

## **Generic Feedback from the Partners on the Responses Received to the Expression of Interest / Intention to Submit Stage under the Urban Living Partnerships Pilot Call Phase**

### **Overview of the response to request to submit EOIs / intentions to submit under the Urban Living Partnership**

Overall the partners are very encouraged by the initial response to the call and the wide range of ideas and collaborations outlined in the EOIs covering a spread of urban areas and challenges / opportunities.

We received 64 EOIs by the deadline which have been analysed in developing the feedback below; two further EOIs were submitted after the closing date and have not been included in this analysis.

There was a considerable degree of heterogeneity between the EOIs and it is recognised that at the time the EOIs were submitted consortia and ideas were at different stages of their development. As a result it is difficult to provide generic feedback which applies across all the EOIs submitted.

Given the large number of EOIs submitted we are not able to provide detailed or specific individual feedback on each EOI. However, the general feedback below reflects some issues that arose most frequently in analysing the information provided in the EOIs against the advertised call document. In considering this general feedback applicants should bear in mind that these points may or may not be relevant, or will be relevant to varying degrees, to each individual EOI. Other than the general feedback below, we do not intend to publish any further information on the call or provide more feedback ahead of the closing date for full proposals.

### **Geographical Spread of EOIs**

Of the 64 EOIs 10 covered parts of Greater London. 37 different urban areas were covered in the remaining EOIs. All 15 of the largest urban areas in the UK were covered to some degree by one or more EOIs and 18 of the 20 largest urban areas. Coverage of smaller urban areas was more uneven. 25% of the EOIs covered smaller urban areas, predominantly within Greater London and in the South East of England.

13 urban areas were covered by more than one EOI, including one urban area covered by 3 EOIs. Some applicants may wish to refer to the comments in point 3 of the general feedback regarding multiple bids covering the same urban area.

## **Research Collaborations**

71 different research organisations were involved in EOIs. The largest number of EOIs led from a single research organisation was 4. 37% (24) of EOIs involved only one research organisation, 52% involved between 2 and 3 research organisations and 11% involved 4 or more.

92% of projects involve a research organisation with close proximity of the proposed pilot urban area. 32% of projects involve academic expertise from outside of the geographical location of the pilot urban area. 11% of EOIs are cross-regional / involve more than one urban area

Further comments on research collaborations are provided in point 4 of the general feedback

## **Collaborations outside academia**

89% of EOIs involved a local government organisation. 25% identify an NHS/ Public health/care organisation as a partner

77% of projects involve a private sector partner

78% involve a partner from civil society

Further comments on wider collaborations are provided in point 5 of the general feedback

## **Fit to the Call**

The most commonly identified concern regarding fit to the call requirements related to those EOIs focused on a specific project or set of projects addressing a (often quite narrowly defined) challenge or opportunity rather than on integrated challenge / opportunity diagnostics.

Other concerns regarding fit to the call affecting more than 5 EOIs related to the extent to which proposals integrated the existing strengths within local research and innovation ecosystems, the breadth of the cross-disciplinary expertise on which teams were drawing and the range of partners across local government and the public private and third sectors.

Each of these issues is covered further in the general feedback below.

## **General Feedback to Applicants and Clarification for Applicants in the Light of the EOIs submitted**

### **1. Addressing the diagnostic focus of the pilot phase**

The call document states that the focus of the diagnostic phase is on holistic diagnosis of the cross-sectoral challenges present in the selected urban area

which *"demonstrably affect multiple sectors of the city and transcend individual city systems and communities"*. A key aim outlined in the call is to *"develop more integrated understanding of the inter-relationships and inter-dependences associated with the complex challenges and opportunities faced by urban areas"*.

