

UKRI Digital Research Technical Professional (RTP) Skills NetworkPlus – Webinar Q&A

Scope of this call

Q: Is this funding opportunity specifically for the remit of a particular funding body within UKRI (e.g. NERC), or is it to fit with all of them?

A: NERC is administering this funding opportunity on behalf of UKRI and its Councils. Eligible applicants from any of UKRI's Council's remits can apply. The NetworkPlus awards must however support cross-discipline and cross-domain communities and collaborations to address cross-cutting challenges related to digital RTP skills and careers. A key objective of this funding opportunity is to build new and enhanced communities of digital RTP's that are diverse, inclusive and interdisciplinary across both research and industry. There is no specific number of UKRI Council remits that applications must fit within, it depends on what challenge areas or topic(s) the Network will focus on in order to realise the aims and ambitions of the funding opportunity.

Q: Is there more interest for a "deep and narrow" focused Network covering for example, domain-specific challenges of which the solutions could be generalised and applied to other domains? Or a "shallower and wide" Network focusing on the cross-disciplinary picture to address overarching challenges and the interplay between disciplines and domains?

A: It is up to the core team to make a convincing case regarding what type of Network is most appropriate to them considering their expertise and their intention of focus. UKRI has not defined a preference in the Funding Finder page and we advise applicants to refer back to the funding specification for more detail.

We intentionally left the funding opportunity quite open in order to be flexible and to account for different needs and models. However, a key expectation of the NetworkPlus awards is to build cross-discipline and cross-domain communities to address cross-cutting challenges in terms of digital RTP skills and careers, and we therefore would not expect the 'depth' to be in one very specific community. For further information, please see the objectives under the 'What we're looking for' section of the funding opportunity.

Q: Is there any funding available for early career researchers, or specifically female researchers in this call?

A: Whilst there's no specific funding available for this call dedicated to early career researchers or female researchers, the core team and the wider Network should be diverse and inclusive. We would

expect to see the flexible fund to be used to support capacity building and career development opportunities for researchers at different career stages and different backgrounds.

Alignment with UKRI's ambitions and other initiatives

Q: How does this fit with other UKRI projects, particularly ESRC's Future Data Services projects and associated funding calls?

A: This Digital RTP call is one of a suite of 36 projects which directly contribute to the wider UKRI Digital Research Infrastructure programme. UKRI Digital Research Infrastructure (DRI) is a cross-UKRI programme of work which will deliver the next generation of digital research infrastructures. This includes investment in large scale computing, secure data access, software engineering and skills capacity.

UKRI DRI Programme projects are delivered by the Research Councils – this call is being delivered by NERC. ESRC is delivering some projects via the Future Data Services programme, for example, which is a strategic review into digital RTP roles in data infrastructures. The DRI Programme funds foundational activities that contribute to the DRI strategy. These activities underpin and maximise digital investments made by other funding mechanisms.

This funding opportunity and other related initiatives such as ESRC's Future Data Services programme are closely aligned with the objectives of this wider UKRI programme of work, but they are distinct in terms of their scope, aims and objectives and funding allocation.

Q: How will this new NetworkPlus link with recently funded projects from EPSRC for Research Technical Professionals announced through UKRI?

A: As UKRI, we've been keen to build on the successes of the EPSRC call you highlight, and this digital RTP Skills NetworkPlus call is a key step in doing so across all of the domains and disciplines of UKRI. EPSRC colleagues have been very involved in helping us design it and learn from previous investments.

Following this investment's outcomes, we would be keen to convene discussions across this key set of investments in the digital RTP space across UKRI, to maximise potential, cross fertilisation and discussions about future activities in this space. We would be interested in thoughts offline about how we might do this if you're involved in the existing investments.

Building a network

Q: Is this call open to existing communities and consortia (e.g. N8CIR, GW4, DiRAC) who wish to expand their network and their skills/training offering? To what extent are you expecting this bid to be taken on by groups who already know and work with each other?

A: We welcome applications from both existing and newly formed partnerships. The assessment process will be fair and transparent and will not favour the length of time the partnerships have been in place in any way. The focus instead will be on whether the proposed partnerships and composition of the team will deliver the aims and objectives of the NetworkPlus awards. We suggest that if the network/consortium is already established in this area, it will be important to articulate how funding from this call will enable activities and outcomes to be substantially grown.

