



Future Blood Testing Network+

FBTN Funding Call 2 Collaborative Innovation Project Guidance Document

Call Announcement: 13/09/2022
Application Deadline: 14/12/2022
Funding Announcement: 30/01/2023

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FBTN-Funding-Series:Call-2

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Network: Future Blood Testing

This Network+ is EPSRC Funded under Grant No: EP/W000652/1

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Network+ Coordinator: *Dr Samantha Kanza & Mr Steve Brewer*

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1. Summary

Applicants are invited to apply for short-term interdisciplinary pilot research study funding from the Future Blood Testing Network+. These pilot studies will be no longer than 18 months in duration and are intended to develop new digital health systems to support remote blood monitoring, AI enabled blood sample analysis, personalised decision support, self-management and timely intervention in community healthcare.

All projects must comply with every aspect of the URKI project guidelines:

<https://www.ukri.org/files/legacy/news/grant-fec-tcs-january-2018-v1-pdf/>

2. Priority Areas

Our second call focuses on high quality feasibility and pilot proposals in the general area of digital health systems to support remote blood monitoring, AI enabled blood sample analysis, personalised decision support, and self-management and timely intervention in community health and care. We will therefore consider novel proposals in any of the following areas (but not limited to):

- 1) **Remote monitoring:** Technologies for blood biomarker identification with high levels of accuracy and robustness in **non-clinical environments**, including but not limited to examples as below:
 - i. Sensing, applied optics, biochemistry and electronic engineering, AI for a wider range of blood biomarker identification or clinical diagnostic
 - ii. Non-invasive or high-quality sample obtaining whilst minimising intrusion
 - iii. Remote or near patient blood testing or monitoring platform for multiple blood tests

- 2) **Information Communication Technologies (ICT):** ICT technologies to ensure secure data connectivity for remote blood monitoring and personalised analytics. We will therefore consider novel proposals in any of the following areas (but not limited to):
 - i. Mobile health and ICT for connected diagnostics
 - ii. Privacy and security in remote blood monitoring
 - iii. ICT infrastructure for Decentralized blood testing and monitoring
 - iv. Diagnostic testing automation and robotics

- 3) **Personalised analytics and AI:** Remote blood monitoring data facilitate the ability to trend patient data over time and monitor hospital treatment goals, which allows clinicians to better manage their patients, and this subsequently helps to improve patient care. We will therefore consider novel proposals in any of the following areas (but not limited to):
 - i. Decision support using multimodal data such as blood testing, monitoring and electronic health record data etc.
 - ii. Personalised analytics using longitudinal blood monitoring data
 - iii. AI and machine learning-based testing analysis

In addition, we strongly encourage applicants to consider **healthcare applications** of their proposed technology, including but not limited to:

- i. Prevention, early detection, improved diagnostics, treatment monitoring and personalisation
- ii. Efficiency improvement and capacity augmentation
- iii. Chronic disease management and selfcare and self-management
- iv. Clinical research and clinical trials

3. Project Criteria

- Individual projects can request up to £50,000 funding (total spend up to £62,500 as per UKRI 80% FEC funding rules). Applicants will be awarded 80% of the full cost, and the institution receiving the award is responsible for the remaining 20%. When invoices are submitted, they should be for 80% of the full cost and a statement should also be submitted showing the full cost. Please note equipment purchase costs are ineligible. For further details on costings and overheads see EPSRC's Full Economic Costing (FEC) Guides:
<https://epsrc.ukri.org/funding/applicationprocess/fundingguide/resources/>
- Projects are expected to last for a maximum of 18 months.
- Projects must be able to demonstrate how beneficiaries will be engaged, and how the likelihood of impacts can be increased. See the EPSRC guides for integrating impact:
<https://www.ukri.org/councils/epsrc/guidance-for-applicants/what-to-include-in-your-proposal/case-for-support/>
- Projects must be able to demonstrate reasonable prospects of continuation funding to enable sustainable development.
- Projects research is required to be at least 50% within EPSRC remit:
<https://epsrc.ukri.org/funding/applicationprocess/basics/remit/>
- Applications must be made on the FBTN application form, and must not exceed 8 pages, using 11pt Arial Font, with no adjustments to margins. They must be accompanied by a 1 page Gantt chart style project plan.

4. Applicant Criteria & Descriptions

- **PI's:** PI's **must** be eligible for EPSRC funding. For information on the eligibility of organisations and individuals to receive this funding, see the EPSRC Funding Guide:
<https://epsrc.ukri.org/funding/applicationprocess/fundingguide/>. As this call is a targeted funding opportunity provided via EPSRC funding, higher education institutions, and some research institutes and independent research organisations are eligible to apply including NHS bodies with research capabilities. A list of eligible organisations to apply to EPSRC is provided at:
<https://www.ukri.org/councils/epsrc/guidance-for-applicants/check-if-you-are-eligible-for-funding/>.
- **Project Partners:** Projects may also include collaborators referred to as Project Partners. Project Partners are defined as collaborating organisations who will have an integral role in the proposed research. This may include in-kind or cash contributions such as expertise, staff time, use of facilities, etc. Project Partners cannot receive funding directly from the grant; the only exception to this is where a Project Partner is providing services 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. Letters of support can be included to demonstrate project partner support.
- **Staff:** If you are requesting salary for a person either currently working for (or to be hired by the academic institutes of the PI/Co-I) then this person will be considered staff in your application. These would typically be post-docs, although PhD students can be permitted where appropriate but in line with EPSRC rules we cannot fund a PhD Student to do work that could be perceived as a continuation of their PhD.
- **Sub-Contractors:** If you have tendered the position required for your project and ascertained that the best person for the job is someone from a commercial company then this person will be considered a sub-contractor in your application.
- **Collaboration Agreements:** In addition to a contract with the PI institution, we require agreements to be made on GDPR compliant policies and Data Processing Agreements between the applying

institution and their collaborators. If these cannot be agreed within a certain timeframe we reserve the right to cease the contract process and choose another application.

