Digital Economy NetworkPlus FAQ

NetworkPlus Remit

1. **What is the definition of a NetworkPlus?**

   A NetworkPlus aims to bring together relevant researchers and stakeholders that cross multiple disciplines. NetworkPluses should address specific research questions to further scope and understand the respective priority research areas and crosscutting themes they are addressing. NetworkPluses are expected to grow, and deliver activities to facilitate this growth, over their lifespan.

   A NetworkPlus has additional funding to deliver the following activities:

   - feasibility studies (but not to demonstrator phase or beyond TRL 4) that can be allocated to researchers at other universities
   - activities to identify and disseminate key research challenges in the area, for example horizon-scanning studies
   - activities to facilitate impact and advance policy, such as reports, websites and briefings
   - secondment support, including scoping of potential opportunities, travel and subsistence, etc
   - activities to support career development
   - activities to connect users, industry and other stakeholders with the research base

2. **Are the new NetworkPlus grants linked to, or intended to build on, the work already undertaken by the five NetworkPlus grants you have supported since 2018?**

   The new NetworkPlus may build on previously supported NetworkPlus, however this is not essential. Each funded NetworkPlus must address only one of the digital economy theme five priority areas which reflect the theme's long-term strategic goals:
   - beyond a data driven economy
   - content creation and consumption
   - equitable digital society
   - sustainable digital society
   - trust, identity, privacy and security.

   More information about the priority areas can be found here.

   Each proposal must explain the fit to the chosen digital economy theme priority area and demonstrate evidence of how they will connect with on-going excellent research in the UK to grow and develop the network.

3. **Is it possible to align the NetworkPlus to more than one priority area or is it best to align to one specific priority area?**

   This funding opportunity has been strategically designed to produce one NetworkPlus per priority area. We expect each NetworkPlus to broadly cover the whole of one priority area, helping to catalyse change by bringing new people together to co-create new ideas that lead to future research projects or innovations.

4. **Is fitting with 'Manufacturing the Future' theme priorities essential?**

There is no requirement for the proposal to align with manufacturing the future theme priority areas. It is essential criteria to fit with one of the digital economy theme priority areas.

5. **How cross-disciplinary does an application need to be?**

Network activities should be UK-wide and should involve a broad range of disciplines and non-academic stakeholders from relevant sectors. It is essential to involve expertise in computer science, engineering or mathematical sciences. It is expected that other relevant disciplines such as manufacturing, social sciences, economics, arts and humanities, as well as non-academic stakeholders, will be involved in order to provide the expertise required to co-create and implement novel, people-centred digital technology solutions which incorporate legal and ethical considerations.

Ultimately, the NetworkPlus must identify ambitious 'real-world' challenges within their priority areas which require a multidisciplinary approach and form an agenda for future research in the area.

Please note that the proposal must be at least 50% in EPSRC remit and each NetworkPlus must align to one of the digital economy theme priority areas.

The Team

6. **Is a permanent position within a university required to apply as a PI?**

To be a PI (or Co-I) you would need to have a current contract that outlasts the grant duration, or acknowledgement from your research office that a successful a contract will be in place.

7. **What is the role of PI in the NetworkPlus and how does this compare with a standard research grant?**

The role of the PI is not to run research, it is to lead a community. It is an outward-facing role which requires engaging with multiple stakeholders (whether from industry, government, etc.), convening and taking views of the Community, and then, based on the feedback, supporting the future direction of the Community through the NetworkPlus. The PI is responsible for the overall distribution of funds and activities within the NetworkPlus.

8. **Can anyone from the host university participate in feasibility studies?**

Yes. We do however expect this to be a nationwide effort involving the best people across the UK. Processes for allocation of funds must be fair and transparent. Some of the previous NetworkPlus grant holders did not participate in feasibility studies as to avoid conflict of interest.

9. **Does the network lead have to be an academic researcher?**

Yes. The PI and Co-I(s) must have the appropriate depth, expertise and coverage across the full spectrum of the topic. They must have a track record in relevant research, leadership and management of complex activities. This will be assessed as part of the 'Applicant and partnerships' assessment criteria.

You can apply if you are a resident in the UK and meet at least one of the bullets below:

- are employed at the submitting research organisation at lecturer level or equivalent
- hold a fixed-term contract that extends beyond the duration of the proposed project, and the host research organisation is prepared to give you all the support normal for a permanent employee
- hold an EPSRC, Royal Society or Royal Academy of Engineering fellowship aimed at later career stages
- hold fellowships under other schemes (please contact EPSRC to check eligibility, which is considered on a case-by-case basis).

The PI's institution will be submitting the application on behalf of the network; the investigators will therefore need to be employed by an eligible UK institution or independent research organisation. For information on eligible institutions, click here.

10. Could PhD students be funded through this scheme?

PhD students are not eligible for funding through this call.

11. Could post-doctoral researchers be funded as part of this call?

Yes. Post-doctoral researchers would be eligible to be members of the leadership team within Network Plus applications. Their specific role and contribution to the NetworkPlus grant must be clearly defined within the application.

12. What do you tend to look for in terms of distribution of Co-Is across institutions? E.g. 4 investigators all at different institutions?