A broad, evidence-based understanding of the complex inter-relationships, communities and systems of an urban area will be essential to any successful full proposal under this call. However, we recognise that within this broad framing consortia may wish to identify some exemplar challenge areas or focus on a number of broad challenges to illustrate how they would develop an integrated approach and/or in which to 'test' or pilot their integrated approach; where such challenges are identified the proposal should justify their selection (e.g. in terms of current city visions, past 'diagnostics research', distinctive features of the urban area, availability of data/ infrastructure/ resources/local assets, etc.) and show how they will be developed through more integrated, holistic analysis which explores the wider connections within the urban area.

It will be important to demonstrate how – by combining expertise and cutting across silos, the proposed diagnostic phase will add value to past work and enabling the partners to do things that they could not do through other funding routes /streams, particularly through enabling more integrated inter-disciplinary and cross-organisational approaches to understanding urban challenges and identify opportunities to be developed.

## **2. Potentially 'out of scope' EOIs for projects addressing specific urban challenges**

A number of EOIs seemed to fall outside the scope of the call because they focused either on a specific project or collection of specific projects aimed at addressing / exploring 'solutions' to a pre-determined challenge or set of challenges within an urban area. The focus of this call is on the diagnostic work needed to develop more integrated understanding of the complex inter-related challenges facing an urban area and setting the agenda for future research and innovation (as outlined under point 1. above). The call requires the diagnostic phase to explore challenges that *"demonstrably affect multiple sectors of the city and transcend individual city systems and communities"* and excludes under this call *"projects which seek to improve the performance or solve challenges facing a specific infrastructure that might be more suitably funded by a single Research Council"*. Some EOIs which do not include a significant diagnostic element and/or which move significantly beyond the diagnostic phase and propose to address a specific challenge, or narrow set of challenges, are unlikely to fall within the scope of the call unless substantially refocused.

Although not supporting projects aimed directly at addressing a specific challenge, the diagnostic phase should produce outcomes of value to urban

areas and project partners and participants for example through enhanced understanding of the evidence base which can be used to build the case for future activities/ investments / strategies / visions or building collaborations, engagement and/or methods of value to developing future initiatives. Some 'diagnostic' approaches may through their very nature have an 'action' or 'experimental' element to them or stimulate innovative responses. However, as the Partnership develops we envisage that it will be in future phases that we will support research and innovation projects aimed at addressing the challenges identified in the diagnostic phase, building on the more integrated approaches and understanding developed in the pilot phase.

In the meantime we would encourage applicants who have specific research or innovation projects in mind to consider whether this is the right call for what they want to do and to avoid trying to 'fit a square peg into a round hole' - an approach which is highly unlikely to prove successful in a highly competitive call. Ideas for projects to address a specific urban challenge (e.g. to reduce crime or air pollution, improve accessibility for an aging population, and so on) would be more appropriately directed towards other funding schemes operated within the Partnership (i.e. Innovate UK or the Research Councils) or to other funders as appropriate rather than developed into full proposals under this call for the diagnostic phase.

However, it is also possible that such EOIs could be substantially refocused around a 'diagnostic' phase in order to meet the requirements of the call. Alternatively in some cases the expertise, collaborations, ideas and approaches outlined in such EOIs could add value to the diagnostic work proposed under other EOIs and collaboration with other consortia could be explored.

### **3. Building on local urban innovation ecosystems and multiple EOIs covering the same urban area**

As indicated in the summary above a number of urban areas were covered by more than one, potentially competing EOI, and a number of EOIs involving only one or a small number of research organisations did not appear to fully explore the potential relevant capabilities within the relevant urban research and innovation ecosystem. The call seeks to encourage highly collaborative proposals bringing together a wide range of research and innovation strengths and partners within, and beyond, the urban area being studied.