5. Assessment Process

Proposals will be assessed in two stages:

Stage 1: Network+ team sift.

All applications will initially be checked by the Network coordinator and Central Management Team to ensure they meet the application criteria (e.g. funding eligibility, timelines, budgets, finance sign off etc) before further processing by review panels.

Stage 2: Peer Review of selected proposals:

The reviewers will be made up of members of the Network+ Team, and carefully selected external reviewers who have expertise in the project area. All reviewers will have declared any conflicts of interest up front, and will only be assigned to review calls that can be judged impartially. Calls will be judged on the following:

- Suitability for the call: Is it relevant to the call themes; Articulation of problem and “so-what?” factor (what makes this project stand out?) Identifying the potential to inform the research challenges for FTN. How will the project help grow and sustain the FTN Network+?
- Project criteria: Novelty and innovation, clinical need, methodology rigor, benefits to patient care, collaboration suitability and track record, sustainability.
- Standard EPSRC assessment criteria will also be applied: Quality; Importance; Impact; the applicant’s ability to deliver the proposed project within budget and in time.
- Evidence of a planning and management process for the duration of the project will be required.
- Each Application will receive at least two reviews from impartial reviewers, and applicants may request feedback if they wish to do so.

6. Project Management and Expectations

The FTN Network+ coordinator Dr Samantha Kanza will liaise between the FTN investigators and the successful pilot projects. The Pilot projects will be required to keep the FTN investigators informed of progress (e.g. via reports, a web site or a blog) and take part in Network+ activities as appropriate to the project. Projects will need to submit a report on the activities and outcomes of the projects, along with their invoice within a month of the end of the pilot project. NB: Reports can be downloaded from our website here: <https://futurebloodtesting.org/documents/> under Project Series Report Template.

7. Funding Contract Details

The funding will be awarded via a Future Blood Testing Network+ Award agreement from the University of Reading with the Research Organisation that leads on the proposal. If the application includes more than one research organisation and/or other project partners, the main applying Research Organisation must have their own formal collaboration agreements in place to set out the basis of collaboration including ownership or intellectual property and rights to exploitation.

Intellectual Property

With regards to intellectual property, The FTN Network+ and EPSRC make no claim to intellectual property that arises from research activities funded under this grant (for more information see their website: <https://epsrc.ukri.org/funding/applicationprocess/basics/ip/>). For clarity each party shall own the intellectual property generated by that party. However it is required that the outputs/results of any project will be shared with the FTN Network+ Management Team (comprising the Network+ Executive Group and Advisory Board) for inclusion in the project web site and other promotional materials to inform the Network+ as a whole and wider public in an appropriate and timely manner in such a way as to achieve some of the main aims of the funding, that is growing the Network+ and its associated research base.

The funding will be awarded via an FBTN Network+ Award agreement from the University of Reading with the Research Organisation that leads on the proposal, which will specify the agreed terms and allow for any issues with respect to background IP being utilised in the proposed activity to be highlighted. If the application includes more than one research organisation and/or other project partners, the main applying Research Organisation must have their own formal collaboration agreements in place to set out the basis of collaboration including ownership or intellectual property and rights to exploitation.

Any publications or other outputs/dissemination resulting from work carried out under this grant must include acknowledgement of the Network+ funding by including the statement *“This work has been supported by the Future Blood Testing Network+, which has been funded by EPSRC under grant number: EP/ W000652/1”*. These publications (including the required project report) must adhere to UKRI Open access requirements. Funded projects will be expected to present a summary of their work at the Network+ conferences and review workshops.

9. Key Dates

- Call formally announced – 13th September 2022
- Deadline for applications submitted by e-mail to the Network+ Coordinator: s.kanza@reading.ac.uk 14th December 2022
- Successful applicants will be notified by 30th January 2023
- Successful projects should be prepared to start as soon as possible from when the announcement is made, preferably before 1st March 2023 subject to completing the Future Blood Testing Network+ Award Agreement.
- Projects will be expected to report on progress at the review workshops in 2023 and 2024.

10. Contacts

For more information on the Future Blood Testing Network+ visit our website: www.futurebloodtesting.org

For specific information about this funding call visit: <https://futurebloodtesting.org/2022/09/05/13-09-2022-funding-call-2-collaboration-innovation-projects/>

If you have any questions please contact our Network+ Coordinator Dr Samantha Kanza on s.kanza@reading.ac.uk

11. GDPR Statement

The Future Blood Testing Network+ is hosted at the University of Reading and their privacy statement can be found here: <https://www.reading.ac.uk/imps/data-protection/privacy-notice>

Please be aware that we will be retaining the information about applicant institutions and the domains in which the applicants work for the duration of the network in order to create statistics on engagement with our funding call.