



**UK Research
and Innovation**

UKRI Interdisciplinary Circular Economy Centres – Full proposals

FAQs – updated 29.04.20 (updates from original in red)

Why have these changes been made?

UKRI has reviewed the impact of the evolving Covid-19 situation on all of its research and innovation activities, including live calls such as this one. Following discussions within UKRI and with applicants and institutions involved, UKRI has decided to extend the call closing date by one month and provide some flexibility on some requirements in the call.

The call document has been updated to reflect these changes, providing clarity to applicants, reviewers and the panel on the revised processes.

How has this affected the timing of the peer review process?

The dates have been revised as follows:

- The Notification of Intent to Submit deadline has moved from 16.00 07 April to 16.00 07 May.
- The full proposal submission deadline has moved from 16.00 21 April to 16.00 21 May.
- Postal peer review has been pushed back by a month accordingly, and will take place in June and July.
- Applicants that receive sufficiently supportive comments in their reviews will be invited to submit a response. This is expected to take place in late July; UKRI will aim to confirm in advance when responses will be due. It is expected that applicants will have the standard one week to submit this.
- As alluded to in the original call document, UKRI will now hold a sift panel in late August, to prioritise applications for interview.
- The interview panel is expected to take place w/c 7 September 2020. Dates will be confirmed with applicants individually, to ensure no applicant is disadvantaged.
- **Grants must now start on or before 01 January 2021.**

Applicants will appreciate that this is a fast-moving situation. The above dates are subject to change, but UKRI will communicate with prospective PIs if any changes are made.

How will UKRI ensure there is an appropriate balance of reviewers and panel members?

UKRI have looked at the range of disciplines involved in outline proposals to understand the balance of reviewers and panel members required at full stage. As project teams are likely to change between outline and full stage, this will of course be reconsidered when proposals are in our system.

All involved UKRI Councils have been asked to provide suggestions for reviewers and panel members from their Council's remit. UKRI have also aimed to identify reviewers and especially panel members with experience of interdisciplinary and/or whole-systems approaches to research and innovation.

For reviewers, UKRI will therefore aim for each proposal to go to an appropriate balance of people from across disciplines and backgrounds (especially academic, industrial, user etc.), recognising that 5-6 reviewers are unlikely to cover every aspect of any Centre proposal. If there is an expertise gap among reviewers who initially agree to submit a review, we will seek additional reviews if this is possible in the timeframe. UKRI will also aim to use one of the suggestions that applicants submit through Je-S, provided there are no conflicts of interest.

For panel members, UKRI will also aim for a balance across our remit, and across academia, industry and research users. Again, this is recognising that six panel members cannot cover **all** disciplines, especially given that there are a significant number of institutional conflicts.

Why has a sift panel been introduced?

On the outline panel's recommendation, UKRI invited 18 proposals to full proposal stage to ensure an appropriate balance of proposals. However, in the current situation, UKRI wants to reduce the burden on applicants in preparing for an interview where there is a very limited chance of success. Furthermore, holding 18 interviews would have been logistically difficult in person, but will be even more so if held virtually. UKRI has therefore introduced this sift stage.

How will the sift panel operate?

The sift panel membership has not yet been confirmed, but UKRI intends this to overlap with the interview panel membership (for example, the interview panel members who are available, as well as several additional panel members). Both panels' membership will be confirmed with applicants before the meetings.

The sift panel will prioritise applications for interview, based on the applications, reviews received and PI responses. This prioritisation will be against the assessment criteria. **The panel will make a recommendation of which proposals should or should not be interviewed (with a list in priority order, if necessary).** If the panel have concerns that an interview may alleviate, they will be encouraged to consider giving the benefit of the doubt and inviting to interview.

We are not setting a limit in advance of how many proposals will be invited to interview, but we anticipate it will be approximately 10-12. The final number will be based on the panel's recommendations and the logistics of interviews.

Is there any change to the assessment criteria?

The assessment criteria are unchanged, for transparency and because UKRI did not identify any criterion that would be different in the current situation. The reviewer guidance has been updated to remind reviewers of the guidance that:

- UKRI understands the challenges with securing industry letters of support and has relaxed leverage and Project Partner requirements.
- UKRI encourages applicants to remain flexible in their proposals, allowing their proposed research to respond to the evolving external situation.

Similar guidance will be provided to both panels.

How does this change the Project Partner contribution targets?

UKRI recognises that Project Partner communications and contributions are likely be affected by the current external situation.