The pilot call states that: *"We are particularly keen to encourage consortia which both integrate the existing strengths within local research and innovation ecosystems and engage with wider leading edge research and innovation expertise across the UK and internationally". "It is not expected that the partners will commission more than one consortium to conduct a pilot project within a single city. Potential consortia are strongly encouraged to network effectively and combine with other organisations intending to work in a specific city or urban area rather than to develop competing applications".* One of the

published assessment criteria is “capacity of the consortium to proactively bring together leading edge research capabilities from across the research base with businesses, city governance and public sector organisations and wider urban civil society to promote innovation”

We therefore would like to encourage highly collaborative cross-institutional proposals, bringing together expertise across organisational boundaries to facilitate more integrated approaches rather than competing proposals addressing the same urban area which may perpetuate organisational silos or dilute expertise and collaborations between different proposals.

However, the Partnership has undertaken to keep the content of EOIs confidential and does not envisage proactively seeking to broker collaboration between competing proposals covering the same urban area. Therefore it will be for applicants to decide whether broader collaborations drawing in relevant expertise and organisations within and beyond the urban area are likely to be more productive in meeting the aims of the diagnostic phase as outlined in the call.

#### **4. Research Collaborations**

As outlined in the overall summary analysis of EOIs, and not surprising at this stage in the process, the levels of collaboration between research organisations was highly variable. Whilst full applications from single research organisations may in some cases be appropriate, the overall aims of the diagnostic phase are to bring together a wide range of expertise and approaches of relevance to integrated understanding of the challenges facing an urban area, which is in most cases likely to be distributed across a range of research and innovation partners and organisations, rather than contained within a single research organisation.

As noted under point 3 above the call states *“We are particularly keen to encourage consortia which both integrate the existing strengths within local research and innovation ecosystems and engage with wider leading edge research and innovation expertise across the UK and internationally”*

Where a consortium involves a number of research organisations it will be important to make clear the added value provided by each of the research organisations, including the roles and contributions expected from each of the research partners/ collaborators in relation to achieving the aims of the diagnostic phase.

In addition to considering the benefits of broadening consortia, some EOIs might be strengthened by considering how they might link into existing research networks or facilities or create broader research advisory structures.

## **5. Wider Partnerships and collaborations**

As noted above not all EOIs identified partners across all of the sectors identified in the call (i.e. local government, business / private sector, and/ or the civic / third sector). We appreciate that at the time EOIs were submitted collaborations may still have been forming and that building collaborations will be an on-going activity during the pilot phase. Nevertheless we expect all the funded pilots to be highly collaborative with local government and to include a strong set of collaborations across all of the sectors outlined in the call (the private, public and 'third' sectors).

For the pilots, in addition to engagement with local government and leadership, it will be important to give particular attention to public, private and third sector partnerships that can support the integrated analysis, challenge / opportunity identification, participatory/ consultative visioning etc. aspects of the diagnostic phase, whilst recognising that a much broader set of networks and partners will need to be built for future phases to address the challenges and opportunities identified in the diagnostic phase.

Noting the welcome scale and diversity of the collaborations and partnerships already outlined in many EOIs, and the likelihood that these will continue to be expanded and grow in developing full proposals and as the successful pilot phase progresses, we would recommend that applicants consider carefully project management and partnership co-ordination arrangements in their full proposals. Clarity on the roles and expectations of different partners will also be important.

## **6. Cross-disciplinary and cross-Research Council collaboration**

Most of the EOIs outlined collaborations and approaches which cut across the remits of the Research Councils. A large number in particular cut across the remits of the EPSRC, ESRC, and AHRC and many also included some inputs from the remits of the MRC, NERC, STFC and/or BBSRC. The emphasis in the call is on cross- and inter-disciplinary approaches that transcend the individual remits of the Partners (all seven Research Council and Innovate UK) to bring together the relevant expertise needed to address the aims of the diagnostic phase, whichever of the remits of the partners this draws on and cuts across. Whilst there is no expectation that each full proposal for a pilot will integrate expertise and inputs from across all seven Research Council remits, we would encourage applicants to continue to explore the opportunities to draw widely on the expertise, approaches/ methods, data and wider capabilities across the full breadth of the research base which could contribute to more integrated and holistic understanding of urban challenges and opportunities.

