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Questions about TIDAL N+

What is TIDAL N+?

TIDAL Network+ is an EPSRC-funded collaboration between UCL, Strathclyde, Salford and Loughborough Universities. We are building an interdisciplinary network of researchers, assistive technology (AT) users, entrepreneurs and clinical practitioners, to identify and tackle new research challenges that will help us to transform AT. Together we will create novel, innovative solutions that will lead to improvements in the quality of AT and enhance the lives of the people who use them. Our vision is for innovative, sustainable and equitable AT, both physical and digital.

TIDAL N+ has been awarded funding from 1 September 2021 to 31st August 2024 by the EPSRC as a Healthcare Technologies New Challenges Network Plus ([EP/W000717/1](#)). The ‘Plus’ element is a budget for us to award feasibility research funds of up to £60k to each of

eight interdisciplinary teams who have an excellent research hypothesis for solving a clear unmet need. We are planning to run four separate funding calls, and aim to fund two projects from each call.

What is EPSRC?

EPSRC is the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council. It is the main funding body for engineering and physical sciences research in the UK. By investing in research and postgraduate training, EPSRC aims to build the knowledge and skills-base needed to address the scientific and technological challenges facing the nation.

EPSRC is part of UK Research and Innovation, a body which works in partnership with UK universities, research organisations, businesses, charities, and government with the aim of creating the best possible environment for research and innovation to flourish.

Questions about the projects we are looking to fund

What is this funding call about?

Please see separate document, 'Information for Applicants Call 3 and Call 4.'

How many projects will you be funding?

Over the course of TIDAL N+ we will be running 4 different funding calls on different themes. We aim to fund 2 projects from each call, so 8 in total.

What kinds of projects are you looking to fund?

We are funded by EPSRC, the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, so the kinds of projects we are looking to fund are engineering and physical sciences projects that fall within in the remit of what EPSRC fund. We are looking to fund projects that are at an early research stage rather than a commercialisation or implementation stage; technologies at low TRL (Technology Readiness Level) probably TRL 2 or 3, so just beyond the initial idea.

The aim of this feasibility funding is to provide short term support (about 6 months duration) to enable fundamental, interdisciplinary, early-stage research. We aim to fund interdisciplinary teams who have an excellent research hypothesis for solving a clear unmet need. Whilst teams are interdisciplinary, the hypothesis, when answered, should advance the engineering or physical sciences field. The feasibility study should result in increased confidence in the proof of concept developed, which then has potential to attract further investment. We expect all proposals funded through TIDAL N+ to be developed with stakeholders including AT users alongside healthcare services and manufacturing partners, as appropriate.

We want fundamentally research-driven ideas that will then enable a shift in the design of a particular design or service. We are looking for projects that will facilitate a transformation – ideas that will produce a step change.

Projects should have a multi-disciplinary, co-creation approach. This is very important. There should be involvement of industry, stakeholders, service providers, service users, clinicians etc. as appropriate to your project.

Projects should be deliverable for around £60k. The idea is to fund a few months of research to prove enough to allow you to apply for much bigger funding.

We are particularly keen to fund proposals that demonstrate clear plans for how the work will lead to a full proposal to be submitted to a UK funder at a future time.

Applications led by early career academics/researchers are particularly encouraged.

We are not looking to fund:

- Projects which are not directly and strongly aligned with the theme of this call
- Incremental product development projects which might be better served by Innovate UK funding or commercial funding
- People who are just want funds to get their product to market
- Activities that are normally the responsibility of central or local government
- Evaluations of your organisation's own programmes
- Research studies that are already underway, though we would consider funding a new study that is part of a wider programme of research that has already begun

Would you fund research for a product beyond TRL 3 (Technology Readiness Level 3)?

