# Nexus research partnership programme

## Call for Proposals November 2015 – Research Partnership Grants

### *1. Background: The challenges of transdisciplinary collaboration on nexus topics*

The *Nexus Network* (www.thenexusnetwork.org) aims to foster collaborations between researchers from different scientific disciplines, and between researchers and stakeholders in business, policy and civil society, in order to improve decision-making at the nexus of food, energy, water and the wider environment. In order to support the development and implementation of transdisciplinary research on nexus-related topics, the *Nexus Network* has committed £400,000 to a two-phase[1] funding process in 2015 – 2016.

### *2. The call*

In this call, the *Nexus Network* has a total of £300,000 available to support inter- and trans-disciplinary research projects[2] on nexus themes (i.e. projects that improve understanding of food/ energy/ water nexus interactions and support actions to improve their sustainability).

Proposals are invited for funding of up to a maximum of £150,000 each.  The *Nexus Network* (which is funded by ESRC) will award funds consistent with RCUK policy, i.e. the *Nexus Network* will contribute up to 80% of FEC to HEIs, and 100% of costs to non-academic collaborators.  Proposals are invited for up to £150,000, it is expected that 2-4 proposals will be funded.

The FEC (full economic costs) of individual proposals may exceed £150,000 but the maximum total level of funding to be awarded to any given project from the *Nexus Network* will be £150,000. Applicants may choose to build-in FEC up to £150,000, or, they may make up FEC through contributions from additional institutions.

Full proposals should be submitted by **1700 UK time on 31st Jan 2016**. Applicants will be informed of the funding decisions in April 2016. Grants must start by 1st July 2016. Proposals should be for projects of up to 12 months duration.

The projects and activities funded in this call will become part of the *Nexus Network* portfolio of work, that includes an on-going 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.

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[1] Phase 1 of the Nexus Network research partnership programme (which closed in January 2015) awarded six networking grants of up to £20,000 each, in order to support researchers to build meaningful inter- and trans-disciplinary research collaboration networks, and to engage a range of stakeholders as knowledge partners in the co-design of research proposals on nexus topics.  Recipients of phase I grants are encouraged to apply to phase II, but this is an open call, and not restricted to recipients of phase I funding.

[2] See http://www.thenexusnetwork.org/what-is-transdisciplinarity/

*3. Scope*
- ➢ Proposals must have the potential to improve understanding of interactions between two or more nexus areas (food, energy, water and environment).
- ➢ Proposals must involve collaboration beyond academia (e.g. with civil society, business or policy) in the co-design of the research
- ➢ The thematic focus of the research can be either UK based or international.

*4. Key dates:*

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| Research Partnership Call opens | 19th November 2015 |
| Submission deadline | 31st January 2016 1700 hrs GMT |
| Funding decision / award | Early April 2016 |
| Latest start date for awarded projects | 1st July 2016 |
| Latest end date for awarded projects | 1st July 2017 |

*5. 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.
- ➢ 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 Network* team 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).

**6. Submitting an application:**

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

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 project
- ➢ A clear, non-expert summary of the nexus issue, challenge or opportunity, to be explored (*up to 6000 characters including spaces*)
- ➢ A description of the project activities, including proposed methodology and deliverables (up to 6000 characters)
- ➢ A description of the transdisciplinary nature of the project, including the different academic disciplines and other knowledge partners (from outside academia) who will be brought together in this project, and how (*up to 2000 characters including spaces*)
- ➢ Track record of the proposed team (*up to 2000 characters including spaces*).

> Amount applied for, budget breakdown and justification of the funds requested (*up to 2000 characters including spaces*).
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## 7. Assessment process:

Applications will undergo a three-stage process:

1. First sift by the *Nexus Network* management team and exclusion of applications that do not meet the eligibility criteria (see point 5. 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. Final selection, including potential interviews.

## 8. 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 (i.e. clearly articulated vision for the proposed piece of work) and creativity (i.e. novelty and creativity in the approach taken)** of the proposal
> **Feasibility** of the work plan over the grant period, and **appropriateness of the budget**, including Value for Money (VFM).
> **Track record** of the proposed team with regard to inter- and trans-disciplinary work
> **Impact:** Potential for transformation of research agendas, policy agendas etc.

## 9. 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. 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.

## 10. 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, Cian O'Donovan by emailing C.O-Donovan@sussex.ac.uk or call 01273 87 3603.

## 11. About the Nexus Network

The Nexus Network is a three-year initiative (running from June 2014 – September 2017) 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.

*Programme of Nexus Network thematic workshops:*

➢ Diverse valuation approaches to decision making around food, energy and water (http://www.thenexusnetwork.org/events/past-events/)
➢ The role of business in responding to challenges at the nexus (April 2015 - http://www.thenexusnetwork.org/events/natural-bridge-exploring-business-led-action-from-nexus-thinking-workshop/)
➢ Transdisciplinary methods for developing nexus capabilities (June 2015 - http://www.thenexusnetwork.org/events/transdisciplinary-methods-for-developing-nexus-capabilities-workshop/)
➢ Resource conflicts & social justice implications of interdependencies between food, energy and water (February 29, 2016)
➢ Nexuses of the Urban: Interactions between water, energy and food provision for sustainable cities (Workshop and strategy lab. May 12-13, 2016)
➢ Green Technologies and the nexus (2016)
➢ From evidence to policy to transformation (2016)