 4pm

Background

The total material requirements for the UK economy is over 1bn tonnes p.a. dominated by construction minerals, biomass, fossil fuels and metal ores; approximately 15% higher than 2001. The UK also generates an estimated 200 million tonnes of waste p.a. 12% higher than 2010. Additionally, according to a recent study the production of goods and services are a significant contributor (45%) to carbon emissions. The proportion of resources that are recovered, re-used or recycled after a first use life has been estimated to be <10%, meaning their embodied value and materials are lost, whilst placing increasing demand and pressure on virgin materials and scarce resources.

The CE is a simple, yet compelling framework based on a set of clear principles that decouple resources from economic growth through innovation and entrepreneurship. Analysis has indicated that scaling up circularity provides a multi-billion economic opportunity, driving up resource productivity, driving down material costs, improving resource security and reducing negative externalities and their human and environmental costs. In the wake of COVID-19 there is a significant opportunity for a more sustainable and resilient recovery that can 'Build Back Better'. Recent reports propose that moving to a more CE can provide an essential element of the UK's recovery plan, delivering increased clean growth, net jobs, higher resilience and regenerate natural capital.

The National Interdisciplinary Circular Economy Research (NICER) Programme is a £30M UKRI investment to accelerate and upscale research and innovation towards a UK Circular Economy. Working the five National Circular Economy Centres the CE-Hub was launched in January 2021 to:

- Accelerate understanding and solutions to enable circularity of specific resource flows
- Provide national leadership, coordinate and drive knowledge exchange
- Embed research by involving business, policy makers, consumers and the wider community in every part of the programme

Feasibility Study Funding Call

The CE-Hub is looking to fund its first round of Feasibility Studies to accelerate Circular Economy research, innovation and implementation with a specific focus on the five resource flows connected with [the UKRI funded National Circular Economy Centres](#). Research into specific enablers or barriers that are common to multiple centres, resource flows and / or sectors are also encouraged and could include, but are not limited to:

- Metrics and Indicators,



- Product and Service Design,
- Business Models including citizen adoption,
- Digital Technology,
- Procurement,
- Finance,
- Skills and the future of work.

The total funding available for this call is £200,000 and we want to fund as many high-quality applications as possible. Feasibility Studies will be funded to a maximum of £50,000 at full Economic Cost (fEC). Funding will be awarded at 80% fEC (total project value cannot exceed £50,000) Projects can be between 6 and 12 months in length and must be completed before the end of November 2022. Applications where a portion of the project costs are met by industry funding are also welcomed.

As the CE-Hub is funded by UKRI, our focus is on fundamental ideas that have the potential to be developed into future funding applications or concepts that can be implemented to accelerate circular economy implementation. Therefore, proposals should address challenges at low [Technology Readiness Levels](#) (TRLs 1-3) and be aligned with at least one of the five Circular Economy Centres.

In light of the current social distancing guidelines, all proposals must be able to conduct and complete their research while adhering to government guidance.

What is the aim of the funding?

The aim of the fund is to provide the wider Circular Economy community with the opportunity to undertake interdisciplinary, cross-value chain, foresight, speculative and potentially high-impact research to accelerate innovative solutions in collaboration with the NICER Programme. Proposals that consider different scales (including regional and place-based research), new collaborations between sectors and disciplines, and involve and / or led by early career researchers will all be encouraged. Projects will also be expected to ensure that their research involves explicit collaboration with industry partner(s), providing direct or in-kind support

Funded projects will be expected to deliver a tangible piece of work that would achieve a specific output such as early stage concept development, decision making tools and methods or demonstrator projects focussing on evidencing the transferability of Circular Economy principles across scales, disciplines and industrial sectors. We are keen to support collaborations of all sorts that would otherwise not happen, and welcome applications with leading participation from people drawn from all parts of the Circular Economy community. The feasibility study should result in increased confidence in the proof of concept developed, which then has potential to attract further investment.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

The CE-Hub is committed to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. We particularly welcome applications from teams which are diverse in terms of protected characteristics and



disciplinary areas. We want to encourage, support and respect ideas from everyone and ensure our inclusive activities are representative of the diverse circular economy community.

