

EPSRC-Defra Reimagining Circularity: Outline Stage Funding Opportunity Informational Webinar

Webinar Date/Time: November 13 2025, 14:00 UK Time

Webinar Recording: <https://youtu.be/YYhe2nNoTL4>

Funding Opportunity Webpage: <https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/reimagining-circularity-outline-stage/>

Applications

1. Can we apply to more than one theme?

You can be involved in two applications in total, for example, one as project lead and co-lead or two as project co-lead. We expect the majority of your work to focus on one theme and you should identify which theme this is in your application. Although there may be some overlap eg use of data and metrics for built environment and textiles.

2. How many investigators are allowed in one bid?

There is no limit to the number of project co-leads on an application, or limit to the applicant team. Only one project lead is allowed. You can only be involved in two applications in total. You should consider the roles of each investigator and what they are contributing to the networkplus. Only those managing the networkplus should be listed in your application.

3. Invitation to partners at the outline stage?

We have asked for project partner details at the outline stage to ensure we are managing panel member conflicts appropriately.

4. What exactly is needed for the intention to submit application.

The Intent to Submit form will ask you to provide the following information: name of project lead, name(s) project co-lead(s) at the time of ItS submission (this list can change prior to outline submission deadline), project lead email address, project lead UK academic host institution, your chosen challenge area, proposed project draft title the Funding Service application reference number. You will need to begin an application on the Funding Service to get this number but will not be required to submit until the closing date. Please see the funding finder page for more information <https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/reimagining-circularity-outline-stage/>

5. What kind of network activities are particularly looked for and what impacts would be expected?

On our Funding Finder page we outline what a successful NetworkPlus will look like and deliver, along with exemplar activities that could be undertaken. Please note, this list is not exhaustive. Please see the funding finder page for more information <https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/reimagining-circularity-outline-stage/>

6. Are there any opportunities to employ postdocs in this network funding to carry out research?

Research related activities cannot be undertaken in a NetworkPlus - these must be funded by EPSRC responsive mode. ECRs not involved in the NetworkPlus can apply for flexible funding which may focus on funding research activities. Early career researchers can be included in the leadership team but they must be well supported particularly in terms of their career development and opportunities for networking must be present in their allocated activities. Postdocs can be involved in the flexible funding projects.

7. How many consortium members would you like to see in one project?

We encourage you to assemble a team that is an appropriate size to your project. There is no limit to the NetworkPlus team size.

8. How much detail is required about project partners at the intent to submit stage? Do we need to provide a full list of project partners at this point?

Yes a full list of project partners is required at the Outline Stage following standard EPSRC guidance. Please see further details about what must be included about project partners and included in letters of support on the UKRI Funding Finder page under How To Apply. More information is also available here: <https://www.ukri.org/councils/epsrc/guidance-for-applicants/what-to-include-in-your-proposal/project-partners-letter-of-support/>

9. Will you fund single institution applications?

Yes, we will accept single institution teams. Your team should be justified and we would expect the network to engage broadly across the UK. Please remember to foster innovative interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary research, or both, and cross-disciplinary interactions for researchers involved, we are looking for teams consisting of two or more researchers representing two or more areas of expertise to apply, and to include industrial partners.

10. I've seen Network+ that are Consortiums. Is this accepted during application or it it EPSRC that connects multiple applicants to form one?

You must assemble your NetworkPlus team. EPSRC will not connect you to other potential collaborators. Your application should demonstrate that the team combines different areas of expertise and experience as appropriate to lead a NetworkPlus and achieve the stated outcomes, including community engagement, leadership and driving impact. To foster innovative interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary research, or both, and cross-disciplinary interactions for researchers involved, we are looking for teams consisting of two or more researchers representing two or more areas of expertise to apply, and to include industrial partners.

Assessment

1. How the process of application will progress? What information needs to be provided at every stage? What are the main criteria for awarding the funding?

The application and assessment process is outlined within the How To Apply and How We Will Assess Your Application sections on the UKRI Funding Finder page

<https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/reimagining-circularity-outline-stage/>

2. Could you kindly expand on how multidisciplinary balance and impact would be examined at the outline stage, such as the relative importance of scientific innovation and policy relevance?

