Call for Expressions of Interest:
Research Project on Public Acceptance of Electricity Network Infrastructure

Overview

The UK Energy Research Centre (UKERC) is inviting **Expressions of Interest** (EoIs) to conduct research on **public acceptance of electricity network infrastructure and the responsiveness of development processes to societal preferences**. EoIs should be submitted by **17:00 on Friday 12 September 2025**.

The authors of the successful EoI will be invited to co-create, along with UKERC's Director and research theme leaders, the details of a research proposal that would form part of UKERC's research programmes on Delivering Energy Infrastructure and Affordability, Justice and Economic Impacts.

The co-created research, led by the authors of the selected EoI and conducted by their teams, should start no later than 30 March 2026, and should conclude by 30 June 2028. The maximum budget available for the research is **£375,000 at 100% Full Economic Cost (FEC)**, i.e. £300,000 at 80% FEC.

Eligibility

Expressions of Interest (EoIs) are invited from eligible UK researchers, i.e., applicants based in UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Research Council Institutes and Centres, and Independent Research Organisations (IROs) approved by any of the Research Councils. Please refer to the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) website for details on funding eligibility.

Organisations not eligible to receive Research Council funding directly (e.g., industry, government agencies, third sector organisations) may participate as project partners. Individuals may submit no more than one EoI as Principal Investigator plus one as Co-investigator, or two as Co-Investigator, to this call.

Membership of UKERC

Contributors to the new project will be considered full members of the UKERC consortium and should contribute fully to UKERC activities. This includes participation in relevant research theme meetings and the UKERC annual assembly, submission of quarterly reports, and contributions to stakeholder engagement events, blogs, and consultation responses. In turn, UKERC offers access to a large network of parties interested in energy system research, opportunities for dissemination of work, insights into the full range of UKERC research and the forging of new relationships with other energy researchers.

Context and scope

Meeting the UK Government's Clean Power 2030 target, and future carbon budgets, will require the build-out of considerable new electricity transmission and distribution grid infrastructure. These developments can be highly contested, with opposition to siting, challenges to decision-making processes, and the assessment of local impacts and benefits. Potential consequences include changes to infrastructure design, increased cost and delay. However, under arrangements being considered by government, infrastructure developers might be required to provide specific forms of benefits to local communities.

Where we want to build new understanding and evidence

Understanding how best to build public acceptance of new energy infrastructures, and the processes by which they are developed, is critical to rapid and fair delivery of clean energy goals. We are seeking research proposals that explore:

- perceptions of, and responses to, new electricity network infrastructures across different publics and/or scales;
- how infrastructure development processes respond to societal views and how these processes can be more responsive;
- how societal acceptance can be developed in and beyond communities close to developments;
- the conditionality, sufficiency and durability of any such acceptance or responsiveness;
- systemic interactions between public responses to individual infrastructure projects and other infrastructures relating to net zero and energy system change.

UKERC wishes to encourage genuinely innovative thinking in this area. Proposals should explain how they build on and extend existing literature and practice on public responses to grid infrastructure, including existing and ongoing UKERC research in this area. This should accommodate but also take the research field beyond the conventional notions of social licence and public acceptance common in the literature.

Applicants should describe which aspects of public acceptance of infrastructure their proposal focusses on and why. Based on stakeholder engagement we anticipate that key areas for further research include:

- **Cumulative impacts:** understanding the cumulative impacts of successive developments on acceptance. This could include analysis of how acceptance changes over time (before, during and after developments) and the role of coordination across projects or organisations.
- **Trust and transparency:** exploring how different forms of community engagement build trust across demographics and scales. This could include assessing levels of trust in information sources, understanding the role of misinformation in shaping public perceptions, and/or exploring how the responsiveness and transparency of development processes influence acceptance.
- **Assessing impacts and sufficiency of acceptance:** assessing how people weigh up and legitimise impacts and benefits, including costs, environmental impacts and community benefits. How is 'sufficient' acceptance understood in communities affected by developments?

Applicants should ensure that the proposal includes provision to:

- conduct a brief mapping of policy and academic learning on public acceptance of infrastructures, including in other country contexts and of comparable 'linear' infrastructures, in the early stages of the project.
- engage with the dynamics of acceptance in UK localities impacted by current grid infrastructure developments.

