

Announcement of Opportunity

Part A: Scope of ESPA-2016 Grants

Published: 8 March 2016

Deadline: Full proposals to be submitted via Je-S
by **16:00 (4pm) UK Local Time (GMT+1/UCT+1), 17 May 2016**

The Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation (ESPA) research programme is funded by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) and Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). ESPA is an international programme funding cutting-edge interdisciplinary research generating new knowledge to enhance global understanding of how ecosystems function and provide services that contribute to human well-being, poverty alleviation and sustainable development that benefits the poor.



A research programme co-funded by DFID, NERC & ESRC and accredited by LWEC



Summary

1. The ESPA-2016 Grants call is for research synthesis projects designed to significantly advance global understanding on the way that ecosystem services contribute to poverty alleviation. The call will fund a set of projects that build upon the scientific advances and evidence generated by [ESPA projects](#)¹.
2. ESPA is focusing on synthesis, impact and legacy in its final phase of work. It recognises that synthesis should (a) in large part be co-constructed by the growing ESPA community, (b) draw on other evidence where helpful to improve the sample size and for validation; and (c) take the chance to look through a number of policy 'lenses' prior to attempting an overall analysis.
3. ESPA-2016 projects will use ESPA research, knowledge and frameworks as a starting point but researchers will be required to extend their analysis more widely to consider all other relevant research evidence from the perspective of ESPA's aims and approach. This requires interdisciplinary studies considering the links between a range of ecosystem services and multiple dimensions of poverty.
4. As with all previous ESPA projects, the research needs to have specific emphasis on generating new understanding that can benefit poor people in low-income countries (LICs), but projects are encouraged to consider how the results may be applicable more widely including in middle and high income countries. Research funded under ESPA-2016 is expected to inform thinking and practice over, at least, the next decade, representing a step-change in the knowledge and evidence that will underpin future activities in ESPA's sphere of activity. In this respect, the challenge of implementing the SDGs may provide a policy-relevant context for the synthesis, especially as the SDGs demand an integrated and transformative approach.
5. ESPA-2016 welcomes interdisciplinary partnerships from both current ESPA researchers and those who have not previously been awarded ESPA grants.
6. **Applications are invited for funding in the range of between £50,000 and £200,000 GBP Full Economic Cost (FEC).** This call has been allocated a total available budget of up to £1.0 million GBP, which may be revised at the discretion of the Programme Executive Board (PEB).
7. **Projects will be funded for a maximum duration of 12 months, with an expected start date between 1 September 2016 and 1 December 2016.** Projects will not be able to postpone their start date to later than 1 December 2016. All other standard NERC guidelines will apply.
8. Projects will be selected through an expert peer review process making recommendations to the PEB.(see Part B of the AO for further details).

**Full proposals must be submitted via Je-S by 16:00 GMT+1/UCT+1
on 17 May 2016**

¹ www.espa.ac.uk/projects

Abbreviations

AO	Announcement of Opportunity
DFID	Department for International Development
ESPA	Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
FAQ	Frequently Asked Questions
FEC	Full Economic Cost
GBP	Great British Pound
<i>GMT</i>	<i>Greenwich Mean Time</i>
Je-S	Joint Electronic Submission System
LIC	Low-income country
MIC	Middle-income country
NERC	Natural Environment Research Council
NGO	<i>Non-Governmental Organisation</i>
<i>PEB</i>	<i>Programme Executive Board</i>
RCUK	Research Councils UK
RIS	Research Information Services (a standardised data tag format)
UTC	Coordinated Universal Time

Important Terminology (Related to the Call)