Multidisciplinarity is not in scope for this funding opportunity. Inter- and transdisciplinarity is in scope. At the Outline Stage, an expert panel will convene to score and rank applications according to the assessment criteria. The panel will consist of members with expertise in circular economy, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary working, policy, and the operations and delivery of a NetworkPlus investment. The peer review panel will score applications according to the assessment criteria. We will decide, based on the advice of the peer review panel, which applications to invite to the full application stage. At the Full Stage, full applications will be considered by an expert interview panel against the full opportunity assessment criteria listed below. Prior to the interview stage you will have an opportunity to respond to initial comments on your full application from the interview panel. Representatives from the applicant team will be invited to be interviewed by the panel, who will have access to your application and response to the initial panel comments. Using this information, and the interview, the panel will score your application against our assessment criteria and rank it alongside other applications. The panel will make a funding recommendation, and the final decision will sit with EPSRC and Defra. Please see How We Will Assess Your Application on the UKRI Funding Finder webpage.

3. Is there a scoring matrix at the outline stage

Yes there is a scoring matrix – these will follow standard UKRI assessment procedures. Please see the guidance stated on <https://www.ukri.org/councils/epsrc/guidance-for-reviewers/peer-review-panels/panel-guidance-and-protocols/panel-member-guidance/#contents-list>.

4. Could you please elaborate on the 'place' assessment criterion? I assume there will only be only one network plus per focus area - should the focus of such a network be national?

We will ask about the place related challenges or opportunities for your application. In your application please explain how your proposed work:

- will deliver local and or regional impacts, both direct and indirect, and who the beneficiaries might be
- enhances the UK's research and innovation capabilities through local and or regional activity
- will engage local and or regional stakeholders in meaningful partnership

Within this application section we also expect you to:

- show understanding of the strengths, needs, opportunities and challenges in the targeted places

- make good use of local and or regional strengths and assets in the targeted places, including UKRI assets
- demonstrate how this project will align with local and or regional strategies and or activities
- demonstrate how the project will encourage project partner contributions either cash or in kind

Yes, there will be one network funded per challenge area.

The NetworkPlus must engage with and be national across different places in the UK including:

- incorporating a local, regional, devolved administration and national lens in its activities to identify solutions that promote economic, social and cultural prosperity
- engaging with a number of specific places in the UK to develop 'case studies' in how the academic community can work with local business, communities, industry and local government councils

Budget

1. Do all the consortium members need to pay for that 20% even if they are co-leads?

Yes, UKRI and Defra will only fund 80% of the full economic cost. Please see <https://www.ukri.org/apply-for-funding/develop-your-application/what-costs-are-eligible-for-ukri-funding/> for more information.

2. Is there a specific percentage of the total funding that must be allocated to industry versus academic partners?

Please cost your project as required for your project outcomes - we are not specifying funding allocations between the project team and industry partners. Business cannot receive funding from the network. Only eligible organisations are eligible to receive UKRI funding. Businesses should be listed as project partners and contribute in-kind or cash to the network activities.

3. Will recommendations on budget ranges and project durations be provided at the outline stage, or should submissions merely reflect the projected scale and ambition?

Yes, you must provide duration in your Outline Application. Costs must be provided at the Outline Stage - they are not assessed, however, will be at the Full Stage. We do not provide recommendations of costs - you must list costs appropriate to your project. Prospective applicants to this funding opportunity should ensure:

- 1) at least 60% of overall funds applied for are allocated to flexible funds
- 2) at least 50% of the flexible fund should be used for research to innovation or translational research to accelerate a route to market. For example, developing a prototype and testing it with users (such as a durability testing method for textiles)

Please see information under What We Are Looking For and How To Apply on the UKRI Funding Finder webpage.

Eligibility

1. Are Catapults eligible to participate with universities?

Standard EPSRC eligibility criteria for this funding opportunity. Catapults are eligible to apply for UKRI funding if they are listed on <https://www.ukri.org/publications/organisation-eligibility/research-organisations-eligible-for-ukri-funding/> . If not, a Catapult must be involved with an application led by an eligible organisation as a project partner. Project partners cannot normally receive funding from a grant - please see <https://www.ukri.org/councils/epsrc/guidance-for-applicants/what-to-include-in-your-proposal/project-partners-letter-of-support/> for details where there are exceptions.

