Call for evaluators for the Royal Astronomical Society RAS200 Sky and Earth project

The Royal Astronomical Society (RAS) is seeking an experienced contractor to undertake the evaluation of the first tranche of RAS200 Sky and Earth projects that have been set up across the UK. The evaluation exercise will be part of a wider monitoring and evaluation process, assessing the implementation and success of the RAS200 Sky and Earth project as a whole.

This person/team will work alongside the RAS200 Steering Group and members of staff at the Royal Astronomical Society, with guidance and support from the Education, Outreach and Diversity officer at the RAS. This person/team would be expected to work closely with the first tranche winners in order to carry out the evaluation. If successful the person/team could continue to work with the second tranche winners in 2016/2017.

This document provides a background to the RAS and the RAS200 project and an outline of the RAS200 evaluation exercise with a schedule of services.

**Background to the RAS:**

The Royal Astronomical Society (RAS), founded in 1820, encourages and promotes the study of astronomy, solar-system science, geophysics and closely related branches of science. The RAS organises scientific meetings, publishes international research and review journals, recognizes outstanding achievements by the award of medals and prizes, maintains an extensive library, supports education through grants and outreach activities and represents UK astronomy nationally and internationally. It has more than 3800 members (Fellows), a third based overseas, include scientific researchers in universities, observatories and laboratories as well as historians of astronomy and others.

**Background to the RAS200 Sky and Earth project:**

In 2020 the Royal Astronomical Society will be 200 years old. To celebrate our bicentennial, the Society has established an Outreach and Engagement Fund of £1,000,000 to support astronomy and geophysics projects that create a real buzz about science – understanding, discussion and dialogue – in diverse sections of the community.

We anticipate that the RAS fund itself will support up to 12 projects with sums up to £100,000. The grants will be released in two calls – the first were announced in 2015, the second by early 2017, to initiate projects that run up to and beyond the RAS bicentenary (therefore projects in the first tranche are expected to run for 5 years until 2020).

The aims of the RAS 200: Sky & Earth projects are:

• Have a lasting impact beyond 2020 and inspire a new generation to broaden their interest in science, technology, engineering, maths and medicine (STEMM)

• Go 'where no outreach project has gone before', engaging people from all age groups, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds etc.

• Harness the shared ambitions of world-leading researchers and national, local and community organisations

Throughout the initial process we travelled across the country holding town hall style meetings to meet with potential partners and aid future collaborators and in the first tranche of applications we received 92 proposals, of which six projects were chosen for the first tranche of funding.

The RAS announced £500k in grants for the first tranche of innovative public engagement projects in May 2015. For more information on these refer to <http://www.ras.org.uk/news-and-press/2629-460k-for-public-engagement-in-astronomy-and-geophysics-six-teams-win-ras-funding>.

The other useful pages on our website can be found here: <http://www.ras.org.uk/200/2633-and-the-winners-are>

And: <http://www.ras.org.uk/200>

**Description of the RAS200 project evaluation:**

The RAS200 project is a brand new venture run by the RAS and as such no formal monitoring and evaluation process has been undertaken.

The aims of the evaluation programme are:

* To monitor the demographic and the successful impact of the new audiences reached
* To refine plans for introducing an improved practice for the second tranche
* To see how and to what extent each project aim has been met and to asses if and how the project outcomes contribute to the RAS outreach and public engagement programme.

We require evaluation of proposals in response to calls for proposals in line with the various aims of the RAS200 programme, evaluation of first tranche winners under the programme and appraisal of the programme itself in order to assess impact based on specific evaluation criteria and indicators.

Due to the nature of the programme we believe we require a responsive evaluation approach utilising a mixed methodologies incorporating qualitative and quantitative techniques and primary and secondary data sources.

The evaluation is likely to be undertaken in four key phases as outlined in the schedule of services. The output of the evaluation will be a report that draws out results, themes, experiences and key lessons learnt from the project which can be shared with future applicants, project winners and RAS fellows and staff.

**Schedule of services:**

* Planning: meetings with the RAS200 steering group and staff. Meetings with the first tranche winners. Agree an evaluation plan for the project to include (but not limited to) aims, indicators, how and when the information will be collected.
* Delivery: collection of relevant information and data including (but not limited to) meetings with the RAS200 steering group and staff, visits to meet with all six first tranche winners, observations of any ongoing projects, interviews with key stakeholders, face to face evaluation with audiences.
* Analysis: transcription of interviews and observations, inputting of data and data analysis to determine key findings.
* Dissemination: report to be circulated amongst all parties.

**Interest:**

If you are interested in undertaking this piece of work please contact Dr Sheila Kanani, Education Outreach and Diversity officer, outreach@ras.org.uk, with a covering letter including details of your evaluation project and a price schedule. Please breakdown this price schedule to include your daily rate, the number of days you expect this piece of work to take and a budget for travel and accommodation.

**Deadline:**

Deadline for applications should be received by 9.00am on the 20th July 2015.

Shortlisted applicants will be notified by the 31st July 2015 and will be interviewed during the period between the 17th September and the 23rd September 2015. Successful bidders will be expected to attend a meeting at the RAS on the 24th September 2015.