UKRI currently have a target to attain £10m of leverage across the programme (the Centres, Hub and SME funding). To deliver this target, Centres were expected to elicit at least £1.5m of Project Partner contributions (in-kind or cash) over the lifetime of the Centre. Both the overall and Centre-level targets will be reviewed in the context of the evolving external Covid-19 situation.

There is no set target at the point of application. At this application stage, applicants should demonstrate the Project Partner interest (and where possible, contributions) that they have identified at the point of their application, and detail planned approaches to eliciting more leveraged support.

Reviewers and the panel will be asked to assess evidence of stakeholder interest and contributions at application stage, in the context of each application's chosen resource flow, the disciplines and sectors involved, and in the context of the current external Covid-19 situation.

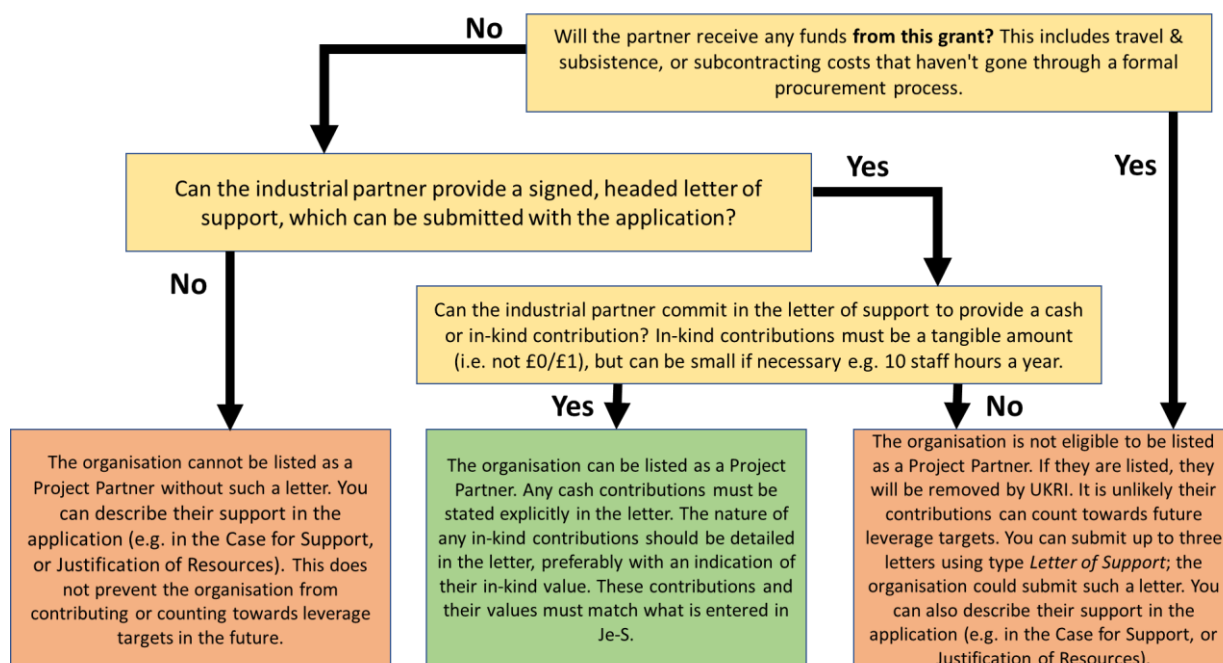
Once Centres have been selected, UKRI will consider targets for each Centre, in consultation with the programme's Strategic Advisory Group. Again, this will be in the context of each application's chosen resource flow, the disciplines and sectors involved, and the context of the external situation.

How do we account for possible Project Partners who have asked for travel reimbursement/who are subcontracted on the grant/who can't commit to a specific contribution/who can't provide a letter in time?

Project Partners can be academic, industrial, policy, or other users/stakeholders. The standard EPSRC rules on Project Partners continue to apply to this call: see <https://epsrc.ukri.org/funding/applicationprocess/preparing/writing/lettersofsupport/> . To be listed as a Project Partner, any organisation:

- **Must** submit a headed, signed, dated letter of support with the proposal
- **Must** outline in the letter why they are partners, what they hope to get out of the collaboration, how they have contributed to preparing the proposal, and what they will contribute towards the project, whether cash or in-kind (including staff time, access to equipment in their organisation, provision of data, software or materials – all expressed as cash equivalent). The in-kind contribution cannot be listed as £0/£1.
- **Must not be receiving funding directly from the grant, including travel and subsistence payments or subcontracting costs.** The only exception is if they are providing services or equipment that will go through a formal procurement process audited by the host organisation.