Upon receipt of a proposal we will ask the PI to (voluntarily) complete an anonymous EDI monitoring form for their team so we can learn how we can support increasing diversity in our activities. We particularly recognise the impact of engaging with activities such as networks and are keen to challenge our own thinking as we deliver our programme. Therefore, we encourage applicants to discuss any specific requirements that will enable participation with the CE-Hub team. We have designed our funding allocation process with an aim to minimise any potential impact of bias at all stages of decision making. We are therefore piloting a new approach in the application process. The application form will be in two parts: Part 1 will contain contact details, project team and track record information and Part 2 will be the outline Case for Support, which will be considered anonymously by a shortlisting panel. Please make every effort to ensure that no identifying content is included in Part 2 (e.g. host institution). This will enable proposals to be considered without members of the panel having knowledge of the applicant's identity or affiliations.

Responsible Innovation

[Responsible Innovation](#) is a process that seeks to promote creativity and opportunities for science and innovation that are socially desirable and undertaken in the public interest. Responsible Innovation acknowledges that innovation can raise questions and dilemmas, is often ambiguous in terms of purposes and motivations and unpredictable in terms of impacts, beneficial or otherwise. The Ce-Hub wants to ensure that any research it funds is undertaken with the values of Responsible Innovation in mind. In this case, we expect researchers involved in funded feasibility studies to anticipate, reflect and engage on the wider ethical and societal impacts, implications and value of their work, entering into dialogue with the public and other stakeholders where appropriate, and respecting the views of others.

Application Process

Awards will be made via a short written application, followed up by a pitch to a multidisciplinary panel including representatives from industry and UKRI. Successful applicants will be expected to participate in CE-Hub events and will be required to present project updates at the NICER Programme annual conferences. In addition, there is a requirement that presentations on the successful projects are made at a kick-off meeting to be held online. We expect our feasibility study teams to form a core part of the CE-Hub community.

Selection Criteria

The following criteria will be used by the review panel when assessing proposals:

- Multidisciplinarity,
- Involvement of Early Career Researchers,
- Involvement of Industry and / or Government Stakeholders,



- Commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion,
- Demonstration of Circular Economy Principles across scales, disciplines and industrial sectors,
- Complementary to the overall work of the NICER Programme,
- Potential for the development of future funding applications,
- Potential to lead to strong dissemination materials,
- Pathways to accelerate the impact of the research to ensure rapid transfer to industry, government and other end users.

Key Dates

8 th June 2021	Call goes live
21 st June 2021	Webinar for interested participants
12 th July 2021	Deadline for submissions (4pm)
4 th August 2021	Invitations to Panel Pitch Day issued Unsuccessful proposals advised
14 th September 2021	Panel pitch
November 2021	Feasibility studies start
16 th November 2021	Feasibility studies kick-off meeting
November 2022	Feasibility study completion

Eligibility

Guidelines on eligibility can be found [here](#). Eligible organisations include all UK Higher Education Institutions that receive grant funding from one of the UK higher education funding bodies, along with research institutes for which the Research Councils have established a long-term involvement as a major funder. Other independent research organisations (IROs) may also be eligible and a list of such organisations is available [here](#).

What can the funding be used for?

The budget outline for the proposed feasibility studies can include investigator/ researcher time, travel and subsistence appropriate to delivery of the project, and consumables. As the grant holder, the University of Exeter is responsible for allocating funding to successful proposals and will reimburse subcontracting organisations at 80% full economic costing. Academic institutions will be required to itemise bills based on 100% FEC and then invoice at 80% FEC.

Submitting Proposals



Feasibility study applications should be submitted, using the application form provided, via email to Katie Cooke, CE-Hub Project Manager: K.Cooke@exeter.ac.uk by 4pm on 12th July. The application forms will be made available on the [CE-Hub Website](#) as soon as the call goes live on 8th June.

Additional Information

In addition to the specific outputs outlined in your proposal, each feasibility study project team is required to:

1. Attend a kick-off meeting on 16th November 2021.
2. Present your work (in progress or completed) at the NICER Programme annual conferences (Feb 2022 - date TBC). You will need to include conference expenses in your budget if it is held in-person.
3. Provide information and updates for the dedicated project webpage on the CE-Hub website, when requested. The CE-Hub will also promote its work across the circular economy community, and occasionally project leads might be asked for short quotes or other information to demonstrate the activities that are taking place.
4. Work with the CE-Hub Team to produce an information sheet and detailed case study, templates for which will be provided.
5. Ensure that the work is acknowledged as being supported by UKRI and the CE-Hub when promoting projects, either through articles, papers, presentations or interviews. Both UKRI and CE-Hub branding should be visibly included on any presentations.

Further Information

If you have any questions regarding this call for proposals, please contact the CE-Hub Project Manager, Katie Cooke email: K.Cooke@exeter.ac.uk