2. Is this fund suitable for organisations looking to lower the carbon footprint within the NHS/Life Science sector?

Yes - there is no restriction on the sector that you can choose to focus your NetworkPlus on. Our opportunity is open to NHS bodies with research capacity in addition. However, please ensure you focus on the themes of the funding opportunity

3. Could you please confirm whether the Principal Investigator is expected to have a strong track record of successfully funded projects as a PI?

Your application should demonstrate that the team combines different areas of expertise and experience as appropriate to lead a NetworkPlus and achieve the stated outcomes, including community engagement, leadership and driving impact. To foster innovative interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary research, or both, and cross-disciplinary interactions for researchers involved, we are looking for teams consisting of two or more researchers representing two or more areas of expertise to apply, and to include industrial partners. We also expect networks to champion and engage with early and mid-career individuals. "

4. Are relationships between universities and industry partners anticipated to be established at the outline stage, or is it sufficient to suggest potential partners and roles? Can we include several industrial partners?

Industry project partners are mandatory for this funding opportunity. You must select partners as appropriate to your project. They are expected to be listed at Outline Stage. We also expect collaborations to build over the course of the network.

5. Can researchers be employed within participating Universities or only administrative staff?

Individuals formally involved in the NetworkPlus (project lead, project co-leads etc.) cannot apply or be listed as a project co-lead for the flexible funds. Individuals based at host organisations are eligible to apply for the flexible funds. Please contact EPSRC for more details about which type of researchers can be included on a grant.

6. Can a researcher from management / business school lead the application, if their research expertise are related to this call?

Yes, they can lead. Please remember the majority of the focus of the networkplus and the flexible funded projects should be in EPSRC remit.

7. Could you please clarify the expected size of the consortium for this funding, specifically, how many organisations you're looking to support or involve?

We encourage you to assemble a team that is an appropriate size to your project and that involves two or more researchers from two or more discipline areas to encourage cross disciplinary interactions. There is no limit to the NetworkPlus team size. We will fund one NetworkPlus in each Challenge Area. We will take a place based portfolio approach at award stage if appropriate. Please see the UKRI Funding Finder for more details, specifically the How We Will Assess Your Application section.

Adequate resourcing to support an appropriate management structure, as specified in the funding opportunity documentation, should be costed within the grant. This includes employing a grant manager on the grant. 40% of the NetworkPlus funding can be allocated to network activities, including the staff to run the network.

8. We have some European industrial partners (not from Norway) interested in joining the project. Are they eligible to be included under this funding scheme?

Yes your European industry collaborators can be part of the project team, but they must be listed as project partners. Please ensure you mention their role in your project in your application, considering the remit of the call and key aspects we have asked you to consider (please refer to the funding opportunity text). You should include all international collaborators (or UK partners not based at approved organisations) as project partners. Project partners cannot normally receive funding directly from the grant. The two exceptions to this are:

- 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 can receive small amounts of funding from the grant, such as for travel and subsistence to attend project meetings. These will need to be requested by the PI and will need to be fully justified.

9. Can not for profit (non-HEI) organisations be Co-Is and receive funding or can they only be partners?

Non higher education institutions, including non-profit organisations, would need to be listed as project partners, unless they are eligible for UKRI funding. See the following link for eligibility requirements and organisations eligible to receive UKRI funding (<https://www.ukri.org/publications/organisation-eligibility/research-organisations-eligible-for-ukri-funding/>). Please note project partners cannot normally receive funding directly from the grant. The two exceptions to this are:

- 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 can receive small amounts of funding from the grant, such as for travel and subsistence to attend project meetings. These will need to be requested by the PI and will need to be fully justified.

10. Can the grant manager be a Co-I?

Yes, we welcome the inclusion of senior professional enabling staff, such as professional research and investment strategy managers, as project co-leads. If you decide to include such roles, we would expect them to be represented as an integral part of the leadership team and so designated as project co-leads in your application.

11. Can the same researcher be involved in two different networks in the same topic area i.e. both applications in built environment?

Any individual can only appear on one application as project lead and only two projects in total. For example, one as project lead and one as co-lead or two as co-lead.

