

EPSRC funding opportunity

## **Network to drive digital sustainability and a circular economy**

### **Webinar Q&A**

16 November 2023

**Q. Will a copy of the slides be made available?**

Yes, the slides will be available in PDF form online with the webinar recording.

**Q. Is this opportunity limited to ICT only, or what other digital technologies would you consider?**

In this context, digital and communication technologies are considered to include software and hardware, and relate to ICT materials, components and products as well as the systems they form. This is broadly defined for the purposes of this funding opportunity.

**Q. Should this network plus cover at least two different impact sectors, such as construction, industry, and manufacturing?**

We're aiming for the Network Plus to be broad and focus more on the opportunities and challenges presented by integration of the circular economy and ICT research domains than on the direct application of this to sectors or impact areas. You may identify some specific target sectors as case studies or areas of exemplar focus, and you will need to decide what you are able to deliver, but the Network Plus remit must be broad in order to meet the aims of the funding opportunity.

**Q. Are collaborations with international centres of excellence encouraged or frowned upon?**

Collaborations with the appropriate people, with the appropriate skills, are always welcomed in our research. You should ensure that for every collaboration, there is a clear and substantial benefit to the application, and the skills and expertise of the collaborators are relevant to the proposed work.

**Q. Is EPSRC providing applicants with means or opportunities to network and identify partners?**

This funding opportunity is a culmination of a number of recent networking activities (run by EPSRC or in collaboration with other institutions), including a networking scoping workshop. EPSRC has no current plans to organise further networking for applicants.

**Q. Can investigator time be supported on the grant?**

Yes, investigator time can be funded as part of the Network Plus.

**Q. How many Co-Leads can be on the application?**

We have not set a limit on the number of investigators or co-leads. It is up to you to decide how to manage the grant funds, balancing spend on investigator time against the other activities undertaken by the Network Plus.

**Q. Can the Co-Leads be from different institutions?**

Yes, multi-institution bids are welcome.

**Q. How much engagement from beyond EPSRC remit would be appropriate?**

This Network Plus is supported by EPSRC, so it must be at least 50% within EPSRC remit. Up to 50% remit interest from non-EPSRC disciplines, in terms of activities, deliverables and investigators, would be acceptable. If you would like to discuss the remit of your application with EPSRC ahead of submission, please do not hesitate to contact us.

**Q. The Network Plus is directly related to the “Research for a digitally enabled circular economy and sustainable digital technologies” funding opportunity. Is there a list available of the people who have been invited to the full application stage? How does EPSRC expect the Network Plus bring together the projects if they are not known in advance?**

Although you will not know in advance who will be funded and what specific sector they are working in, the [funding opportunity](#) provides detail on what they are expected to deliver. You will be expected to provide plans for how you will interact with the cohort of funded projects and to have allocated appropriate resource to facilitate this.

**Q. Would you expect the scope of the Network Plus to be broad enough to capture all of the projects funded through the “Research for a digitally enabled circular economy and sustainable digital technologies” opportunity?**

Network Plus is not expected to have expertise in every area, or to encompass every sector, that the funded projects span. The Network Plus should facilitate knowledge exchange across the projects more broadly, and drive progress in cross-cutting areas, improving cross-disciplinary understanding and facilitating application of the state of the art between different areas of research.

**Q. How much of the funding should be dedicated to the flexible funds?**

We have not specified a quota for this. It is up to you as the applicants to decide what is appropriate to deliver your vision for the network, balancing flexible funding alongside against the other activities you plan to undertake. You should clearly make the case for whatever funds you request.

**Q. Do we need to be specific about the small-scale projects we plan to fund? Or should we ask for the resource to do small scale projects without defining them?**

We are not expecting detail, but some examples of the kinds of projects that you want to support would be useful. We will expect you to discuss the process you will go through to decide what activities you will support, but we do not expect you to have made these decisions in advance, particularly in areas like this, which may be quite exploratory.

**Q. What does a 'digitally enabled circular economy' mean in the context of this funding opportunity?**

A circular economy as applied to any sector is about creating tighter loops, reducing waste and maintaining value in the materials already in use in many different ways. A digitally enabled circular economy encompasses the translational and novel use of data, digital tools and models, as well as the implementation of new technologies including, but not limited to, software, simulation, machine learning, automation and sensing, to enable a circular economy across sectors.

**Q. Is it always about addressing waste?**

The Network Plus should address the circular economy more broadly. A circular economy aims to reduce consumption and keeps resources in use for as long as possible, extracting the maximum value from them while in use, recovering products, materials and feedstocks after use, including reuse and remanufacture, where appropriate.

**Q. The funding opportunity mentions the direct impacts of ICT, such as energy use. To what extent should that be included, or should we focus on circularity?**

We welcome the broader sustainability agenda being included and addressed by the Network Plus. However, the Network Plus must focus primarily on the circular economy and resource efficiency, bringing in other aspects sustainability as appropriate. Considering trade-offs and taking a whole systems approach, and supporting the wider community to do the same, is a key function of this Network Plus.