EPSRC is very much about fundamental engineering and physical sciences research. If there is a solid engineering and physical sciences research question that can be addressed by research, that could be relevant at any number of developmental stages for a product, but probably more at the early stages of product development rather than at the later stages. As long as your project can be expressed as a solid research question that is clearly within the EPSRC remit, that's the key thing. It doesn't specifically matter what stage of the product development process that research question comes in, but bear in mind that we are looking to fund research that enables a fundamental, step change in products and services, not incremental improvements. Also, we are looking to fund projects that have a collaborative, multidisciplinary, co-creation approach. We are not looking to fund people who are just want funds to get their product to market.

Would you fund a project about the psychosocial aspects of AT?

We are looking to fund multi-disciplinary research, so the psychosocial dimension could certainly come into a project, so long as the project fitted with our aim to fund fundamental engineering and physical sciences research that will enable step-changes in AT products and services.

Should the geographical focus of our project be the UK or is there an international angle as well?

We are funded by the EPSRC to stimulate interdisciplinary working on issues within the context of UK research institutions, and between research institutions and other

stakeholders (AT users, clinicians, industry, policy makers, civil society etc.). However, given the inter-connected and often global nature of the challenges, we do not expect that all work funded by or associated with the Network + will be exclusively UK-focused. However, we would require international collaborations to have a lead partner based in a UK institution that is eligible for EPSRC funding. Also note that international collaborators can't be named on the application as Co-Investigators or budgeted as Co-Investigators. We anticipate that commercial partners and collaborators will provide in-kind support to the project and donate their time. If there is a good case for meeting the expenses of other collaborators or partners who can't be named or funded as Co-Is, their expenses can be included in the budget.

Will you be funding projects from people in LMICs (Low and Middle Income Countries)?

We welcome engagement from people in LMICs but it has to be in the context of partnering with academic partners in the UK who would be eligible for the funding (i.e. who qualify for EPSRC funding). If you do not qualify for EPSRC funding we would encourage you to attend our agenda-setting & collaboration workshops to discuss your research ideas and possibly find a UK academic partner to lead the project and make the application.

There are overlaps between rehabilitation and AT. Will you fund rehabilitation technologies?

There is another EPSRC Healthcare Technologies Network+ that will launch soon which is looking at rehabilitation. There will be opportunities from that Network+ as well as TIDAL N+ so depending on what you have got in mind and the remit of your project, you could apply to this Network+ if you think it is predominantly an AT project, but if it is specifically about rehabilitation, there is another Network+ coming up which may be a better fit.

Can I apply for funding for a project that has already started?

No. Awards will not be made retrospectively: this means that the work for which support is requested must not have started, or be planned to start, before the funding contract with UCL has been signed.

How long should my project take to complete?

Projects should be about 6 months in length.

Questions about eligibility

Who is eligible for funding as a PI (Principal Investigator/Lead Applicant) or Co-I (Co-Investigator/Co-Applicant)?

To be eligible for funding, the PI and Co-Is must be academic employees of an organisation that qualifies for EPSRC funding and be resident in the UK.

For employees on a fixed term contract, their contract must extend beyond the duration of the proposed research project. Although EPSRC rules say that ordinarily a Co-I would not be

required to have a contract that extends beyond the term of the grant, we will require this as the project timeframe is only 6 months.

Note that:

- Funding is not available to support Directly Allocated staff i.e. permanent academic staff such as lecturer or above, including ECRs with permanent contracts. However, permanent staff can still be named as PI or Co-I where they will supervise the project (and we expect all projects to have appropriate supervision).
- TIDAL also allows and encourages Early Career Research (ECR) staff on fixed-term contracts (i.e., Research Associates / Research Assistants within 15 years of receipt of a doctoral qualification) to submit projects as PI or be named a Co-I. In such cases their time can be budgeted as Directly Incurred staff.

I am an ECR (Early Career Researcher). Can I be named as a Co-I (Co-Investigator) on a project?

Yes. We expect applications to include people in the team who are transitioning towards establishing research independence.

I am an ECR (Early Career Researcher) or PhD candidate. Can I apply as a PI?