Questions for the expression of interest

- Principal Investigator (PI) details.
- List of co-investigators, their email addresses and their organisations
- List of project partners – individuals, their email addresses and their organisations. (A project partner is a contributor to the project that does not receive UKRI funding via the award for this project)
- What questions you will address on the subject of public acceptance of electricity network infrastructure, the methods you will use to address them, team roles and key outputs. Please make clear how your approach will build on and extend existing literature and practice on public responses to grid infrastructure. *(1000 words max)*
- Please summarise your experience of engaging with infrastructure providers and local communities in your past research. *(500 words max)*
- Please describe the types of impact your proposed research is expected to achieve and how you intend to realise them. This could include contributions to policy, practice, community engagement, or energy infrastructure planning. Outline key mechanisms, partnerships, or engagement strategies you will use to maximise the impact. *(300 words max)*
- Please outline what you will bring to UKERC's research community if you are asked to lead the invited research and become part of UKERC. *(300 words max)*
- Please outline how you have employed principles of equality, diversity, inclusion and intersectionality in the proposed research/team setup and any specific objectives planned with respect to EDI. *(300 words max)*
- Budget details. Including travel and accommodation costs to attend a minimum of two UKERC meetings per year.

Evaluation procedure

EoIs will be evaluated by a review panel convened by UKERC, which will make a recommendation as to which EoI should proceed to the co-creation and submission of a full proposal.

Please see below the scoring matrix against which EOIs will be assessed:

Section	Criteria	Aspects for evaluation	Score guidance (0–10)
Research questions, methods, team roles, and outputs (1000 words)	Quality and coherence of proposed research	- Clarity and relevance of research questions - Appropriateness of methods - Clear team roles - Extent to which proposal builds on and extends literature and UKERC research	0–3 = vague or off-topic 4–6 = coherent and feasible but not innovative 7–8 = strong with sound rationale and fit 9–10 = outstanding innovation, excellent fit with UKERC goals

Section	Criteria	Aspects for evaluation	Score guidance (0–10)
Experience with infrastructure providers and communities (500 words)	Team's relevant experience	- Evidence of prior engagement with infrastructure developers, siting issues, local communities, or contested projects - Relevance to the current topic - Demonstrated competence in stakeholder engagement	0–3 = minimal or unrelated experience 4–6 = some relevant examples 7–8 = clearly relevant experience, good depth 9–10 = strong, directly aligned track record
Pathways to impact (300 words)	Clarity and feasibility of impact strategy	- Relevance and ambition of expected impact - Clear and realistic mechanisms to deliver impact - Stakeholder or policy engagement plans - Letters of support - Alignment with UKERC's impact goals	0–3 = vague or generic; lacks mechanisms 4–6 = plausible but limited detail 7–8 = well-articulated strategy with good alignment and strong letters of support 9–10 = compelling, strategic, and targeted approach
Contribution to the UKERC community (300 words)	Added value to UKERC	- Willingness and ability to engage across UKERC's wider activities - Evidence of collaboration, leadership, or capacity building - Complementarity to existing UKERC members	0–3 = minimal contribution beyond own project 4–6 = some potential for engagement 7–8 = clear added value 9–10 = strong UKERC ambassadorial potential
Equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) (300 words)	Integration of EDI and intersectionality	- Attention to EDI in team composition and recruitment - Inclusive and ethical research design - Specific objectives or actions on EDI	0–3 = generic statements or absent 4–6 = basic awareness, some actions 7–8 = thoughtful and embedded approach 9–10 = model example of inclusive design
Budget and justification (Form Section 3)	Appropriateness of budget	- Budget is realistic and aligned with project activities - Value for money - Inclusion of required UKERC participation costs	0–3 = incomplete or unjustified 4–6 = mostly appropriate 7–8 = clearly justified 9–10 = excellent cost-effectiveness and clarity

Timeline

- EOI opens: week commencing 28 July 2025
- Submission of EOIs: by 17:00 on 12th September 2025
- Assessment of EOIs completed: 10th October 2025
- Development/Co-creation of full proposal: until 5th December 2025
- Decision on award of funding: 19th December 2025
- Start of project: no later than 30 March 2026

Submission

Please submit your EoI to ukerc@imperial.ac.uk no later that 17:00 on Friday 12 September.

Please submit your EoI as a PDF using the naming convention: 'PAI Call' followed by the name of your project. In the submission email please also specify the call that you are applying to.