Term	Definition	Reference
Developing Country Research Institutions	A national or regional research institution or an NGO with the capacity to undertake high-quality research that is operating in a low-income or a middle-income country. ESPA does not consider that offices of international agencies and research organisations or international NGOs that are located in developing countries should be considered to be developing country institutions.	
Developing Country Researcher	An individual holding the nationality of a developing country (low-income or middle-income countries) who will undertake a research role in the ESPA project.	
Low-Income Country (LIC)	As classified by the World Bank. http://data.worldbank.org/about/country-classifications LIC countries have an average annual <i>per capita</i> income of less than US\$1,005 calculated using the World Bank Atlas Method .	World Bank Lending Groups
Middle-Income Country (MIC)	As classified by the World Bank. http://data.worldbank.org/about/country-classifications . MIC countries have an average annual <i>per capita</i> income of between US\$1,006–\$3975 (lower–middle-income) or US\$3,976–\$12,275 calculated using the World Bank Atlas Method .	World Bank Lending Groups
Poverty	Poverty can be generally understood as the lack of, or inability to achieve, a socially acceptable standard of living, or the possession of insufficient resources to meet basic needs. Poverty is a contested concept and is experienced and conceived differently according to context. Researchers will be expected to adopt a multidimensional approach to poverty.	ESPA Poverty Framework
Ecosystem Services	Ecosystem services are the final point in the delivery chain from ecosystems that are used for material or non-material goods. They result from underlying biophysical processes and structures. See the Research Strategy and UK National Ecosystem Assessment.	Knowledge Strategy
Ecosystems	The places where abiotic and biotic components of the environment come together spatially. They involve biophysical processes and structures that underpin a variety of final ecosystem services.	Knowledge Strategy

Change Log

In addition to the Change Log for this document, the ESPA Secretariat will publish a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document to support the call, which will be updated as necessary or by emailing espa@nerc.ac.uk.

All potential applicants are strongly encouraged to [register](#) to join the ESPA Directorate's mailing list and receive ESPA's monthly newsletter. Any important information relating to the call during the first stage of the proposal process will be publicised via the Directorate's mailing list.

Date	Section	Page	Detail

ESPA-2016 Research Objectives and Scope

1. This Announcement of Opportunity (AO) invites applications for projects that will deliver “synthesis” research; providing innovative synthesis and analysis of research carried out within and beyond the ESPA programme that enhances the understanding of the ways in which sustainable management and utilisation of ecosystem services contribute to the long-term alleviation of poverty for poor people (both benefits and dis-benefits can be considered).
2. Projects funded under the ESPA-2016 call are expected to enhance ESPA’s academic and policy/conceptual influence and its development impact by equipping decision-makers and communities with new knowledge and evidence, changing the way they view and act on the links between ecosystem services and poverty alleviation.
3. The ESPA-2016 call welcomes applications from both existing ESPA researchers and those not previously supported by the programme. ESPA-2016 encourages interdisciplinary partnerships as well as the participation of developing country researchers, impacts partners and decision makers and their contribution should be documented in the case for support.
4. This call will fund a number of projects (funding £50K to £200K FEC) which have been designed specifically to provide significant added value to the ESPA programme by delivering innovative research, enhancing global understanding of the circumstances under which ecosystem services contribute to sustainable poverty alleviation. £1.0 million has been allocated to fund projects in this call.

ESPA’s Vision

5. ESPA is an international research programme providing evidence of how ecosystem services can be used sustainably to support well-being and sustainable poverty alleviation among poor people in developing countries. ESPA projects are interdisciplinary, linking the social and natural sciences to address a series of focused research questions and evidence challenges. They are delivered through collaborative partnerships of the world’s best researchers. ESPA’s success will be measured by the way that its research can be turned into results that benefit the poor in a sustainable manner.
6. [ESPA’s vision](#) combines research excellence with development impact, with a focus on:
 - generating world-class science in ESPA’s key research areas (see [ESPA’s Knowledge Strategy](#)); and
 - working with partners to ensure that ESPA’s new knowledge is put into use to support significant and sustainable delivery of ecosystem services, poverty alleviation and growth (see ESPA’s Impact Strategy).

Synthesis Research: Developing the next generation of thinking for ESPA

7. The ESPA programme has funded a significant body of research since 2007 (Annex A). As the programme moves into its final phase, the ESPA-2016 call provides an opportunity for the world’s best researchers to add significant value to the ESPA programme and to enhance impact – that is, bring about change in the lives of poor people in developing countries –through synthesis.

