**THE NEXUS NETWORK**
new connections in food, energy, water and the environment
An ESRC investment

# Nexus research partnership programme

# Call for Proposals November 2014 -  Networking Grants

*1. Background: The challenges of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary collaboration*

The Nexus Network (www.thenexusnetwork.org) aims to foster collaborations between researchers from different scientific disciplines (to develop interdisciplinary research involving social and natural scientists), and between researchers and stakeholders in business, policy and civil society (i.e. transdisciplinary research), in order to improve decision-making at the nexus of food, energy, water and the wider environment. Inter- and trans-disciplinary research collaborations are widely understood as being crucial for understanding and addressing such complex interlinked challenges. However, developing collaborative research projects is complex, messy, often political, and there are some well-recognised barriers to meaningful engagement. In order to support the development and implementation of co-designed research on nexus-related topics, the Nexus Network has committed £400,000 to a two-phase funding process in 2015 – 2016.

*2. The call:*

The Nexus Network research partnership programme is a two-phase process.

In the first phase, which launches on 27 November 2014, the Nexus Network is offering **five networking grants of up to £20,000** each to enable researchers to build meaningful inter-disciplinary research collaboration networks, and to establish connections with relevant stakeholders (from civil society, policy and business communities) in order to engage them as knowledge partners in the *co-design of research proposals on nexus topics*.

In the second phase (launching in November 2015), the Nexus Network will offer **two grants of up to £150,000** each for inter- and trans-disciplinary research projects on nexus themes.   While it is hoped that recipients of the initial networking grants will apply to  this subsequent round, this will be an open call and will not be limited only to recipients of the networking grants.  **Please note: This document relates to the first phase only.**  Further details about the process for applying for funding in the second phase will be made available in 2015.

The projects and activities funded in the two phases of this call will become part of the Nexus Network portfolio of work, including an upcoming series of thematic workshops.   All applicants should read through the aims of the Nexus Network, and the planned schedule of workshops at the end of this call document (section 12.)

*3. Key dates:*

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| Issue of networking grant call | 27th November 2014 |
| Application submission deadline | 30th January 2015 (1700 hrs GMT) |
| Funding decision/ award (5 x £20,000 awards) | Early April 2015 |
| Submission of networking grant deliverables | Mid-November 2015 |
| | |
| Issue of second phase call (2 x £ 150,000 awards) | End- November 2015 |
| Submission deadline | End January 2016 |

### 4. Eligibility:

➢ This call is open to researchers based at UK organisations that are eligible to receive Research Council funding (including Higher Education Institutions and some independent research organisations). For details about whether your institution is eligible for Research Council funding see here: http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/funding/eligibilityforrcs/).  Researchers based outside the UK may also be involved in an application, and collaborations between UK researchers and international partners are strongly encouraged. But the lead applicant (through whose institution/organisation the funds will be administered) must be based at a UK institution.  The thematic focus of the research agenda to be developed through this call can be either UK based or international.

➢ Lead applicants must have a PhD or at least 5 years full-time equivalent research experience.

➢ Stakeholders from business, policy and civil society who wish to take part in this process must seek a partner in an eligible UK academic institution, through whom funds will be administered. The Nexus Programme would welcome approaches from non-UK or business, policy and civil society organisations, with strong ideas for research, but who find themselves unable to find suitable UK academic partners.

➢ Funding cannot be awarded directly to individuals but will be paid to the organisation/institution with which they are affiliated (if you are not an employee of the lead organisation, it is your responsibility to ensure that they are willing to enter into an agreement with the University of Sussex, to manage the award and administer the funding on your behalf).

### 5. What can the networking grant funding be used for?

The maximum amount of funding awarded in the first round will be **£20,000 per project**.  Eligible costs are restricted to direct costs only funded at 100% (this excludes overheads/indirect costs/estate costs). fEC is not applicable for the networking grant call (but may be applicable in the second phase call).  The following types of activities and associated expenses will be considered for support:

➢ Economy travel, accommodation and subsistence for meetings with knowledge partners (e.g. to map different partners' research needs and priorities)

➢ Field/ scoping visits to potential research sites of relevance to the proposed research

➢ Workshops, meetings and other events involving potential knowledge partners

➢ Consumables (e.g.  printing; recording equipment)

➢ Professional facilitation or translation support for meetings

NB: An audit trail of project expenses is a requirement of ESRC funding. Applicants must be able to identify all direct costs claimed and maintain records of expenditure.

### 6. Networking grant deliverables:

At the end of the grant period (April - November 2015), recipients of networking grants will be expected to be able to demonstrate the existence of inter-disciplinary links, and links between researchers and other knowledge partners (from civil society, business and policy organizations) that have developed as a result of activities carried out over the course of the grant period.

At the end of the grant period the awardees will need to submit:

➢ An *outline research proposal* for a collaboratively derived, inter-disciplinary research project on a nexus-related topic.  The proposal should be focused on two or more nexus interactions (i.e. food, energy, water and environment), and have been developed through interactions between two or more sectors (i.e. academia, policy, business and civil society/NGO).