12. Would a leadership model with 2 Co-Leads be acceptable?

We encourage you to assemble a team which is appropriate to your project. Adequate resourcing to support an appropriate management structure, as specified in the funding opportunity documentation, should be costed within the grant. This includes employing a grant manager on the grant. One Project Lead must be identified for the purposes of the application in TFS, and you should describe your management approach in the application.

Flexible Fund

1. Can academics from the lead University apply for funding that will be distributed via the Network Plus calls?
2. Can a colleague of a successful network team member be eligible to apply for the flexible funding?
3. Can a successful network team member be included in the application for flexible funding as a team member?
4. Can you clarify the funding structure and whether members of the network are included or excluded from applying for the flexible funding?

Individuals formally involved in the NetworkPlus (project lead, project co-leads etc.) cannot apply for the flexible funds. Individuals based at host organisations are eligible to apply for the flexible funds.

5. The lead University we assume must setup mechanisms to put out calls, peer review proposals, announce awards and manage the allocation of the funds and the monitoring of the funded projects?

Yes that's right - the NetworkPlus must set up mechanisms to manage awards and the flexible fund funding opportunities.

6. Could you confirm whether the 60% allocation for the 'flexible fund' is intended to cover project costs like workshops, feasibility studies, public engagement activities, and equipment? If not, please specify the scope of the included activities.

No the network activities are not covered through the flexible fund. The flexible fund is just for projects related to the network. Flexible funding is expected to fund activities under the following 3 streams:

- targeted place-based demonstrators/feasibility studies (academic or addressing government or industry challenges)
- seed-corn funding (high-risk projects, collaborative projects)
- research to innovation or translational research.

7. You mentioned that the 20% shortfall in the flexible funding calls should be covered by the host organisation. does that mean that the recipient organisation can apply to 100% FEC?

Projects funded via the flexible fund should be awarded at 80% FEC to ensure that there is no net cost to the host organisation. The shortfall should be covered by the host organisation of the flexible fund project

8. Can you explain in more detail what should be covered with the flexible fund?

Flexible funding is expected to fund activities under the following 3 streams:

- 1) targeted place-based demonstrators/feasibility studies (academic or addressing government or industry challenges)
- 2) seed-corn funding (high-risk projects, collaborative projects)
- 3) research to innovation or translational research.

Please see the Flexible Fund section on the UKRI Funding Finder webpage under What We Are Looking For for more details.

9. How much detail are you expecting in the flexible funding allocations descriptions e.g. should we have a clear idea on the questions that will be put out to open competition from the very start or can they be described in a thematic way with more detailed descriptions emerging as the network is established?

It is not expected that clear ideas and questions are set at the application stage. It is expected that the questions will be defined through wider engagement once the networks are set up.

10. Is it that Research activities in laboratories and at pilot scale etc. can only be funded via the flexible portion of the fund?

Funds cannot be requested to support the NetworkPlus to carry out research-related activities. These should be sought through the normal mechanisms (for example, EPSRC responsive mode funding) or commissioned via open competition using the aforementioned flexible funds.

Intent to Submit

1. How is the intent to submit used? Would you use to link different potential partners?

The Intention to Submit will be used for administrative purposes only, to assist EPSRC in logistical planning for the assessment of the applications. Providing an Intention to Submit is compulsory for applicants and applications received without prior provision of an Intention to Submit will be rejected.

Providing an Intention to Submit does not oblige an applicant to submit to this opportunity. EPSRC recognises that the planned activities may change during application development and an application to the opportunity does not have to align fully with the information in the Intention to Submit.

Place

1. Although the network will be UK wide can specific place based challenges be addressed?

The NetworkPlus must engage with and should be national different places in the UK including:

- incorporating a local, regional, devolved administration and national lens in its activities to identify solutions that promote economic, social and cultural prosperity
- engaging with a number of specific places in the UK to develop 'case studies' in how the academic community can work with local business, communities, industry and local government councils.

Project Partners

1. Are international (European) partners allowed?

Yes. Please list your international collaborators as project partners on your application.

2. Are construction professional bodies (RICS, ICE, CIBSE etc) considered industrial partners?

Yes, professional bodies can be an asset to extend the reach of the network and assist with wider stakeholder engagement. Please list them as project partners in your application.

3. Could you confirm that Letters of Support are needed at outline stage, pls?

Yes, letters of support are needed at outline stage.