8. The ESPA-2016 research call invites applications for projects that synthesise the best available research evidence – from within and beyond the ESPA-funded portfolio – to answer a specific question in relation to the theme(s) the project is addressing.
9. Projects will utilise the current ESPA [Knowledge](#) and [Impact](#) Strategies and ESPA research portfolio as a starting point to frame their work and then adopt innovative and forward-looking approaches to significantly extend global understanding in ESPA's area of activity.
10. As specified in ESPA's newly revised [Impact Strategy](#), synthesis can add value by:
 - Catalysing further conceptual advancement within the academic community
 - Consolidating, strengthening and enhancing the accessibility of ESPA's body of evidence to amplify influence and uptake by a range of potential research users and,
 - Clarifying the strengths and weaknesses of research on the linkages between ecosystem services and poverty alleviation as it currently stands to inform future research and development activities this area.
11. ESPA-2016 welcomes both '**supply-led**' synthesis that consolidates a critical mass of knowledge and analysis in the field of ESPA research; and '**demand-led**' synthesis that responds directly to a demonstrable evidence need and/or has a clearly defined 'research into use' pathway to impact.
12. Researchers should clearly articulate the supply- and/or demand-led rationale for their proposal. Where supply-led, researchers should feel free to suggest themes based on their specialist knowledge of the existing literature, demonstrating that there is a substantial body of evidence both from ESPA and beyond to which the synthesis can add value and provide new insights. Where demand-led, researchers should suggest themes based on their understanding of the external context and institutional landscape, and link their proposed activities into emerging IPBES, Sustainable Development Goals and other relevant processes wherever possible.

Types of synthesis activity

13. Different approaches to synthesis could include:
 - Synthesis and/or meta-analysis that start with ESPA research results (including conceptual frameworks) of either the entire programme or components/themes and then extend analysis to include relevant research evidence from outside ESPA, in order to extend the scale or scope and/or fill evidence gaps i.e. looking at the world through the "lens" of ESPA research.
 - "Think-pieces" that explore key scientific and developmental themes, findings and methodologies across the ESPA programme.
 - Synthesis that explores and addresses key knowledge gaps of system-wide importance for change that have emerged from ESPA, especially those which if answered have the potential to be transformational in relation to delivering global sustainable development through ecosystem services. Note that projects should not specifically be about identifying knowledge gaps, but should endeavour to understand and fill those gaps through synthesis.
14. **The list of activities above is not intended to be exhaustive, and if you have ideas that are not covered here or you are unsure if your idea fits the scope, you are encouraged to discuss these with the ESPA Secretariat (espa@nerc.ac.uk) before submitting a proposal.**

Other types of synthesis covered outside this call

Synthesis of ESPA activities will also be carried through other programme level actions, including by the Directorate. ESPA-2016 is not looking for synthesis projects focussed on general ESPA learning, for example:

- General comparisons and reviews of methodological and interdisciplinary approaches, including different disciplinary and sector approaches to language and terminologies
- Participatory processes - lessons learned from engaging end users and beneficiaries, citizen science, etc
- ESPA success stories (what has worked and why)
- Defining and measuring ESPA programme-level impact

- 15. Applicants should note that ESPA-2016 will not fund proposals that include new experimental research (e.g. field studies) as this cannot be considered a synthesis activity. ESPA-2016 is also not designed to provide top-up / incremental funds to existing pieces of work, funded either by ESPA or by other agencies.**

