

## UKRI National Interdisciplinary Circular Economy Hub (CE-Hub)

### Feasibility Studies – Third Call for Proposals

**Closing Date: Friday 28th April 2023**

#### Background

A Circular Economy 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, drives up resource productivity, drives down material costs, improves resource security and can reduce negative externalities and their human and environmental costs. The National Interdisciplinary Circular Economy Research (NICER) Programme is a £30 million investment from the UKRI alongside the five National Circular Economy Centres, the CE-Hub was launched in January 2021 with the aim to:

- Accelerate understanding and solutions to enable circularity of specific resource flows;
- Provide national leadership, coordinate and drive knowledge exchange; and
- Perform embed research by involving businesses, policymakers, consumers and the wider community in every part of the programme

#### Feasibility Study Funding Call

The CE-Hub is looking to fund its third round of Feasibility Studies to accelerate Circular Economy research, innovation and implementation across disciplines, sectors and value chains.

The CE-Hub would like to fund feasibility studies that are innovative, evidence based and applied. The focus of this call explores the relationship between the Circular Economy and Wider Society. Areas of particular interest include, but are not limited to:

- Public understanding of the Circular Economy and Net Zero;
- The role of the Circular Economy in addressing complex societal challenges, such as healthcare, cost of living crisis, inequality;
- The role of the media and public opinion in scaling Circular Economy solutions;
- User behaviour and circular business models;
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion;
- Analysis, measurement and demonstration of the social benefits of a Circular Economy,
- Changes in behaviour and / or mindset; and
- Organisational behaviour.

The total funding available for this call is £100,000 and we want to fund high-quality applications. Feasibility Studies will be funded a maximum of £50,000 at Full Economic Cost (fEC). Funding will be awarded at 80% FEC (the total project value cannot exceed £50,000). Projects can be between 9 and 12 months in length and must be completed before the end of August 2024. 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).

### **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 that complement and amplify the NICER Programme. Proposals that consider different scales, including regional and place-based research, new collaborations between sectors and disciplines, have an appreciation for the whole system and involve, and/or are 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 the 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 involve asking for contact details, project team and track record information; and
- Part 2 will be the 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., your host institution etc). 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, whether 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, enter into dialogue with the public and other stakeholders where appropriate, and respect the views of others.

## Application Process

Awards will be made via a short-written application (via the two-part process as mentioned earlier), 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 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:

- Multidisciplinary,
- Involvement of Early Career Researchers,
- Involvement of Industry and / or Government Stakeholders,
- Commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion,
- Complimenting the work of the NICER programme
- Demonstration of Circular Economy Principles across scales, disciplines and industrial sectors,
- Potential for the development of future funding applications,
- Potential to create strong dissemination materials,
- Pathways to accelerate the impact of the research to ensure rapid transfer to industry, government and other end users.

## Key Dates 2023

Date	Action
Tuesday 28th February 2023	Call goes live: Public Announcement
Monday 20th March 2023 (1-2pm)	Webinar for interested participants
Friday 28th April 2023	Deadline for submissions (5pm)
Monday 5th June 2023	Invitations to Panel Pitch Day issued. Unsuccessful proposals are advised of the final decisions
Friday 16th June 2023	Panel Pitch Day
Friday 23rd June 2023	Applicants are notified of Panel Pitch outcomes
Friday 1st September 2023	Feasibility studies start
Tuesday 12th September 2023	Feasibility studies kick-off meeting
Friday 30th August 2024	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 forms provided, via email to Katie Cooke, CE-Hub Project Manager at [ce\\_hub@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:ce_hub@exeter.ac.uk) by 5pm on Friday 28th April 2023. The application forms will be made available on the [CE-Hub Website](#) as soon as the call goes live on Tuesday 28th February 2023.

## 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 Tuesday 12th September 2023.
2. Present your work (in progress or completed) at the NICER Programme annual conferences (2024 - 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 these documents which will be provided.
5. Acknowledge that the work was supported by the 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: [ce\\_hub@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:ce_hub@exeter.ac.uk)