Yes. We actively encourage ECRs to apply for TIDAL N+ funding, and they can be the Principal Investigator so long as:

- They are employed in an eligible UK academic institution.
- Their contract lasts until at least the end date of the project.
- They hold, or are expected to hold, a doctorate by the start date of the funding being awarded, or can demonstrate equivalent research/innovation experience and/or training. There are no eligibility rules based on years since PhD.
- They have the approval of their own institution before submission: there are often local eligibility criteria which need to be met.

I have not been active in research for a while. I have had a career break and/or have been working in a different type of role. Can I still apply?

Applications are welcome from those returning to research from a career break or following time in other roles, so long as you qualify for EPSRC funding. There are no time limits in respect of time spent outside a research or innovation environment.

I work for a non-UK organization. Can I apply?

No. You can't apply as the Principal Investigator (PI) or be a Co-Investigator (Co-I) on a project because you don't qualify for EPSRC funding. However, you can be a partner or collaborator on a project being led by someone in the UK who does qualify for EPSRC funding. In most cases, and especially where partners or collaborators are commercial organisations, we would expect them to support the project in-kind by donating their time. If the PI believes that a strong case can be made to meet a partner/collaborator's expenses, the PI can cost these in the project budget. This funding must not be used to provide any other kind of funding or subsidy for a partner/collaborator or their organisation.

We are intending to include non-UK based team members in our application. Is this allowed?

Yes, but they can't be a PI or a Co-I. All proposed Co-Investigators must be academic employees of an eligible organisation and must be resident in the UK. Non-UK-based team members can be included as partners or collaborators. In most cases, and especially where partners or collaborators are commercial organisations, we would expect them to support the project in-kind by donating their time. If the PI believes that a strong case can be made to meet a partner/collaborator's expenses, the PI can cost these in the project budget. This funding must not be used to provide any other kind of funding or subsidy for a partner/collaborator or their organisation.

What organisations qualify for EPSRC funding?

There is a list of qualifying organisations on the [EPSRC website](#).

Note that the following are NOT eligible for funding:

- Industry / businesses. This does not preclude you involving industry partners in your project and including them in your application, but they cannot be funded as principal- or co-investigators. In most cases, and especially where partners or collaborators are commercial organisations, we would expect them to donate their time in-kind.
- Research and technology organisations. This does not preclude you involving research and technology organisations as partners in your project and including them in your application, but they cannot be funded as principal- or co-investigators. In most cases, and especially where partners or collaborators are commercial organisations, we would expect them to donate their time in-kind.

Questions about project partners

What level of commitment do we need to show from industrial or commercial project partners at the application stage?

Co-creation is a very important aspect of the projects we are looking to fund. Interaction between different partners is important for allowing new ideas and novel perspectives to emerge. That is one of the key things we would like to support. So, if you are going to involve partners, that needs to be from the beginning, which means they have to commit at the outset. We are looking for genuine collaboration. One important thing we are trying to do by funding this research is not to start with a product or solution and improve it but to go back to the problem: if we understand the problem then we can find a better solution for it. We need consider what is the problem from the perspective of the end users, and how we can find a solution to the problem, so that should be the focus of your research question, rather than jumping in with an existing solution that you may want to improve (for example, electrifying wheelchairs). It's not that there aren't worthwhile projects of that nature, but we want to get to the grassroots level, get to the real problems, and then go from there to create transformative solutions.

I am working on a proposal for a project involving private businesses who will want their involvement acknowledged. Is this allowed?

One of the aims of the network is to encourage collaboration between academic and non-academic organisations. It should not be a problem to acknowledge their involvement, so long as this is alongside acknowledgement of TIDAL N+ and the EPSRC (requirements for which will be set out in the terms and conditions for any awards made).

Questions about finances and budgets

How much can I apply for?

You can apply for funding for projects with a total eligible cost of up to £60,000. However, in line with EPSRC funding rules, TIDAL N+ funding is awarded at 80% of the total eligible costs, and your institution is expected to make up the remaining 20%. This means that if you apply for £60k and your project is selected for funding, we will actually reimburse contracting organisations 80% of £60k i.e. £48k not the full £60k.

