

# Interdisciplinary Circular Economy Centre Outline and Coordinator calls: Webinar Q & A

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*This document lists the questions that were asked as part of the two webinars for the UKRI Interdisciplinary Circular Economy calls. The answers aim to provide additional clarity, and should be read in conjunction with the webinar slides and the call documents. Please note the call documents contain the definitive details of both calls. If there are any factual discrepancies or conflicts, the call documents override the slides and this Q&A document.*

## **Scope of programme**

**Is UKRI expecting that the bids will be creative-led or engineering-led? Have you got a sense of where the weight should lie?**

There are no expectations about which disciplines should lead bids, or what proportions of bids/the funding should fall within different council remits. EPSRC are running the call for administrative purposes but they are UKRI calls and **applications are encouraged from across disciplines and UKRI remit**. Applicants should think about and try to build the most appropriate interdisciplinary team to tackle the challenges they have identified.

**This program focuses on Technology Readiness Levels 1-3; however what you describe will quickly move up the TRL to enable practical change in sectors. Could you comment on this?**

We expect the consideration of how solutions can be implemented to form part of impact plans – as well as how applicants will achieve impact as part of this or subsequent funding, and/or the Innovate UK CR&D funding. However this cannot be the core work of the Centres/Hub, which should be focused on fundamental, but user co-created, research. Furthermore, not all research will be technology-focused, in line with the interdisciplinary nature of this programme.

**What will the role be of responsible innovation in the Centres/Hub?**

As a public funder of research, UKRI has a responsibility to ensure that our activities and the research we fund, are aligned with the principles of responsible innovation, creating value for society in an ethical and responsible way. UKRI does not wish to be prescriptive about how this is embedded in the research and innovation process, but recommends that all researchers demonstrate awareness of and commitment to, the principles of Responsible Innovation.

**So Far, it has been WRAP that has had the obvious initiative and responsibility for waste management in UK - how deeply are they embedded in or collaborating with this UKRI activity?**

WRAP were involved in the initial development of the business case for the programme. They will continue their involvement as a member of the programme strategic advisory group.

**Are you able to say anything about the monitoring and reporting frameworks that will be used for these calls?**

Detail on the requirements on individual grants will be provided in the call documents for Centres full proposals and the Hub. UKRI will aim to make any monitoring, reporting and evaluation useful and proportionate. At this stage applicants can expect to have to provide some level of quarterly

highlight reports along with more detailed yearly reporting (including ResearchFish). There is also an expectation of a mid-term review and a final programme evaluation that all grants will be expected to participate in.

## **Networking**

**We have a number of interested applicants but not got an appropriate person to lead - is there a way of networking with other applicants/ or joining in on the community days to join other applications? Will there be a mechanism to include academics/teams from failed bid to be involved with the workshops? Can you provide more information about the initial stakeholder engagement process which the Coordinator will organise? How can relevant organisation submit their interest in involvement?**

UKRI are not running any networking events before the current call deadlines, and suggest using normal networks and channels to identify partners. It may also be useful to refer to the report from the recent [UKRI Circular Economy workshops](#) (noting that these workshops were heavily over-subscribed, and so that not all members of the community could attend).

Following the outline panel in January there will then be one workshop for business and policy makers to network with invited outline teams. A further 1 or 2 workshops will be an opportunity for other interested academics to network with invited outline teams. Further details about the workshops and how to apply to attend will be available in the new-year. Applications to attend will be open to all, irrespective of whether they applied to the outlines call or not. These workshops will be co-organised by UKRI with the Coordinator.

**As a non-academic organisation working on circular economy projects, we are unsure whether our potential involvement would be best suited in the initial research centre consortium building stage or at a later stage through this networking opportunity.**

The workshops will provide an opportunity to increase collaborations and partnerships but we encourage non-academic organisations to get involved as early as they can to help shape the evolving centre bids from the start.

**If we are already involved in circular economy funding (e.g. Networks) would this be seen negatively by review panels?**

The panels will assess applications in line with the assessment criteria as published. Provided the proposed work in the application is distinct from the work in the existing grant, there is no reason why holding funding in this area would be a disadvantage; applicants are encouraged to demonstrate how their existing funding provides an appropriate track record, and of the additionality of this funding beyond their existing grants.

## **Eligibility**

**Can someone be a PI or Co-I on one bid as well as a PI or Co-I on another?**

Yes - there are no restriction on how many applications an individual can be on (across both calls).

**Can an institution lead on more than one proposal? Could an institution have both a centre and the hub?**

Yes - there are no restrictions on how many applications (to either call) an institution can submit.