Themes for ESPA-2016 synthesis

16. Applicants should refer to the [ESPA website](#) to identify areas suitable for synthesis.
17. The chosen theme should have sufficient **scale** (relevant to a large geographical area) and **reach** (applicable to large number of people) to have potential of significant impact on poverty for large numbers of people.
18. To date, a key finding of ESPA research has been the importance of distributional issues, including gender, equity and justice, when considering how poor people benefit from ecosystem services. All applicants are encouraged to consider if these are relevant to their proposed topic or research. It is also noted that these topics could form the basis of a proposal in their own right.
19. ESPA's funders have highlighted that they would welcome proposals that address any of the following themes.
- Equality of access and distribution of benefits and dis-benefits – in particular as regards gender and youth; possibly as part of a wider analysis of power relations within and between stakeholder groups.
 - Climate and environmental change as a driver of change in the links between ecosystem system services and poverty alleviation.
 - The opportunities to manage ecosystem services for climate change adaptation and mitigation.
 - Governance and the dynamics of institutional change - the role of formal and informal institutions in mediating the links between ecosystem services and poverty alleviation; how effective institutions evolve; the role of the political economy and the importance of political processes (local, national and international) on how ecosystem services contribute to poverty reduction.

- Dimensions and dynamics of poverty and well-being – this could include for example, ESPA findings that are relevant to particular types of poor or livelihood groups; concepts and models of poverty and wellbeing used; connectivity between multiple deprivations; vulnerability/resilience to poverty;
- Conceptual and operational frameworks – has ESPA advanced the MA and other frameworks?; how are frameworks used?; how are feedbacks, interactions and limits dealt with?; how can they work across scales?
- Incentives for management of ecosystem services e.g.: payments for ecosystem services (PES)

Research questions to be addressed by all ESPA-2016 projects

20. All projects funded by ESPA-2016 will be expected to address the following aspects and questions for the theme(s) the project is addressing. **This should be included in a report to be submitted to the programme to be published on the ESPA website.**

- Summarise what the research says relating to the theme of the study and how does this relate to how ecosystem services may or may not deliver sustainable poverty alleviation.
- In what distinct ways has ESPA-funded research made a clearly definable and significant contribution to this area of knowledge?
- Summarise any methodological approaches and advances that have contributed to the development of this area of work. How have they made a difference? What advances are partly attributable to the ESPA programme?
- How has the synthesis added value and extended our understanding in this area? What are the new, innovative or otherwise significant insights for different stakeholder groups?
- How may understanding and impact in this area be advanced through follow-on research and/or policy actions?

Requirements central to all applications

21. Projects will be required to consider the relevant range of the (multiple) dimensions of poverty and of multiple ecosystem services to ensure that the solutions are sustainable over the medium term (decades). Choices about which dimensions to consider must take account of relevant environmental, demographic, technological and societal changes.
22. All applicants wishing to be funded under the ESPA-2016 call must use their proposal to demonstrate how they will:
 - a. Build upon, utilise and extend understanding generated by research previously funded by the ESPA programme;
 - b. Use the ESPA [Knowledge](#) and [Impact](#) Strategies as a starting point for the conceptualisation of the research synthesis, noting that this framing should not be allowed to constrain the potential outcomes of the research;
 - c. Utilise research from outside the ESPA programme to further contextualise and enrich the conclusions derived from ESPA projects.

Applications to the ESPA 2016 call must:

- **Demonstrate how the synthesis will be carried out and describe any innovative, and, if appropriate, “risky” features of the proposed research.** Proposals should explain how the successful completion of the project will change the way that the links between ecosystem services and poverty alleviation are viewed.
- **Consider all contexts of relevance to the synthesis** including disciplinary, governance, geographical.
- **Refer to published peer-reviewed literature** relevant to the synthesis, *but* project teams are strongly encouraged to consider appropriate ways to incorporate other sources of knowledge **including, as appropriate, grey literature and indigenous knowledge.**
- **Clearly demonstrate research excellence** that has **relevance to the needs of poor people living in low-income countries.**
- **Include defined and appropriate methodologies** and rationale for the proposed academic synthesis.
- **Address a range of ecosystems services, and link these to a multi-dimensional analysis of poverty and human well-being and the ways that poor people can move out of poverty.**
- **Consider both natural and social systems** (socio-ecological systems) as well as the processes and links between.
- **Include/consider multiple dimensions of poverty and human well-being** (see [ESPA's Poverty Framework](#)).
- **Demonstrate understanding of the ecosystem processes that underpin different services and benefits or dis-benefits** in order to identify synergies and trade-offs between them (see [ESPA's Knowledge Strategy](#)).

