Research Services

NERC Independent Research Fellowships Guidance 2016

Research Services deadline: Tuesday 27th September 2016

NERC deadline: Tuesday 4th October 2016

These guidance notes for applicants and Administrators have been compiled using analysis of Oxford data for this scheme, and information available on the NERC website: http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/available/fellowships/irf/

Headline information:

- Aimed at promising early-career environmental scientists
- The fellowship provides 5 years support for successful applicants
- NERC currently awards around 14 Independent Research Fellowships per year. Over the last 5 years, Oxford has secured on average 1 of these awards each year.
- NERC Fellowships can be held on both a full and part-time basis.

PREPARING THE APPLICATION

- Applicants must discuss their proposal before preparing the application with the Administrator and/or finance office in the department where they wish to hold the fellowship.
- Applicants for the Independent Research Fellowship scheme must:
  - Demonstrate that their research vision and outline ways that their research can be developed over the five year fellowship
  - Explain how they will contribute to the international research area and interact with the leading international groups in their field
  - Explain how they will enable the potential economic or societal benefits of their research to be realised
- Applicants must consult senior academics in the department to establish whether the scheme is suitable for their level and also for advice of preparing the JeS form and proposal.

Formatting and layout

Extra care should be taken to ensure the application complies with the rules surrounding font size, margins, number of pages etc. As specified in the NERC Handbook, if these rules are not adhered to the application could be rejected outright (before the application has been peer reviewed).

All attachments (excepting Letters of Support and equipment quotes) must comply with the following (this includes references and all non-embedded figure legends):

- Font = Arial (do not use Arial Narrow or Calibri)
- Size = 11pt, single line spaced and standard character spaced
- Margins = 2cm on all sides

N.B.: If an alternative programme to Microsoft Word is used to process the attachments, ensure that when the documents are converted to PDF that the font sizes have remained within the guidelines set by NERC. There have previously been some issues where the font style and size has altered during the conversion to PDF. Ensure all documents are converted to PDF before uploading to JeS to mitigate any risk of fonts being corrupted during the conversion process. NERC will check fonts by copying and pasting text into a word document.
SUBMISSION AND REVIEWAL PROCESS
N.B. As of 1 January 2016, Research Services will not review fellowship applications under £1m to specified ‘standard funders’, one of which is NERC. If the value of the fellowship applied for falls below the £1m threshold, it will be submitted by RS without review (unless the Department specifically asks RS to review it, in exceptional circumstances, at least 5 working days prior to the funder’s deadline).

- Once the application form has been completed, the applicant should press submit in JeS and then the departmental administrator/finance office must submit the application as well as the X5 costing to Research Services.
  
  **N.B. Submission route in JeS: PI -> Department -> Research Services -> NERC**

- The status of the application can be checked at any time by logging into JeS.
- Shortlisted candidates will be invited for interview in March 2017.
- Following interview NERC will e-mail successful candidates in April 2017.

OXFORD TIPS

These tips have been gathered from previous Oxford applications and peer-review comments from NERC:

Proposal and project remit

- Previous successful projects have been important, timely, and well developed.
- The proposal must include the cutting edge science appropriate to a fellowship.
- The proposal must propose clear strategies for tackling the problems outlined supported by a clear programme of research.
- A previous NERC interview panel commented about one application that too much of what was exciting was buried too deeply in the proposal and only brought out through questioning in interview, rather than being communicated directly to make a compelling case for the applicant.
- Ensure that the ‘global questions’ to be tackled moving forward are highlighted upfront in the application.
- Previous successful proposals have included impressive cases for outreach activities.

Demonstrable independence of the PI

- Successful applicants had a strong track record and had started to establish themselves as a leading independent researcher in their field. They were also able to discuss their future plans in the interview showing a vision to lead the science rather than being led.
- Some unsuccessful applicants required stronger vision for the future and career planning from would-be world leading scientists.

Project team

- Proposals can be strengthened by engaging with a network of collaborators and project partners who will contribute key expertise to the project.

Funder interview

- The presentation must be well rehearsed and the applicant must provide clear in response to all questions posed by the panel.
HELPFUL LINKS

- The scheme page on the NERC website: http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/available/fellowships/irf/
- The NERC Handbook for grants and fellowships: http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/application/howtoapply/forms/
- JeS portal: https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk/
- Research Services NERC webpage: https://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/researchsupport/sponsors/nerc/

For any queries regarding this fellowship first contact the research facilitator in the department, followed by the relevant Senior Research Funding Specialist at Research Services.