**Can a “professional” or SME apply to be a Coordinator or co-Coordinator? Can independent consultancies with experience in network coordination apply to be a coordinator? Can SMEs [small and medium enterprises] be part of a consortium for one of the centres?**

Both calls have standard UKRI Research Council eligibility restrictions. Please see: <https://epsrc.ukri.org/funding/applicationprocess/fundingguide/eligibility/investigators/> for information on eligibility of investigators, and <https://www.ukri.org/funding/how-to-apply/eligibility/> for information on eligibility of organisations – in addition, certain Public Sector Research Establishments are also eligible as part of this programme. Ineligible organisations can still join consortia as project partners, if contributing cash/in-kind support to the project. If you have any questions about a specific situation please email [circular.economy@epsrc.ukri.org](mailto:circular.economy@epsrc.ukri.org).

**Will local authorities will be accepted as key partners, and their time, etc. as an in-kind contribution.**

Yes they are eligible as Project Partners, provided they are not benefiting financially from the funding.

**We are an RTO and whilst being eligible for Innovate UK funding we are not eligible for UKRI Research Council funding. With this being a UKRI call, and Innovate UK involved, is there any provision to include RTOs (other than as subcontract subject to the usual rules)?**

As above, the standard UKRI Research Council eligibility requirements apply. Ineligible organisations and businesses are encouraged to get involved with the programme either as project partners or through the collaborative research and development funding which will be launched by Innovate once the centres have started.

**I understand that Higher Education Institutions/independent research organisations/institutes PSREs are the only eligible partners, but can they involve, on-contract, independent consultants for specific justified purposes?**

Yes non-eligible organisations can be involved as sub-contractors if appropriate and justified.

## **Centres**

**Could you describe a bit more about what the scope of a resource stream might be i.e. the breadth of the centre? Can a "composite" material containing several materials be considered as "single resource flow"?**

Applicants must make the case that their Centre is focused on one resource flow, as defined in the call document. The aspects of a Centre's scope must therefore be interlinked within one resource flow, where "resource" refers to materials, material systems, products and/or services. A single composite material may be eligible if it is broad enough to take an interdisciplinary whole-systems approach; similarly, multiple materials can be covered e.g. in terms of material substitution. Ultimately, the panel will assess any applications in line with the assessment criteria. Applicants wanting to discuss specific Centre ideas are welcome to email [circular.economy@epsrc.ukri.org](mailto:circular.economy@epsrc.ukri.org).

**What if resource flow 'flows' into Global Challenges Research Fund territory e.g. offloading of waste overseas. Would dealing with research that could also be in the GCRF domain still be in centre remit?**

It is not out of remit - anything normally eligible on a UKRI Research Council grant is eligible for this, and applicants are encouraged to think about the whole resource flow/system. However it is worth thinking about the need to make a case for the resource flow being nationally important for the UK and maintaining an appropriate balance.

**Regarding any macroeconomic analysis, will this be carried out at the level of the centres, or will this be carried out across the work of the centres (and thus all resources flows combined)?**

It is up to individual centre bids to define what areas of research will be impactful and relevant to consider within the scope of their bid. UKRI do expect cross-cutting research such as macroeconomic analyses to be co-ordinated across the programme and carried out by the Hub – either in the Hub's initial plans or as part of their flexible funding. It is for the Coordinator to define the scope and priority of different cross-cutting areas in designing the Hub.

**Can you confirm the £2m needs to come from business and not HE? You mentioned that the contributions of host institutions do not count towards the £2m match funding requirement - does this just include the 20% fEC element or further (cash/in-kind) contributions as well? Do we have to show evidence of £2m match funding / in-kind contributions details on the final proposal?**

The leverage requirement must come from Project partners. Contributions from the host organisation(s), either as the 20% or other contributions, do not count. UKRI would like to highlight that no evidence of leverage is required at the outline stage. At the full proposal stage the £2M will be considered a target. Applications will be expected to demonstrate (through project partner letters of support) substantial leverage but do not have to have met the target. If they have not applicants should detail their plan to achieve it over the lifetime of the grant. Progress towards the target will be reviewed as part of the mid-term review. Further details will follow in the full proposals call document.

**Can the £2.5M for SMEs be used as part of the £2M contribution to the Centre?**

No this cannot be counted towards the target.

**It was noted that project partners need not be UK-based. Is there any restriction on inclusion of other countries?**

No, project partners can be from anywhere but applicants are advised to remember the need to demonstrate the national importance of the proposed research.