Expected outcomes and deliverables for all projects

23. ESPA-2016 projects are expected to produce outcomes of very significant importance. Applicants should aim to publish results in the highest ranked international journals. However it is recognised that these may not always be the most appropriate for sustainable development research. The case for support should describe the target journals for publications, the rationale behind the choice and the realistic prospects for achieving this.

24. There are three expected deliverables that are expected of all funded ESPA-2016 projects.

- a. A final project report in a standard format for publication on the ESPA [website](#). This must include answers to the questions listed in Paragraph 20, plus an annotated² bibliography of research publications relevant to the synthesis.
- b. An electronic bibliography of publications used in the synthesis study using a standard data exchange format (e.g. RIS, Endnote, Medline etc.)
- c. At least one potential peer-reviewed academic publication in listed high calibre relevant publication should be in preparation by the end of the project. ESPA's

² An annotated bibliography lists all relevant papers that have been included in the synthesis study along with a short summary (1-2 paragraphs) of the key findings of each paper

fundings accept that it will not be possible to have this submitted or accepted for publication by the end of the project, but will require all projects to submit a draft publication to the ESPA Directorate by the end of the project which indicates the target publication and potential alternatives.

Sources of Information to support proposals and funded projects

It is essential that all applicants for ESPA-2016 funding refer to information on ESPA-funded research available on the [ESPA website](#) before preparing and submitting their proposals.

25. A [full project list](#) of ESPA funded research is available on the programme website.
26. A list of [publications](#) from ESPA projects is available on the programme website. These can be downloaded in standard bibliographic formats.
27. The ESPA [Project Finder](#) Tool can be used to identify projects that have reported that they are working on themes relevant to a number of likely themes for ESPA-2016 projects. Individual project pages then lead to relevant publications.

Poverty Focus and Geographic Scope of this Call

Poverty focus of the research and its location

28. ESPA's research needs to be focused on poverty and have a pathway to impact that will help to reduce poverty and, through this, improve the lives of poor people, particularly those living in low-income countries.
29. ESPA considers that poverty is multidimensional, going beyond single measures of income or consumption (see ESPA [Poverty Framework](#) and recognises that poverty is experienced differently according to context. ESPA, therefore, expects researchers to adopt a multidimensional understanding of poverty, and one that is relevant to the specific research context. It is likely that a mixed methods approach will be most appropriate for improving the understanding of the underlying determinants and dynamics of poverty.

Where should ESPA-2016 research be focused?

ESPA's research is expected to generate new knowledge and/or thinking of international relevance that has the potential to benefit the lives of poor people in low-income countries. The World Bank's [income classifications](#) are available online. A list of countries currently classified as being low-income is provided at <http://data.worldbank.org/about/country-classifications>. The participation of developing country researchers and developing country research institutions is strongly encouraged in all ESPA Grants.

ESPA actively encourages international collaboration and the active involvement of developing country researchers and institutions in the design and implementation of projects.

30. There are no restrictions on where researchers are located or their nationality. Similarly, there are no geographic restrictions on where research institutions are based, as long as they meet the administrative eligibility requirements for funding (for further information or to check your eligibility, please contact the ESPA Secretariat directly at espa@nerc.ac.uk).

31. ESPA-2016 encourages the participation of developing country researchers, impacts partners and decision makers and their contribution should be documented in the case for support.

Pathways to Impact

32. Applicants should refer to ESPA's new [Impact Strategy](#) for guidance on the types of impacts expected from ESPA research. There are many potential ways for research from ESPA-2016 projects to deliver academic influence (conceptual) or development impact. For this reason, the programme is not being prescriptive in terms of expectations from projects and applicants are required to use their pathway to impact statement to:
 - a. describe who is interested and/or could benefit from this research, and how will they use it
 - b. describe the type and significance of potential impact(s) that could be derived from the project and
 - c. describe what the project will do in order to promote the achievement of that impact.