This flowchart explains different options. If an organisation cannot be a Project Partner for any of these reasons, you can submit up to three regular Letters of Support. You can also refer to their support elsewhere in your application.



Can we change our application to reflect the Covid-19 situation?

UKRI encourages Centres to retain flexibility within the overall programme of work to allow for the Centre to respond to emerging priorities and opportunities, especially in the context of the evolving external situation. This flexibility should be reflected in the proposed research programme and the workplan.

Applicants may want to include research on the effects of the Covid-19 situation on their resource flow, and this is acceptable. Applicants may also want to consider mitigation plans for Covid-19-related risks to project delivery. It is not mandatory from UKRI’s perspective to do either of these at application stage.

The resource flow focus of the full proposal cannot be substantially different from the outline proposal. If you are considering what could be perceived as significant changes, please contact UKRI as soon as possible.

Covid-19 has limited our ability to broaden our project team. How will this be reflected in the assessment process?

Reviewers have been asked to take the current situation into account when evaluating proposals, including on the Fit to Call criterion. The panel will be provided with additional guidance to take this into account when considering applicants' progress in addressing the outline panel's feedback.

The additional month has been provided to allow applicants more time to complete discussions with potential collaborators. Applicants are also reminded to allow for flexibility in their proposals, which may include flexibility in collaborations over the lifetime of the Centre.

How does this affect the spend profile for the programme/our Centre?

The programme has a fixed spend profile, **although a reprofile was agreed on 29 April, allowing for a short delay to Centre start dates. As a result, applicants are asked to prepare their proposals as follows:**

- With a start date of either 01 October 2020 or 01 January 2021
- To run for 48 months

Recognising the short notice between the announcement of this decision and the call closing date, applicants are welcome to continue preparing their proposals on the basis of a 01 October 2020 start date, and to subsequently decide to slip the start date to 01 January 2021 if their proposal is funded. All grants must start on or before 01 January 2021.

The fixed spend profile is based on a flat profile – that is, the same amount paid in total across the five Centres each quarter. This spend profile is across the programme and therefore allows for some variation between Centres – for example, Centre 1 could spend more in Q1 2021-2022 if Centre 2 spends less that quarter, and then vice versa in Q2 2021-2022.

For this reason, UKRI has asked applicants to submit a *preferred* spend profile that is broadly flat across the 16 quarters, but that can have minor variations if necessary (for example, to balance PDRA time, or to account for a major event). UKRI and successful project teams will then negotiate final spend profiles at the post panel stage, with UKRI looking across all 5 Centres' preferred profiles. This negotiation will include consideration of the impact of any slippage of the start date to 01 January 2021.

There is recognition that the current external Covid-19 situation and delays to the peer review process may result in slower than anticipated spend in 2020-21, and these can be reflected in applicants' spend profile document. **It is therefore reasonable if the preferred spend profile is generally flat, but spend is lower than average for the first 3-6 months. It is hoped that the flexibility to start on 01 January 2021 will provide more lead time for recruitment and initial planning.** Again, any specific requirements will be considered at the post panel stage.

The call document contains specific timeframes for governance (for example, the collaboration agreement and statement of KPIs/outputs). How will these be affected?

The grant conditions will be finalised and discussed with applicants in September, considering the situation at that time. UKRI will show reasonable flexibility, and will extend these deadlines if they are no longer feasible.

On Je-S, applicants are asked to select a discipline but these are EPSRC-based. How do we represent an interdisciplinary, cross-UKRI proposal?

This question is mandatory for all EPSRC-managed proposals, but has no impact on how your proposal is processed. The question normally allows EPSRC to assign proposals to the most appropriate Portfolio Manager, but will not be used for this call. Please select the most appropriate option for your proposal.

How exactly do applicants need to follow the guidance about page lengths for the Case for Support or other documents?

The only requirement from UKRI is not to exceed the section page limits in the call documents – for example, no more than 2 pages on the track record, no more than 10 pages on addressing the assessment criteria. Beyond this, there are no further UKRI requirements; applicants may want to consider if reviewers and panel members will find assessment easier if the proposal is generally written in the specified order.

My question is not answered here.

Please contact us at circular.economy@epsrc.ukri.org. These FAQs will be updated as necessary until the call closes.