

Floods and Droughts Research Infrastructure

Small Grant Funding Call

Funding Available

Grant size: Up to £15,000 per project

Total funding: £45,000 (up to three projects)

Call opening: 9 March 2026

Deadline: 17:00, 20 April 2026 (early applications welcome)



As part of the [Floods and Droughts Research Infrastructure \(FDRI\)](#) Project, funding is available for up to three new research projects to advance hydrological modelling or field experimentation within the Upper Tweed, Upper Severn, and Chess catchments. Each small grant, up to £15,000, will support innovative approaches that engage with FDRI's state-of-the-art field and digital technologies, helping to inform the ongoing rollout of national hydrological infrastructure. This funding call is being administered by Lancaster University as host of the FDRI Chief Science Advisor.

Background

FDRI is a £38 million five-year capital investment in world leading hydrological research infrastructure, which will feature a network of instrumented basins providing nationally relevant data. The project will instrument the [139 km² Upper Tweed](#), [174 km² Upper Severn](#) and [105 km² Chess catchments](#) with the latest technology as a focus or demonstrator for UK-wide initiatives in hydrological modelling and field experimentation. Digital solutions will underpin the observational infrastructure and facilitate data use.

The FDRI team has recently appointed [Catchment Champions](#) to encourage research engagement across the target catchments. In parallel, they have released new [long-term, quality-assured data](#) for the Upper Severn catchment. To support the wider UK hydrological community, FDRI has supported the production of a new dataset comprising of [long-term discharge records at a 15-min resolution](#) for most publicly funded UK river stations. This work has also contributed to an update of the [CAMELS-GB dataset that for the first time includes hourly rainfall and discharge](#) for most of those river catchments. Together, these initiatives create opportunities for UK researchers to engage with the FDRI catchments, through fieldwork and/or modelling, placing them in the broader context of UK hydrology and addressing key research challenges. To support this engagement, FDRI is offering small grants to UK researchers.

Aim of the Call

The purpose of this small grant call is to encourage novel research that will inform the rollout of FDRI's field and digital technologies and lay the groundwork for future major funding programmes.

Eligibility

Applications are welcome from both Early Career Researchers, defined as those within five years of starting research, and established academics at UK universities/institutes. Projects may focus entirely on modelling or involve experimental fieldwork, but all proposals must make a clear link either to the hydrological behaviour of the Upper Tweed, Upper Severn or Chess catchments, or to the advanced technologies being developed for FDRI. Within this context, research may explore hydrological modelling, hydrological processes including those relevant to water quality, or hydrological field technology. Examples of possible topics are provided in Box 1 to stimulate ideas, but applicants are encouraged to propose their own.

Individual Catchment Champions and FDRI partner institutions (UKCEH, BGS, Bristol and Imperial) are ineligible to apply for this call.

Funding and Resources

Each grant is worth up to £15,000 inclusive of VAT, with most resources expected to cover staff time and institutional overheads, though equipment and travel costs may also be included.

Application Requirements

Proposals should not exceed four pages of A4 in total, including:

- two pages for the science case including justification, figures and references,
- one page for resources detailing staff time (hours, days or FTE), costs per person, institutional overheads, equipment and travel (trips, cost per trip and total),
- one page summarising the *curriculum vitae* of all team members.

Applications must be submitted as a single PDF by email to chiefscienceadvisor-fdri@lancaster.ac.uk by 17:00 GMT on 20 April 2026.

Assessment

An independent panel of hydrologists will assess bids based on: (1) scientific excellence and novelty, and (2) relevance to FDRI's developing technology systems. By applying, you agree for it to be shared for assessment purposes. Grants may run for up to twelve months, though shorter projects are also welcome.

Grant Conditions

Award recipients will be required to follow the 'Specific terms, conditions, and requirements' (attached). We expect to make three awards under this call, with the intention that at least one will involve an Early Career Researcher.

Further information

For questions about the scope of the small grant bids or details of FDRI's developing infrastructure, contact the NERC Chief Science Advisor at chiefscienceadvisor-fdri@lancaster.ac.uk. Award holders will be expected to share plans and headline findings with the relevant Catchment Champions and may seek advice from the Chief Science Advisor at any stage of the grant.