> A *collaboration report* describing how the outline proposal was developed – e.g. the way in which research priorities were determined/negotiated, the kinds of interactions that facilitated these.

Further details about the precise contents, length and formatting requirements of the outline research proposal and collaboration report will be discussed with successful awardees at the start of the grant period.

## 7. Submitting an application:

Applications must be submitted online via the Nexus Network website:
http://thenexusnetwork.org/networking-grant-application

In the online application form you will be asked for the following information:

> Name and institutional affiliation of lead applicant and partners
> Proposed title of network
> A clear, non-expert summary of the nexus issue, challenge or opportunity, to be explored (*up to 6000 characters including spaces*)
> A brief outline of the likely academic disciplines/ areas of expertise that will be brought together in this network (*up to 1000 characters including spaces*)
> An indication of other relevant knowledge partners in this area with whom engagement will be sought and a description of any existing links between the proposed research team and these partners.  Although, please note that it is not necessary for the research team to have existing links with partners in order to apply for this funding (*up to 2000 characters including spaces*)
> A description of the strategy to be employed/activities planned for the purposes of engaging knowledge partners (from other disciplines and sectors) to co-design an outline research proposal (*up to 6000 characters including spaces*)
> A justification of the funds requested

## *8. Assessment process:*

Applications will undergo a four stage process:

1. First sift by the Nexus Network management team and exclusion of applications that do not meet the eligibility criteria (see point 4. above)
2. Peer review of eligible proposals by a cross-sectoral and transdisciplinary panel consisting of representatives from business, policy, civil society and academia
3. Shortlisting by the Nexus Network Advisory Group
4. Final selection (including potential telephone interviews) by the Nexus Network management team

## 9. Assessment criteria:

> **Scope:** does the application engage with two or more nexus areas (food, energy, water and environment)?
> **Engagement strategy:** does the application outline a persuasive strategy for engagement between disciplines and between researchers and other knowledge partners? (i.e. are the kinds of engagements suggested appropriate and feasible?  Do the applicants display a depth of understanding about the possible barriers and challenges to inter- and trans-disciplinary work, and has thought been given to how these might be overcome?)
> **Quality**, **clarity and creativity** of the proposal
> **Feasibility** of the work plan over the grant period, and **appropriateness of the budget**, including Value for Money (VFM).

**10. What will the grant require of successful applicants?**

A standard grant agreement between the University of Sussex and the applicant's organisation will be established before projects start and funds are disbursed. The grant agreement will include terms and conditions related to: the grant start date and duration; the grant payment schedule; reporting requirements and timeframes; outputs and results; participation in key Nexus Network events and workshops.

**11. Contact:**

For further information about the Nexus Network please see www.thenexusnetwork.org

For further details or to discuss your proposal please contact the network coordinator, Dr Rose Cairns by emailing r.cairns@sussex.ac.uk or call 01273 876 581.

**12. About the Nexus Network**

The Nexus Network is a three year initiative funded by the ESRC and carried out by the Universities of Sussex, UEA and Cambridge. The Nexus Network aims to improve the provision of strategic research around the nexus of interactions between food, energy, water and the wider environment, in order to improve business, policy maker and other users' decision making. While natural science perspectives on nexus challenges are developing fast, social science and interdisciplinary understandings are less well developed – yet urgently needed. Multiple social science disciplines and perspectives are required to:

- Characterise the social, cultural, economic and political drivers and dynamics that impact on food, energy, water and environment interactions.
- Untangle interdependencies and trade-offs at various scales; address consequences as experienced and valued by different people; elucidate the actors, interests and power relations that shape governance and decision-making processes
- Elucidate connectedness and global nature of issues to address nexus challenges e.g. equitable access to resources, understanding and encouraging sustainable behaviours, financing the green economy

*Our specific aims are:*

1. To build and sustain a network of social scientists, natural scientists and users from business, government and civil society, able to co-design and deliver research that improves decision-making around nexus interdependencies;
2. To focus on the strategic needs of users, and shape an interdisciplinary research portfolio that targets opportunities, gaps and mismatches between user requirements, current research and future uncertainties;
3. To engage proactively with business and align nexus-linked research with business needs and tangible outcomes;
4. To support the social science research community to develop and share new data, conceptual frameworks, methodologies, skills and practices oriented towards nexus challenges;
5. To provide a UK interface for international initiatives with nexus dimensions, such as Future Earth;
6. To synthesise and analyse the outcomes of network activities to inform ESRC policies and strategies.

*Planned programme of Nexus Network thematic workshops:*

- Diverse valuation approaches to decision making around food, energy and water (November 2014)
- The role of business in responding to challenges at the nexus (April 2015)
- Resource conflicts & social justice implications of interdependencies between food, energy and water (2015)
- Nexus challenges in urban contexts (2015)
- Green Technologies and the nexus (2016)
- From evidence to policy to transformation (2016)