**Is there a target requirement for a balance between cash and in kind for the buy-in from industry partners? Either for individual centres or the overall programme?**

There is no required or target balance for any grant or the programme overall. UKRI has a programme requirement to achieve £10m of business leverage (cash/in-kind) across the programme.

**Can ongoing projects be used to demonstrate in-kind contributions?**

Again, host organisation contributions do not count towards the £2m target. Contributions from industry should be specific to this application – that is, they cannot be contributions that are already in place or that would have been offered by the partner regardless of this application. Any contributions must be confirmed at full proposal stage in project partner letters.

**Will there be an attempt to achieve a ‘portfolio’ of centres to match defined UK priorities - if so, are these clear? Would you/the panel potentially suggest a merger of outline proposals into one centre proposal? Also will there be a consideration to recommend similar bids come together for the second stage?**

UKRI will take a portfolio approach at both the outlines and full stage, to achieve an appropriate balance across resource flows, sectors, disciplines and institutions. The balance or identity of resource flows has not been determined in advance, other than that the final Centres should all focus on nationally-important resource flows. The panel will be asked to provide feedback to applicants, which may include consideration of bringing in expertise from other applications. It will ultimately be for the Principal Investigators of shortlisted outline applications to build their full proposal consortia, and to consider the panel’s feedback in doing so.

**Is there a limit to the number of investigators? The call document says each investigator should represent a different area of research, how should we incorporate academics in similar areas.**

There is no limit, other than the maximum amount of funding available for each Centre. It is expected that all investigators will bring a unique contribution to the interdisciplinary management team, and it is not therefore expected that consortia will include multiple people in precisely the same research area and with exactly the same skills.

**In the track record of the team, will there be any considerations for the diversity of the team. Will there be an EDI statement in the full stage proposal.**

Outline applications must consider how equality, diversity and inclusion is embedded in their approach and plans for building collaborations, including in how the core interdisciplinary team is recruited, how the diverse range of perspectives in the community will be reflected and encouraged, and how the team will create an inclusive and accessible environment for broad participation. Further requirements around ED&I will be included in the full call document, in line with other large UKRI investments.

**Could you give an example of Centre funding to engage with sectors?**

Centres must engage with stakeholders, including industry across sectors. Centre applicants are expected to include funding to engage effectively with business across their lifetime, and are encouraged to apply for funding to achieving pathways to impact activities. Further details will follow in the full proposal call document.

**Whether it is acceptable to have a key set of targets areas for projects, or whether it should be more about developing a 'hub'?**

Centres will be expected to have planned research objectives much like any large research grant, though some flexibility given the length of the funding would be reasonable.

**Collaborative Research and Development Funding**

**Confirm please whether the £2.5M is per centre or across centres, but not a linear split across centres?**

The £2.5 is across the centres but will likely not be split linearly. Further details will be provided when the calls are launched by innovate likely at the end of 2020.

**Coordinator**

**Whether it is acceptable to have a key set of targets areas for projects, or whether it should be more about developing a 'hub'?**

The Coordinator is expected to have a clear plan for the initial 11 months of funding. At this stage the Coordinator does not need to provide any specifics about the Hub but rather be describing what their overall vision would be.

**Is there an expected % FTE for the Coordinator?**

No. There is an expectation that due to the nature of the role it will require more time than being PI of a standard grant. However how much more time will be different for different academics. UKRI advise applicants to ask for what they feel is appropriate and justified to achieve the aims of the call.

**Could two co-Coordinators come from two different (eligible) institutions?**

Yes.

**If all interested outline proposal writing teams will be invited to attend workshops in Feb/March - will the coordinator have a voice in making selections and reshuffling proposals?**

The Coordinator will work with UKRI to define the processes and criteria for applications and selection of applications to attend the workshops. They will be expected to talk to the Centre bids and help them develop their bids and interdisciplinary teams, but will not have the ability to make funding selections or force the combination of different bids.

**How would a Coordinator work with Centre proposal teams given that 5 will be selected out of 8-12?**

The nature of the Coordinator's interactions with the centres is expected to evolve over the length of the grant as the peer review process takes place. The Coordinator will then work with the Centres once they begin in October 2020. However the Coordinator will also be building their consortium for the Hub during 2020, and will engage with the entire community in doing so (including unsuccessful Centre applicants).

**Is there a target for buy-in for the coordinator / hub?**

There is no target for leverage for the Hub but UKRI expects partner engagement to be a strong part of the Hub so it will be strongly encouraged.

**Change log**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Version</b>	<b>Change</b>
Nick Cooper/Lisa Coles	25.10.2019	1	As published