Most of the EOIs also outlined multi-method approaches and approaches which sought to bring together different forms of data and evidence. There were some

notable clusters of EOIs which seemed to focus to varying degrees on particular types of approaches for example around data analytics, smart cities, sustainability assessment, systems analysis, integrated design or participatory approaches. Whilst the need for an integrative approach and analytical framework to bring together and interpret the different inputs, data and evidence is acknowledged, some EOIs would have benefitted from making it clearer how they would bring together different types of data/ evidence and use different methods and approaches within such framings in order to provide more integrated and cross-disciplinary insights onto the 'diagnosis' and 'understanding' of the challenges and opportunities of the urban area. Related issues such as data management will also need to be addressed in full proposals given the variety of data likely to be involved in the diagnostics phases from a wide range of sources.

## **7. A focus on the specific urban context /area**

The focus in the pilot diagnostic phase is on identifying the challenges and opportunities facing an urban area and it is these needs and opportunities which should drive the focus of proposals, with the consortium seeking to bring together the expertise and capabilities relevant to these challenges/ opportunities. In some EOIs the appearance was that the driver was coming from the capabilities within the research and innovation partners rather than the needs / opportunities of the urban area, and some applicants may wish to make the urban area drivers clearer in their proposal.

Some EOIs outlined a clear rationale for why the urban area they proposed to work on would provide a suitable, timely, 'test-bed' for exploring the more integrated diagnostic work outlined in the call. This often included an analysis of the distinctive characteristics of the urban area or its future vision and/or in what ways it might be a good exemplar or context or case study to explore urban challenges, as well as outlining the commitment and relevant strengths of partners in the urban area relevant to the proposed activities. Some identified a need to address issues around the appropriate scales, boundaries and interconnections within and beyond an 'urban area' which are likely to need to be addressed in any diagnostic work. Similarly some started to outline a case for how their proposed activities would be innovative, and add significant, distinctive, value to what has gone on in that urban area in the past and/or has the potential to contribute to a 'step change' in integrated analysis of the urban areas' challenges and opportunities . Given the large range of urban areas covered in the EOIs we would encourage all applicants to include such a case for studying their particular urban area in their full proposals.

## **8. The Assessment Process and Criteria for Full Proposals**

Applicants should be reassured that EOIs have not, and will not, be used in the assessment process, which will be based on the full proposals submitted in

January. There is therefore no constraint on the degree of change between the EOIs submitted and full proposals, nor commitment to submit a full proposal arising from an EOI.

The call for proposals lists the assessment criteria which will be used in assessing full proposals and which have been collectively agreed across the partner organisations. Applicants are encouraged to consider these carefully in preparing their full proposals, and ensure that they provide evidence in their case for support to allow reviewers to assess the strengths of their proposal against each of these criteria.

There is no hierarchy or weighting attached to these criteria. All of the proposals will be assessed against all of the criteria outlined in the call document and we will be looking to support proposals which meet, or are judged to have the potential to meet, all of the criteria. However the final criteria "Potential of the selected city / urban area as a pilot for the development of the broader Urban Living Partnership, including a balanced portfolio of city pilots and opportunity to learn from the case studies in developing further activities in the Partnership and potential for collaboration between pilot projects" will primarily be taken into account in making the final selection of pilot projects from amongst the high quality proposals which have already been assessed on an individual basis as meeting all the other assessment criteria. Discussion in proposals of the specific urban context and opportunities therein, as encouraged in point 7 above, is likely to be particularly helpful at this stage in the process.

Applicants should be aware that the assessment process for full proposals has been agreed collectively by the Partnership and will include a broadly-based assessment panel drawing on a wide range of experience from a range of academic disciplines and non-academic organisations and sectors nominated by all eight members of the Partnership. It will therefore be important that full proposals are written in accessible language for a broadly based expert panel (in a similar way that it might be written for the cross-disciplinary and cross-sectoral expertise which is expected to make up each individual pilot consortium) and not to assume that each reviewer will share the same specialist or discipline-specific expertise.