BOX 1: illustrative small grant topics – to stimulate ideas

- Evaluating a novel rain gauge design against an FDRI reference gauge
- Learning from inter-comparison of measurement devices for moisture content at FDRI reference soil stations
- Integration of soil moisture observations to estimate patterns of storage
- Better estimation of patterns of rainfall inputs
- Better estimation of wet canopy evaporation in space and time
- Observing the dynamics of a farm pond during floods and/or droughts
- Reducing uncertainty in rainfall-runoff model simulations by incorporating novel observations
- Value of natural or artificial tracer experiments to inform interpretation of hydrometric sensor observations or network design
- Identification of preferential flows at plot or hillslope scales
- Hydrological interpretation of rainfall-runoff dynamics of an FDRI Catchment in comparison to other UK catchments
- Advances in automated quality assurance of hydrological time-series
- Complex flow structures and mixing in river reaches observed with a thermal drone

Terms, conditions, and requirements

This award is subject to [UKRI Terms and Conditions of Grants Meeting terms and conditions for funding – UKRI](#) as well as specific terms set out in this award letter.

Specific Terms, conditions, and requirements

The following conditions apply to this award:

i/ The funding is cash limited. The Awardee should inform Lancaster University of any risk of overspend at the earliest opportunity.

ii/ The funding is either Resource (recurrent expenditure) or Capital (limited to the procurement, build or enhancement of assets) and spend should be charged accordingly.

iii/ The Awardee is required to participate in NERC assurance activity associated with this award. To satisfy this requirement, unless otherwise agreed in writing, Lancaster University will request a **one-page end of project report from the Awardee that shall include details of the final project expenditure** which shall be submitted to NERC following completion of each project. Further information on assurance will be provided by Lancaster as advised by NERC to meet NERC's requirements.

iv/ Any risk of material deviation from the funding profile should be relayed to Lancaster University (consultancy@lancaster.ac.uk).

v/ The Awardee may not vary the deliverables in the proposals unless prior agreement has been sought and obtained from Lancaster University.

vi/ The Awardee will need to invoice Lancaster University for the agreed amount.

vii/ Lancaster University is to establish local governance to cover contract, restricted fund control, budget expenditure, programme, quality, delivery, and risk as appropriate to the size and nature of the project. Lancaster University will also ensure that this requirement is flowed down to awardees, who will be asked to outline the proposed local governance in their grant applications.

viii/ Lancaster University is required to demonstrate how net zero targets, environmental sustainability and equality, diversity and inclusion issues will be addressed which will support delivery of the Proposals. Lancaster University currently has and will continue to maintain appropriate institutional level policies, procedures and reports to support this requirement, which shall be available to NERC upon written request.

ix/ Where awards result in assets, award holders are required to maximise the exploitation of the assets to support high-quality research and innovation and to enable wider access where appropriate.

x/ Where awards result in assets, award holders must assist with any reporting or review requirements requested by NERC up to eighteen months after the equipment becomes operational or capital maintenance work has been conducted, including details of equipment usage. Award holders must keep a record of all usage, providing details of the user and scientific project, which must be made available to NERC.

xi/ Where awards result in assets, NERC reserves the right to conduct asset validation and verification up to eighteen months post award, which could include site visits to view the equipment.

xii/ Awardees should consider the equality impacts of their projects. Guidance on undertaking an equality impact assessment is provided in Annex A.

This document provides guidance when completing an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA). The EIA template can be found at the end of this document.

The Research Councils are committed to promoting equality and participation in all their activities, whether this is related to the work we do with our external stakeholders or whether this is related to our responsibilities as an employer. As public authorities we are also required to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations when making decisions and developing policies. To do this, it is necessary to understand the potential impacts of the range of internal and external activities on separate groups of people.

What is an Equality Impact assessment (EIA) and why do we need to complete one?

An equality impact assessment (EIA) is an evidence-based approach designed to help organisations ensure that their policies, practices, events, and decision-making processes are fair and do not present barriers to participation or disadvantage any protected groups from participation. This covers both strategic and operational activities.

The term ‘policy,’ as used throughout this document, covers the range of functions, activities, and decisions for which your organisation is responsible, including for example, strategic decision-making, arranging strategy & funding panels, conferences, training courses and employment policies.

The EIA will help to ensure that:

- We understand the potential effects of the policy by assessing the impacts on separate groups both external and internal.
- Any adverse impacts are identified, and actions identified to remove or mitigate them.
- Decisions are transparent and based on evidence with clear reasoning.

When might I need to complete an EIA?

Whether an EIA is needed or not will depend on the impact that the policy may have and relevance of the activity to equality. The EIA should be done when the need for a new policy or practice is identified, or when an existing one is reviewed. Depending on the type of policy or activity advice can be sought from either your HR team, your Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team, your Peer Review Policy team, or their equivalents.