4. Are there any expectations with regards the number of partners and overall match funding?

Please form your team as appropriate to your project. There is no match funding requirement.

5. How many LoS are needed, or there is a maximum to upload?

One letter of support per industry partner is required. These have a page limit of two sides of A4 per partner

6. Just double checking. Are letters of support necessary for the outline stage? They used to be required for the full stage only.

Yes - letters of support are required at the Outline Stage.

7. What is the expected match funding contribution of industrial partners?

There is no match funding requirement. Your industry partners must be listed as project partners. Project partners are expected to contribute to the network, this could be cash contributions, or in-kind such as time to contribute to network activities. Project partners cannot normally receive funding directly from the grant. More information is available here <https://www.ukri.org/councils/epsrc/guidance-for-applicants/what-to-include-in-your-proposal/project-partners-letter-of-support/>

Remit

1. The call uses the word 'maximise value'. Could we have some more information on what the call means by this?

By maximising value we mean getting the best possible benefit from our resources. This could be through extending product life (repairing, refurbishment, reselling), recovering materials (remanufacturing, recycling, repurpose) or through designing for longevity/ creating systems where resource use is minimised/regenerative. Value isn't limited to economic value; societal and environmental value can also be considered when thinking about maximising value.

2. Could you kindly explain how widely ""circularity"" is defined in this call, such as whether it encompasses biological or chemical methods, as well as digital and design-based approaches?

Our definition is as follow: At its heart circularity is a system which is restorative by design, we consider it to be about producing and consuming less; keeping the products, materials, and resources we do use and produce in circulation at their highest value for as long as possible; and then recovering them after use. Applicants must demonstrate their methods align with the challenge themes. This can encompass biological and chemical methods

3. Would life sciences be included in Defra's and EPSRC's priority sectors?

Yes - only if they fit into the themes set out in the funding opportunity. There would be no issue with life sciences being included.

4. In the built environment do you consider natural building materials in your definition of circular or are you here focussing on "finite materials" (which are typically described as repair, reuse, recycle etc)

Natural materials are in scope. Please see funding opportunity text for examples, specifically under What We Are Looking For.

5. Do we need to cover as many sectors?

For the data and metrics challenge area, this should be a a cross-sector network advancing the circular economy through coordinated data sharing and the development of robust metrics, indicators, and frameworks to enable, measure, and accelerate progress across any of the six priority sectors.

6. More specifically regarding "Data and metrics," would it be accurate to say that UKRI is seeking proposals that place greater emphasis on environmental sustainability compared to other dimensions of sustainability?

Yes we would see environmental sustainability as the key emphasis but not the only consideration. We appreciate economic and social sustainability are needed to enable environmental sustainability.

7. What is the focus of this call?

The primary theme of this funding opportunity is circular economy. We invite you to develop a NetworkPlus which builds new capacity, strengthens community and enhances research to innovation capabilities focused on the circular economy in built environment, textiles or data and metrics. You must imaginatively use the 'Plus' element to accelerate impact in your chosen area. Please see the Funding Finder page for more information

8. What do you mean by 'the community' in the context of who can apply for flexible funding? Assume the Network will have a very broad membership outside of the core management team are affiliated members eligible part of 'the community' or are they not eligible?

Research community and university partners. Flexible funding can only be awarded to UKRI eligible applicant (universities and research organisations). Individuals formally involved in the NetworkPlus (project lead, project co-leads etc.) cannot apply or be listed as a project co-lead for the flexible funds. Individuals based at host organisations are eligible to apply for the flexible funds.

9. The call mentions the word "regenerative" - does the EPSRC have a definition of regenerative that they work with?

In this context and for this funding opportunity specifically we define regenerative as not only restoring but reversing environmental damage (and related effects, e.g. on a societal level). This could be through engineered solutions or through changes to the way natural capital is utilised in the economy. A more regenerative economy could involve increasing the sequestration of carbon or enhancing natural habitats or natural capital while undertaking economic activity.

Webinar Recording

1. Dear Team, are the slides going to be shared following the webinar?
2. Sorry, I was waiting in the previous Teams. Missed most of the webinar. Could the recording be shared today/tomorrow, please?

The slides and YouTube recording are now available on the Funding Finder page under Additional Information. You can view the YouTube recording here:

<https://youtu.be/YYhe2nNoTL4> .