In registering for this webinar, we asked attendees for their consent whether they are happy to share their details with the other participants. The aim of this is to give individuals the opportunity to identify potential synergies with and connect with other potential applicants. For those that consented, we will be sharing details shortly after the webinar.

Q: What might the involvement of the RCs (thinking particularly of STFC/DiRAC) be in this?

A: We welcome applications from both existing and newly formed partnerships, including applications from individuals who are eligible to receive UKRI funding whilst being involved in existing UKRI initiatives such as DiRAC. However, it is important to stress that we would expect applications to clearly articulate how funding from this call will enable activities and outcomes to be substantially grown from the intended aims/objectives of the original initiative.

Q: Is there an ideal size of the Network and research partners that we should be aiming for? How many domains and disciplines should we connect to?

A: There is no specific size or number of partnerships required within a core team for this call. The NetworkPlus awards are expected to connect with partners and build their network across relevant sectors to realise the aims and objectives of the NetworkPlus. As a result we would expect a funded team to be seeking to build and grow a broader network, and for this to be appropriate in size to be diverse and inclusive and span domains and disciplines. We advise applicants to look at existing UKRI NetworkPlus awards on [Gateway to Research \(GtR\)](#), where you can see the kind of activities and partnerships they have.

Q: To what extent are cross-domain vs. cross-disciplinary teams expected? Is there a focus on regional or national networks?

A: We expect to see partnerships proposed that reflect the topic, landscape and environment that the NetworkPlus will cover to help realise its aims and objectives. These may be teams that are cross,

multi- or trans-disciplinary, they may span domains, and they may draw in members across sectors. The composition of the team will depend on what challenge areas the Network will focus on. We expect to see highly collaborative bids, comprising of teams made up of applicants from multiple research organisations, that bring together a suitable leadership group and that this group then builds the wider Network.

A key objective of the NetworkPlus awards is to build and maintain a national and cross-domain community, bringing together disciplines, sectors, and domains to address cross-cutting challenges related to digital RTP skills and careers in the UK. We expect networks to be representative of the UK community in their field, but it is not a requirement to include representation from every region or nation in the UK.

Eligibility

Q: What do we mean by Research Technical Professional (RTP)? What technical skills fall under the scope of the RTP acronym?

A: UKRI sees Digital Research Technical Professional (RTP) as an inclusive umbrella term which includes hundreds of job titles such as data scientists, research software engineers, systems administrators, and technical support for digital research infrastructures. Therefore, we are not prescriptive in terms of exact RTP roles and technical skills. All job titles and technical skills under the RTP umbrella term are encouraged to apply as long as a person meets the standard UKRI Eligibility Criteria and are involved in the delivery of digital research infrastructures.

Q: I see many roles included, would Information Governance and Data Management roles also be included in the scope?

A: As mentioned above, we intended this to be an umbrella term covering a huge list of digital research technical professional roles. We have not tried to list them all exhaustively, so just because a role is not explicitly mentioned does not mean it is not in scope. Any role within the broad area of digital RTPs should be part of the scope and community.

Q: Are digital RTP's who do NOT meet the standard UKRI Eligibility Criteria able to apply as project lead or a project co-lead? i.e. not a permanent member of academic staff at a UK Higher Education Institution?

A: To apply as a project lead or a co-lead to this call, digital RTP's must be eligible to be apply for UKRI funding. We are unfortunately unable to support applications as project lead or co-lead from digital RTP's who do not meet the standard UKRI eligibility criteria. Digital RTPs who are not eligible to apply as project lead or a project co-lead to this call are able to apply as either project partners, sub-contractors or hold dual roles (both project partner and sub-contractor). We anticipate that membership of networks will likely be made up of digital RTPs who are and are not eligible to apply,

and that a key aim of the Network will be to support capacity building opportunities and career development opportunities for those that are not eligible to apply for UKRI funding as project lead or co-lead.

Q: To what extent do project leads need to have an existing national leadership position/recognition? For instance, is it sufficient to have a local leadership role alongside being supported by a range of community members?

A: There is no requirement for project leads to have an existing national leadership position or national recognition in this space. It is up to the applicants to make the case for why they are the right people with the skills and experience to lead the activity that they are proposing. We expect to see highly collaborative bids, where the project lead will convene and be supported by a suitable leadership group and that this group will build the wider Network. Please see the 'Applications Questions' under the 'How to apply' section of the funding opportunity for more information on what the assessors will be looking for in terms of applicant and teams capacity to deliver the proposed work.