Ideally, an EIA should form part of any new policy, event or funding activity and be factored in as early as one would for other considerations such as risk, budget or health and safety.

Who is responsible for completing and signing off the EIA?

Depending on the nature of the policy, event or funding activity, the responsibility of who should complete the assessment, who should be consulted, and who should sign off the EIA will vary. Ultimate responsibility on whether an EIA is required, and the evaluation decision(s) made after completing the EIA lies with the Senior Responsible Officer, budget holder, project board or the most relevant senior manager. Further advice is available from your Equality, Diversity & Inclusion contact.

What is discrimination?

Discrimination is where someone is treated less favourably or put at a disadvantage because of their protected characteristic. The separate groups covered by the Equality Act are referred to as protected characteristics: disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership status, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, sex (gender), and age.

Discrimination is usually unintended and can often remain undetected until there is a complaint. Improving or promoting equality is when you find ways to remove barriers and improve participation for people or groups with a protected characteristic.

Building the evidence, making a judgement

In cases of new policies or management decisions there may be little evidence of the potential effect on protected characteristic groups. In such cases you should make a judgement that is as dependable as possible. Consultation will strengthen these value judgements by building a consensus that can avoid obvious prejudices or assumptions.

Consultation

Consultation can add evidence to the assessment. Consultation is particularly important and key to proving that organisations are meeting the equality duties, but it also needs to be proportionate and relevant. Considering the degree and range of consultation will safely guard against 'groupthink' by involving a diverse range of consultees. These are the key considerations, to avoid over-consultation on a small policy or practice and under-consultation on a significant policy or an activity that has the potential to create barriers to participation.

Provisional Assessment

At the first stages, you may not have all the evidence you need so you can conduct a provisional assessment. Where a provisional assessment has been conducted, there must be plans to gather the required data so that a full assessment can be completed after a reasonable time. The scale of these plans should be proportionate to the activity at hand. When there is enough evidence a full impact assessment should be prepared. Only one EIA should be created for each policy, as more evidence becomes available the provisional assessment should be built upon.

Valuing Differences

EIAs are about making comparisons between groups of employees, service users or stakeholders to find differences in their needs and/or requirements. If the difference is disproportionate, then the policy may have a detrimental impact on some and not others.

Evaluation Decision

There are four options open to you:

- 1/ No barriers or impact found; therefore, activity will go ahead.
- 2/ You can decide to stop the policy or practice at some point because the evidence shows bias towards one or more groups.
- 3/ You can adapt or change the policy in a way which you think will eliminate the bias, or
- 4/ Barriers and impact found, however having considered all available options carefully, there appear to be no other proportionate ways to achieve the aim of the policy or practice (e.g., in extreme cases or where positive action is taken). Therefore, you are going to go ahead with caution with this policy or practice knowing that it may favour some people less than others, providing justification for this decision.

In most cases, where disproportionate disadvantage is found by conducting EIAs, policies and practices are usually changed or adapted. In these cases, or when a change has been justified, you should consider making a record on the project risk register.

Equality Impact Assessment

Question	Response
1. Name of policy/funding activity/event being assessed.	
2. Summary of aims and objectives of the policy/funding activity/event.	
3. What involvement and consultation has been done in relation to this policy? (e.g., with relevant groups and stakeholders)	
4. Who is affected by the policy/funding activity/event?	
5. What are the arrangements for monitoring and reviewing the actual impact of the policy/funding activity/event?	

Protected Characteristic Group	Is there a potential for positive or negative impact?	Please explain and give examples of any evidence/data used	Action to address negative impact (e.g., adjustment to the policy)
Disability			
Gender reassignment			
Marriage or civil partnership			
Pregnancy and maternity			
Race			
Religion or belief			
Sexual orientation			
Sex (gender)			
Age			

Evaluation:

Question	Explanation / justification	
Is it possible the proposed policy or activity or change in policy or activity could discriminate or unfairly disadvantage people?		
Final Decision:	Tick the relevant box	Include any explanation / justification required
1. No barriers identified; therefore, activity will proceed .		
2. You can decide to stop the policy or practice at some point because the data shows bias towards one or more groups		
3. You can adapt or change the policy in a way which you think will eliminate the bias		
4. Barriers and impact identified, however having considered all available options carefully, there appear to be no other proportionate ways to achieve the aim of the policy or practice (e.g., in extreme cases or where positive action is taken). Therefore, you are going to proceed with caution with this policy or practice knowing that it may favour some people less than others, providing justification for this decision.		