If TIDAL only reimburses 80% of the total eligible costs for the project, where does the other 20% come from?

Your institution will have to cover the other 20%. You must get the permission of your Head of Department or Head of Finance (or other appropriate financial authorities in your institution) before applying for funding, to ensure that you have their commitment to pay the other 20%.

Can I also get funding from other sources for my project?

Yes. If you can secure matched funding for your project and/or contributions in kind, we would welcome that.

What can I include in the budget?

You can include directly incurred costs such as directly incurred researcher salaries, consumables, research expenses (but **not air travel** other than in exceptional circumstances and with prior permission from the TIDAL N+ team), participant compensation, sub-contracting an individual or service to deliver a specialist service or input; also indirect costs such as overheads and estate costs. Open access publication charges are not eligible costs. Our expectation is that travel costs will be for essential travel only, that essential travel will be minimal, and only within the UK. We do not anticipate funding any international travel.

- Funding is not available to support Directly Allocated staff i.e. permanent academic staff such as lecturer or above, including ECRs with permanent contracts. However, permanent staff can still be named as PI or Co-I where they will supervise the project (and we expect all projects to have appropriate supervision).
- TIDAL also allows and encourages Early Career Research (ECR) staff on fixed-term contracts (i.e., Research Associates / Research Assistants within 15 years of receipt of a

doctoral qualification) to submit projects as PI or be named a Co-I. In such cases their time can be budgeted as Directly Incurred staff.

- Other RAs working on the project who are not on permanent contracts can also be costed as Directly Incurred.
- Costs should be actual, auditable, and verifiable; researcher time should be justified, not salary.

Under what circumstances can I include air travel in my project budget?

We would consider a request to cover air travel if the travel was essential and there was no alternative means of travel, or if an individual would be significantly disadvantaged (not merely inconvenienced) in some way if unable to travel by air. In all cases, you would need to request permission for air travel from the TIDAL N+ team before incurring the costs. We envisage that essential travel will be minimal and do not anticipate funding any international travel.

Can I include publication fees in my budget?

No. TIDAL N+ funds cannot be used to fund open access or any other publication fees. EPSRC expect these to be covered by your institution's block grant.

If my application were successful, would the salary money be additional to someone's existing salary or would it just buy them out so that they were still getting what they earn now?

This is up to your organisation. Note, however, that funding cannot be awarded directly to individuals, and must be paid to your organisation.

Are salary costs indexed to account for inflation and salary increases?

Funded projects will only run for 6 months. We will not add future pay awards or indexation to the salary costings at the time awards are made. You will need to account for them in your budget (e.g. known pay awards pending) or your institution will need to cover these.

Questions about the application and funding process

What is the application process?

The process for the funding call and submitting applications is as follows. See 'Key dates and deadlines' below for dates.

1. An in-person workshop in London on 27th October (times t.b.a. but likely to be between 10am and 4pm). The primary aim of this workshop is to generate awareness of the research challenges relating to **Call 3 - Sensors & Data Science for Communication Aids**, and to stimulate collaboration and engagement with relevant stakeholders. There will also be an opportunity to ask questions about the other themes, and to network with potential collaborators. We encourage you to attend this workshop, but it is not compulsory as we recognise that some people do not flourish in workshop-type environments. We will not be holding any further workshops specifically focusing on the themes for **Call 4 (Responsible Engineering, and DMS**

and Physical Devices), but the recordings from the workshops held earlier in the year are on our website.

2. Applicants for Call 3 and Call 4 to submit an expression of interest form by 10th November 2022 (2 weeks after the workshop) to indicate their intention to submit a full application. **ALL lead applicants, for both calls, must submit an expression of interest, whether or not they attend the workshop.**
3. Applicants submit full application forms 6 weeks after the workshop.
4. Applications are reviewed.
5. Shortlisted applications are considered by the Steering Committee and TIDAL N+ investigators, who then make the final selection of proposals for funding.

We are piloting two-part Expression of Interest and Application Forms: Part 1 will be the outline Case for Support, which will be considered anonymously by two reviewers; Part 2 will contain contact details, project team and track record information.