Q: Am I able to put my name to an internal bid at my institution AND potentially another bid with external partners?

A: Yes, applicants can be involved in no more than two applications submitted to this funding opportunity. Only one of these applications can be as project lead, however. There is no limit on the number of applications you can be involved in as either a project partner, sub-contractor or dual roles (both project partner and sub-contractor). For more information on the different types of roles you could apply as, we encourage applicants to visit the [UKRI website](#).

Flexible Fund

Q: Please could you give examples of how the Flexible Fund should be used?

A: It is up to applicants to make the case for how they want to use the flexible funding to maximise outcomes. A list of examples for how the flexible fund can be used is given on the funding opportunity page, but this is not intended to be limiting. The flexible fund should be used by each NetworkPlus award to commission and administer funding for various activities, all of which should contribute towards achieving the main objectives. The fund can be used to run workshops, conferences, training events and knowledge exchange programmes. It can also be used to produce specific outputs such as reports, websites, showcase events and briefings to help build the profile of RTP's in UK research and innovation.

Applications should propose using the flexible fund to meet the aims of the NetworkPlus. They will be assessed on the extent to which they distribute the funding appropriately across a diverse range of activities to achieve the objectives of the funding opportunity. Applicants should demonstrate that

they have plans in place to distribute funding through a clear, fair and transparent competitive process.

Q: Could the Flexible Fund be used to support curriculum development as part of existing open licensed initiatives (e.g. the Carpentries)?

A: Yes, the flexible fund can be used to support career development opportunities for individuals, teams and communities and this can include both developing new training activities or attending existing training activities such as those run by the Carpentries. A list of activities which the Flexible Fund can be used for is given on the funding opportunity page.

Q: Does the Flexible Fund have to be spent to the same end date as the main award?

A: Yes, the flexible fund should also be spent by the end date of the award which is 31 March 2029. Applicants should consider setting out the timescales for awards from their flexible funding in their application as part of plans for ensuring an open and transparent processes.

Q: Do we have to specify activities and approximate costs for the different activities that we will fund via the flexible fund? What level of detail is required?

A: You should outline the activities you plan to do and their costs. When it comes to the flexible funding, it is anticipated that some of this will be distributed by you to a broader community - in this case you will likely not yet know what they are going to do, so the key will be to set out the open and transparent process you intend to use to distribute the funding.

Q: How should we list resources requested as part of the Flexible Fund in our application on the UKRI Funding Service?

A: The flexible fund can be used for directly incurred items as per the examples listed in the funding opportunity. If costs are for travel, accommodation and subsistence for conferences, training events, workshops, for example, then these should be listed under the travel and subsistence cost heading. Otherwise, please list all other resources in the flexible fund under the 'Other – directly incurred' cost heading. The flexible fund will be funded by UKRI at 80% FEC.

Q: Regarding the flexible fund, for this call it will be £1 million out of which UKRI will fund £800,000. Can this pot be administered by the co-lead organisation?

A: We expect the flexible fund to be at minimum 50% of the total award, it can be a larger proportion of the total awarded funds. The flexible fund can be administered by the lead or co-lead organisation. Named individuals on the grant are not eligible to benefit from the flexible fund, they are administering it. But digital RTP's from the host organisations who are not named individuals on the grant are eligible to apply for the flexible funding. We expect applicants to clearly articulate in

their applications how a clear and transparent process for awarding the flexible funding will be followed.

Other

Q: Where can we go to find out more information on existing NetworkPlus awards to better understand the expectations of the Network and expected outputs?

A: We advise applicants to look at existing UKRI NetworkPlus awards on [Gateway to Research \(GtR\)](#), where you can find more information on the kinds of activities and partnerships they have, or to explore with your institution where NetworkPlus activities may have been led by colleagues across research domains.

Q: Where can I access all the required information we need to apply for funding opportunities at UKRI from start to finish. What is the UKRI grant lifecycle/funding process (pre-, during and post-award), including documents required, and roles and responsibilities of those concerned on both sides?

A: Information on UKRI funding opportunities and how to apply can be found on our website at [Apply for funding – UKRI](#). The UKRI grant lifecycle/funding processes can be found at the same website under the heading [How we make decisions – UKRI](#).

Funding Opportunity Enquiries:

For questions related to this specific funding opportunity, contact digitalrtpnetworkplus@ukri.org

Any queries regarding the system or the submission of applications through the Funding Service should be directed to the helpdesk. Please email: support@funding-service.ukri.org