CE Hub Flexible Fund:
Accelerating Digital Manufacturing Research Collaboration and Innovation

Feasibility Studies – Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the CE Hub?

The [CE-Hub](#) is a coordinating Hub for the NICER Programme, constituting [five Circular Economy Centres of Excellence.](#) The NICER Programme is a four-year £30 million investment from UKRI to move the UK towards a Circular Economy. Starting on 1st January 2021, the CE Hub's objectives are 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.

We will continue to implement a collaborative, multidisciplinary and inclusive approach to knowledge creation, knowledge transfer, new collaborations and strategic influence to achieve demonstrable impact on people, society and the economy.

2. What are the Call Details?
The CE-Hub will 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 and cross cutting enablers. The fund will provide the wider Circular Economy community with the opportunity to undertake speculative and potentially high-impact research to accelerate innovative solutions. Proposals that consider different scales (including regional and place-based research), new collaborations between sectors and disciplines, and involve early career professionals (from academia, industry and government), will all be encouraged. 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.

3. What is the deadline for the current call?

Monday 12th July 2021 at 4pm

4. How much can I apply for?

The expectation is that we will fund up to 4 projects of up to a maximum full Economic Cost (fEC) of £50,000. Funding will be awarded at 80% fEC.

5. Which organisations can be funded?

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.](here) Industry cannot be directly funded.

6. 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%fEC.

7. How long should a study take to complete?

Projects can be between 6 and 12 months in length and must complete before the end of November 2022. Therefore, we do not expect future pay awards in the salary costings or indexation will be added to grant at the time the award is made.

8. What is the selection criteria for choosing proposals to go to the panel pitch?

Applicants should consider that the following criteria will be used by the review panel when assessing the proposal:

- Multidisciplinary,
- 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.

9. Who are the reviewers?

The reviewers are volunteers from academic and industry background who have extensive knowledge of Circular Economy. Each proposal will be reviewed by 2 reviewers.

10. Can Early Career Researchers apply for funding?

Yes – we actively encourage ECRs to apply for funding and can be the Principal Investigator. Applicants are responsible for seeking approval from their own institution before submission as there are often local eligibility criteria which need to be met.

Feasibility studies should include people in the team who are transitioning to or establishing research independence. There are no eligibility rules based on years since PhD or whether the applicant currently holds a permanent/open-ended position or job role. Applicants must be employed in an eligible UK academic institution. To clarify eligibility as an early career researcher, applicants are expected to hold a doctorate by the start date of the funding being awarded or to be able to demonstrate equivalent research/innovation experience and/or training. Applications are welcome from those returning to research from a career break or following time in other roles; there are no time limits in respect of time spent outside a research or innovation environment.

11. What are the key dates?

Key Dates

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

12. How can this call work with the current restrictions on movement?

In light of the current social distancing guidelines, all proposals submitted must be able to conduct and complete their research while adhering to government guidance. We hope that as we progress through 2021/22 that we will then have more opportunities to hold face-to-face activities and have easier access to laboratories, but all proposals should include contingency plans should social distancing guidance continue during the funded period.

13. Do I need to provide letters of support / evidence of funding from Industry or other partners?

Letters of support are not required but you can provide a statement of support within your proposal. Applications where a portion of the £50,000 costs is met by industry funding are

welcomed. The CE Hub can help you if you need support to identify an industry partner. Please contact please contact the CE Hub Project Manager, Katie Cooke email: k.cooke@exeter.ac.uk

14. How many applications can I make per call?

We are unlikely to fund two projects from the same applicant as we are keen to ensure a diverse range of projects covering all areas of the country as well as diverse disciplines.

15. Why are there 3 parts to the proposal?

The CE Hub has a strong commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, in line with the UKRI commitment to ED&I, and strives to ensure that all of our activities are open and accessible to all. We particularly recognise the impact of engaging with activities 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. You can read more about our ED&I Statement on our website.

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 the reviewers. **Please make every effort to ensure that no identifying content is included in Part 2** (e.g. host institution / affiliations).

As you will see form the application form, proposals for feasibility studies includes the following content:

Part One

- Project Title
- Lead organisation
- Principle Investigator
- Details of the project team, including industry partners. Please indicate which members of the academic team are early career researchers.

Part Two

- Start date and duration.
- Context, aims and objectives, and benefits of the proposed work.
- A statement of the novelty of the proposed work.
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion considerations
- An outline project plan
- What are the tangible deliverables of the feasibility study?
- How could further funding in this area be obtained?
- Explicit links to the UKRI Circular Economy Centres

References can be included as an appendix and will not be counted in any word count.

Please complete the form in Arial 11. Please submit your forms in MS Word and MS Excel documents. Do not send in PDF version.

Part Three

A breakdown of the allocation of the funds with a short justification for each category is also required. The categories are:

- Directly Allocated
- Directly Incurred
- Indirect Costs

The budget should be submitted via a separate excel template. Please ensure you annotate the excel sheet so the costs are explained.

16. What happens next if I am successful and awarded a feasibility study?

A contract process will be initiated by the University of Exeter with your institution to formally agree the contract for the funding. We will ask you for details of your contract team when you are successful.

Successful applicants will be expected to participate in CE-Hub events and will be required to present project updates at the CE Hub 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. From experience, one of the most valuable outcomes of feasibility studies is the informal network of researchers that emerges, and we expect our feasibility study teams to form a core part of the CE Hub community.

Each project will be provided with access to a mentor who will support the activities of the project. Your mentor will provide advice and feedback to you at appropriate times during your project activities. The aim is to provide your project with an additional level of support and guidance, rather than monitor its progress. Mentors may be asked to provide feedback to the CE Hub Executive Management Group from time to time.