Please make ensure that no identifying content is included in Part 1 of either form (e.g., host institution). This will enable applications to be considered without members of the panel having knowledge of the applicant's identity or affiliations.

You must also submit a completed budget spreadsheet using the template provided. Planned expenditure must be in line with your host institution's financial regulations.

We require your application to be approved by an appropriate authority in your organisation, who will undertake both to fund the additional 20% of your budget, and to provide the support they normally provide to PIs. This would usually be your Head of Department and/or Head of Finance, but you should follow your organisation's rules on who needs to approve your application. Make sure your application form has been approved and signed by an appropriate authority before you submit it.

Please submit your application form in Word format. Your budget should be in Excel. Please do not submit these as PDFs.

Do you shortlist based on the Expression of Interest?

No. The purpose of the Expression of Interest (Eoi) is so that we know what kinds of full applications to expect, and enable us to put together an appropriate team of reviewers. We will acknowledge receipt of your Eoi but won't be giving you any feedback on it (unless anything needs clarifying at that stage), so don't wait to hear from us before starting or submitting your full application.

Am I allowed to submit an application if I don't attend the workshop?

Yes. We will also offer a direct application route as we recognise that some people do not flourish in workshop-type environments, however, **ALL lead applicants must submit an expression of interest** by the deadline, prior to submitting a full application, whether or not they attend the workshop.

Can I submit more than one application?

Yes, but please don't submit the same application for Call 3 and Call 4. You could submit more than one application to a single call, but we would be unlikely to fund more than one application from a single team or lead investigator.

Where in the application form do we list team members who don't qualify as Co-Is?

We want to be able to assess the quality of your proposed team, so you should include details and credentials of partners and collaborators on the proposal/application form (Part 2), even if you are not requesting funding for them. If you are requesting funding for their expenses, you can cost these under Directly Incurred costs, however, as noted above, where individuals are employed or otherwise funded by a commercial organisation, we would expect them to donate their time in kind.

What document format should I use for my application?

Please submit your application form in Word format. Your budget should be in Excel. Please do not submit these as PDFs. **Please do an accessibility check on your documents before submitting them and correct any issues that are flagged as likely to cause problems for people using screen readers.**

What approvals do I need from my organisation before submitting an application?

We require the approval of your Head of Department and/or Head of Finance, or other appropriate authority (you should follow your organisation's rules on this). They will need to sign your application form and in so doing they approve your application, and undertake both to fund the additional 20% of your budget that we can't fund, and to provide the support they normally provide to PIs. Your organisation will have its own internal rules about who you need to consult before submitting an application and whose approval you need, so you also will need to follow these.

What are the selection criteria for shortlisting and funding decisions?

Research question

- Is there a strong research question which addresses a clear, unmet need within the scope of TIDAL N+. Are the research question(s) important, novel and likely to lead to significant new understanding?
- Is the research question directly and strongly aligned to the theme of the call?

Multidisciplinary team and co-creation approach

- Multidisciplinary team in place?
- How will ECRs be involved?
- How will industry and/or other relevant stakeholders such as AT users be involved?

Future funding potential

- Does the application demonstrate potential for development of future funding applications from EPSRC, Innovate UK or other UK funding streams?

Dissemination and impact

- How will this grant help enable better futures for assistive technology users?
- How will this grant impact healthcare technology systems?
- How will the team maximise impact through dissemination of their work?
- Have criteria for assessing the success of the project been clearly articulated?

Feasibility

- Is the project realistic, given the budget and time constraints?

Research team

- Does the team have the expertise, skills and experience to complete this project successfully?

- Will this funding make a tangible difference to the research trajectory of the lead researcher?
- If relevant, does the researcher have sufficient support in place, e.g. appropriate collaborations established?
- Is there adequate institutional support for this project?

Financial justification and value for money

- Are the funds requested essential for the work and justified by the importance and potential of the research?
- Does the proposal demonstrate value for money in terms of the resources requested?