Annex A - Timeline of the ESPA Programme

1. The current call for ESPA's 2014 Grants will build upon nine previous sets of projects since 2007 (Figure 1).

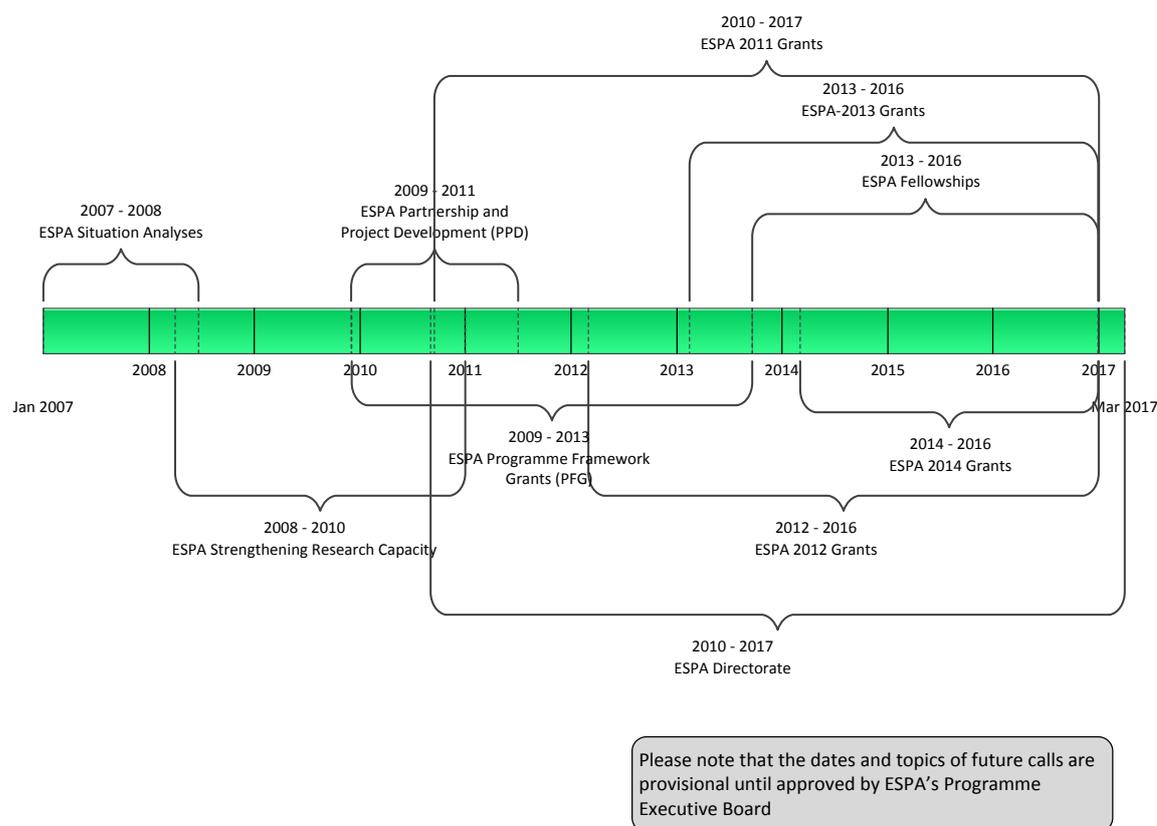


Figure 1 Timeline of ESPA calls

2. Information about ESPA projects that have been funded by ESPA is available from the [ESPA website](#).

Call	Period	Number of projects
ESPA Situation Analyses	2007–2008	6
ESPA Strengthening Research Capacity	2008–2010	11
ESPA Partnership and Project Development	2009–2011	28
ESPA Programme Framework Grants	2008–2013	18
ESPA-2011 Grants (Consortium Grants)	2012–2016	3
ESPA-2012 Grants	2013–2016	6
ESPA-2013 Grants	2013–2016	11
ESPA Fellowships	2014–2016	8
ESPA-2014 Grants	2015–2016	5