The NetworkPlus investments should be national in reach. We encourage submissions from consortiums of research organisations to ensure the team has the appropriate depth, expertise, and coverage across the full spectrum of the topic. However, if the appropriate breadth expertise is present in one research organisation that would be acceptable.

13. What is the difference between a project partner and a network member?

Project partners are part of the NetworkPlus from the beginning and recorded on the Je-S application, they are involved in co-creation of the proposal, they have defined contributions, and are integral to the success of the NetworkPlus. However, the composition of the NetworkPlus can change as it develops and grows, and more project partners can come onboard over time.

NetworkPlus members access and benefit from the NetworkPlus activities - attending events, applying for funding etc.

14. Does the PI have to be a senior academic/professor and have past funding from UKRI?

There is no such prerequisite to have prior UKRI support or to be at professoriate/senior level however, the PI must have relevant track record of in relevant research, leadership and management of complex activities, as well as evidence of thought leadership, responding to strategic and policy drivers. This will be assessed under the 'applicant and partnership' assessment criteria.

Early career researchers would be eligible to lead a NetworkPlus, but applicant must demonstrate that they have the necessary skills and experience required to successfully lead the NetworkPlus and have the full support from the host organisation.

All applications will be assessed by a panel of experts using the criteria specified in the call document.

15. How many investigators should there be in each NetworkPlus?

Your application can have a maximum of five investigators, including PI.

Application

16. Can my application consist of multiple proposals?

The lead organisation must submit one proposal on behalf of all organisation involved in the NetworkPlus. If the NetworkPlus is funded, money will be awarded to the lead organisation who are responsible for distributing it between the collaborating organisations. The lead organisation should submit one proposal and attach all the relevant documentation for the project - researchers from non-lead organisations can be Co-Investigators on the proposal. We will not be accepting submissions consisting of multiple proposals.

17. Is there a limit to the number of letters of support that can be included?

Letters of support are required from all project partners confirming their involvement, they should be dated within 6 months of submission, signed and on headed paper. In exceptional circumstances we can allow a maximum of three letters of support from those who do not meet the requirement for project partner, these must be dated within 6 months of submission, signed and on headed paper.

18. Can a NetworkPlus provide resources for its core investigators to conduct research relevant to the NetworkPlus?

This grant is not for investigators to conduct research and the NetworkPlus core team should not hold back money for their own research projects. If you are interested in research projects, you may apply via [standard mode](#).

19. Can project managers be named in the grant, or do they need to be recruited?

Project managers can be named in the grant or recruited after the formation of the NetworkPlus. If named in the grant, we would encourage their expertise to be described in the case for support. If they will be recruited, we would encourage details regarding the recruitment process to be included in the application. Project managers are critical to the success of this type of grant.

20. Do research projects need to be specifically identified within the application?

The case for support should detail the overall plans for the small research projects (such as feasibility studies), including the commissioning and on-going governance to ensure correct usage and reporting. NetworkPlus investments should also seek to be dynamic to seize new opportunities that emerge during its lifetime, the mechanism to facilitate this should be detailed in the governance structure.

Funding

21. Can we provide funding for partners?

Project partners cannot receive funding directly from the grant. The only exception to this is where a project partner is providing services or equipment that will go through a formal procurement process audited by the host research organisation. The project partner cannot receive any other funds from the grant, such as travel and subsistence.

22. Can industrial partners get funds for feasibility studies?

The same eligibility rules apply as for as standard grants. Industrial members can only be paid as subcontractors; in which case they need to be able to demonstrate that they are providing a service that cannot be provided by university partners. It is the PI's responsibility to ensure on-going governance to ensure correct usage and accountability of the funds. It is expected that the host organisation will provide appropriate support in managing the NetworkPlus budget, commissioning the funds and on-going governance to ensure correct usage and accountability, this should be detailed in the host organisation letter of support.

23. How should the NetworkPlus determine the proportion and distribution of funding?

The call is not prescriptive about the proportion and distribution of funding. The NetworkPlus investments can undertake a variety of activities including workshops, events, feasibility studies, secondments, and horizon scanning. Applicants are encouraged to tailor their activities to the needs of the area and to be innovative in their approach. Therefore, resourcing should be tailored to needs of the particular area. As a guide, a current NetworkPlus allocated 50% funds for feasibility studies, over 20% on salary costs, and the remaining funds on events. However, Please note, the EPSRC budget is larger this time round as the NetworkPlus can run up to 5 years.

24. Who can claim salary cost?

Funding can be requested for:

- Investigators: The PI and up to four Co-Is can request funds to cover their salary costs for the time spent on setting up and leading the NetworkPlus
- Administrative support: A sufficient level of administrative and host university support for the NetworkPlus is vital, in order to support activities such as feasibility studies and dissemination activities
- PDRAs: Their specific role and vital contribution on the NetworkPlus needs to be justified

Please note that salary costs of NetworkPlus members should not be included in the proposal.

Other

25. What is the expected output of the NetworkPlus?

In addition to the requirements set out in RGC 7.4.'Resaerch Monitoring and Evaluation', you are responsible for providing annual progress reports against non-financial performance metrics. A detailed list of performance metrics and instructions for reporting will be agreed with the grant holder and advisory board upon commencement of the grant.