17. Can an application be led by Industry? It seems that the lead applicant needs to be a university or an independent research organisation. Is it possible that the project is mainly delivered by a consultant (in this case Circle Economy as they would have already worked on a similar Material Flow Analysis for food), and that the lead applicant – the university - only provides expert support and peer review?

A. Industry can relate to a project as a project partner <u>OR</u> as a subcontractor. When it comes to project partners an industrial partner cannot contribute and benefit from a proposal under UKRI funding guidelines, i.e. applicants can get funding from an industry partner and they can subcontract some work to industry, but it can't be the same partner doing both. The same also applies to discounts on products and services.

As a rule Project Partners are expected to provide contributions to the delivery of the project and should not therefore be seeking to claim funds from UKRI. However, where there are specific circumstances where Project Partners do require funding for minor costs such as travel and subsistence, this will usually be paid at 80% fEC unless otherwise stated.

For subcontractors, there is not a limit to how much of the funding can be assigned, but we would expect to have it justified in the application how much and why is being subcontracted out and there should be consideration paid to this in the assessment, like why are they subcontracting X amount and has the applicant justified that appropriately

Subcontractor is a third-party individual who is not employed as staff on the grant, or a third-party organisation, who is subcontracted by the host organisation to deliver a specific piece of work. This will be subject to the procurement rules of the host organisation. All costs that support the delivery of the subcontract are eligible and will be paid at 80% fEC unless otherwise stated, these should be outlined and fully justified in the proposal and will be subject to peer review. Entitlement to the outputs of the project and/or Intellectual Property will be determined between the parties involve. We would expect the proposal to clearly outline how subcontracting is appropriate to the project.

Questions from the Webinar on **Monday 21ˢᵗ June 2021 at 12.00pm:**

Q1. Can the fund be used for user testing of a CE Digital service?
A: Yes, anything around the development of tools, particularly if it's aligned with one of the CECs and relevant resource flow.

Q2. Can we involve a non-UK based sub-contractor/partner, will they be eligible for funding?
A: Yes, you can involve a non-UK based sub-contractor/partner, the money will be given to you/your organisation and you would need to follow your own sets of rules alongside the funding T&Cs.

Q3. Would you need to have enough cashflow to pay for the feasibility study project upfront and then claim it back at 80% at the end of the project?
A: We will provide some funding at the beginning and the rest set against milestones. UKRI has only provided 80% reimbursement, so 20% will need to be provide by the applicants.

Q4. Would projects that involve circularity but not necessarily fit within one of the interdisciplinary research centres be considered (e.g. food waste to manufacture a new construction material)?
A: Proposals need to complement the work of the CECs and NICER Programme as a whole, but can be new collaborations.

Q5. Can SME's apply?
A: This feasibility study call is focussed on engaging on Hei's as the lead applicant, so an SME would not be able to apply for the funding without a collaboration with a Hei.

However, later this year there will be an Innovate UK Call (£2.5M) where SMEs can apply directly for funding.

Q6. Is ED&I being considered across a whole project team or just the PI applying? Is an ED&I form completed by each team member for example to get full picture?
A: We ask that the PI completes the x1 form on behalf of the research team anonymously.

Q7. Is the £50k limit the 100%FEC or 80% FEC cost?
A: We will reimburse 80% of the actual costs incurred for the project, therefore, if you apply for the limit at £50,000 and spend £50,000 then we will reimburse £40,000 in total. Please note that we will only be able to reimburse eligible costs that you would have included in the application

Q8. If the educational institution needs to be the lead would they or the business company that are collaborating with them would have to flip the 20% of the full economic costs (the £10k)?
A. The 20% funding shortfall will have to be covered by the main applicant of the award i.e. the Hei Lead (University).

Q9. How many projects will be selected for pitching before you make the decision of the 4 successful ones?
A: Slightly dependent upon applications that we get, anticipating 1 day for the Panel Pitch so inviting 8 to pitch to the panel. However, we might extend that if we get a high amount of high standard of applications.

Q10. Can a non-UK university apply?
A: Unfortunately not, a non-UK university could be a partner but not the lead institution. Please contact the CE Hub so that we can advise on where your project would best align to and how to contact the CECs.

Q11. Will an application be made stronger by new SMEs or not necessarily? The time available may not be sufficient to build a new relationship with new SMEs before submission, i.e. to get letters of support – are these required?
A: You do not need Letters of Support for your submission at this stage. However, we do encourage you to describe the collaborations that you have with your industry partners.

Q12: What TR level are you looking for?
A: We are looking to fund research between the levels of TR1 and TR3 – looking at projects particularly within involvement with industry partners i.e. to test the feasibility of concepts.

Q13. Would you be interested in the more social element?
A: Yes, if you have an idea around social element and if you can align it with one of the CECs and resource flows.

Q14. If People submit to the first round but are not successful can they revise their proposal and submit to the second or third rounds of the CE Hub Feasibility Fund?
A: It depends on how many applications we get to provide some feedback particularly of you get to the pitch day then we would provide feedback then so that you could amend your proposal and submit it to a subsequent round of funding.

Q15. Are CE Hub allowed to apply for this funding?
A: No, it is written into the Fund T&Cs that PIs and COIs are excluded from applying for this funding.

Q16. Are the 3 Rounds of Funding having equal amounts of funding?
A: Round 1 will have x4 feasibility studies with the total fund of £200,000 at 80% fEC (up to £50,000 each at 80% fEC). Round 2 will have x3 feasibility studies and £150,000 and Round 3 will have x3 studies at £150,000 at 80% fEC (up to £50,000 each at 80% fEC). We will fund x10 feasibility projects in total. However, as part of the NICER Programme we are looking for other funding to compliment the feasibility study, so in later rounds we hope that we may be able to offer more funding for feasibility studies.

Any other questions?
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