Ethical issues

- Are there ethical and/or research governance issues?
- Are there satisfactory plans in place to address these?
- Are there clear plans in place for storing and, if appropriate, sharing data in accordance with GDPR?

Equality, diversity and inclusion

- How does the proposal demonstrate excellence in commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion?

Responsible research and carbon impact

- How does the proposal demonstrate responsible research e.g. measuring and limiting the carbon footprint of the project and other sustainable research practices?

Who are the reviewers?

The reviewers will include academics, and representatives of industry and AT user advocates.

How many people will review my application?

Each proposal will be reviewed by at least 2 reviewers.

Who will make the final decision?

The final decision will be made by the Steering Committee with the TIDAL N+ team. If a TIDAL N+ team member is named on any application, they will declare a conflict of interest and will not be involved in any discussion or decisions about that project. Steering Committee members will also be required to declare conflicts of interest and will not be involved in making decisions on any projects where they are conflicted.

What happens next if I am successful?

Contracting between UCL and the successful lead applicant's organisation

A contracting process will be initiated by UCL with your institution to formally agree the contract for the funding. EPSRC terms and conditions will apply, as well as any terms and conditions specific to the TIDAL N+ grant, and any terms and conditions specific to this award. We will ask you for details of your contract team if you are successful.

The lead applicant's (PI's) institution should sign and return the contract as soon as possible. If the lead applicant's institution wants to request any revisions to the draft agreement, the lead applicant is responsible for ensuring all requested changes are made and tracked in a

single Word document. This document with requested revisions must be submitted to the UCL contracts manager as soon as possible. Our contracts manager will discuss the proposed changes with the lead applicant's institution and will then send a final version of the agreement for signature. The lead applicant on the successful project is responsible for having the amended document signed by their institution and returning it to UCL within one week of it being sent out. We would strongly recommend that you are proactive in following-up progress on the contract negotiations with your contracts manager.

Contracting between the successful lead applicant's organisation and their project partners

Successful applicants will be expected to put in place a collaboration agreement or other suitable agreement with any of their project partners or collaborators (including Co-Is and other collaborators/partners), governing the terms of the collaboration. This agreement should reflect all applicable terms of your organisation's contract with UCL, the role and contribution of each individual/organisation, any financial payments to be made, and delivery deadlines. Successful lead applicants should seek the advice of their contracts team to put appropriate agreements in place.

Access to mentors

Each project will be provided with access to a mentor who will support the activities of the project. Your mentor will provide advice and feedback to you at appropriate times during your project activities. The aim is to provide your project with an additional level of support and guidance, rather than monitor its progress. Mentors may be asked to provide feedback to TIDAL N+ team from time to time.

Are there any other obligations for successful applicants?

Successful applicants will be expected to participate in network events and will be required to present project updates at our symposia and/or other TIDAL N+ events on- and offline.

What are the key dates and deadlines?

27th Oct 2022	Workshop in person at UCL in London.
10th Nov 2022	Deadline for expressions of interest to be submitted.
8th Dec 2022	Deadline for full proposals to be submitted.
9th Dec 2022 to 6th Jan 2023	Review of proposals.
w/c 10th Jan 2023	Reviewers' comments sent to applicants for response.
7 days after comments sent	Deadline for applicants to respond to reviewer comments.
13th Feb 2023	Panel makes final decisions on which projects to fund.
14th Feb to 17th Feb 2023	Emails sent to applicants with funding decision
20th Feb 2023	Contracting process begins.
May 2023	Projects begin. (They may begin earlier or later depending on how long contracting takes. A project can begin as soon as the contract with UCL has been signed by the lead applicant's institution.)

NOTE: the workshop dates and submission deadlines are confirmed. Other dates are to be confirmed. We will endeavour to keep to this schedule, but dates may vary slightly. We will keep the website updated with the most current dates.

Any other questions? Anything not clear?

We want you to put in a great application so we are really happy to answer any other questions and queries you may have, or to clarify anything that isn't clear in the call documentation. Please contact TIDAL@ucl.ac.uk