

## Digit Innovation Fund – First Call 2020

### Guidance for Applicants

#### About Digit

The Digital Futures at Work Research Centre (Digit) aims to advance our understanding of how digital technologies are reshaping work, impacting on employers, employees, job seekers and governments. It is jointly led by the [University of Sussex Business School](#) and the [Leeds University Business School](#) with partners from [Aberdeen](#), [Cambridge](#), [Manchester](#) and [Monash Universities](#). The Digit centre has been established with an investment from the [Economic and Social Research Council](#) (ESRC) equivalent to £8m for the period between 1 January 2020 and 31 December 2024.

Digit will provide theoretically informed, empirically evidenced and policy relevant analysis of the benefits, risks and challenges for companies operating in the UK and abroad. It is intended that this analysis will draw on international, interdisciplinary and innovative mixed methods approaches. Digit aims to provide a compelling empirical base that will allow policy makers to move beyond current levels of speculation, while contributing intellectually with empirical evidence to contemporary debates on the future of work.

#### Innovation Fund

The Innovation Fund is designed to support research, capacity building and innovative approaches as they emerge over the life of the centre. The Innovation Fund provides pump-prime support of new projects that complement the core research programme. The fund is open to the wider academic community across the UK (though partners may be based elsewhere). The Digit Innovation Fund is designed to seed research projects to a value of £500,000 over the life of the Digit research centre (2020-2024). There will likely be four rounds, and intention to distribute funds equally across each call. Projects must be costed at 100% full economic cost (fEC) and will be funded at 80% fEC, according to UKRI guidelines. Funding in Round 1 is available for projects which cost **between £10,000 to £50,000** fEC. We very strongly encourage smaller applications as we are very limited in the number of large applications that can be awarded.

The Innovation Fund is designed to support:

- Research projects that advance understanding of digital futures at work, and could include **theoretical work, methodological innovation and emerging empirical developments**. Comparative research is encouraged.
- Research projects that develop and sustain **strong partnerships with external partners** in the private, third and public sectors.
- Innovative **co-production** of knowledge between academics and non-academic partners. Co-production of knowledge means engaging with research users and incorporating their needs from the beginning and throughout the research and impact activity process, with the intention of producing targeted and practical solutions for real-world problems.

## Eligibility

- Funds can only be awarded to a recognised research organisation (RO), not a person. Guidance on organisations eligible to apply for funding can be found on the [ESRC website](#), including a list of independent research organisations (IROs) and other organisations eligible to apply.
- Principal Investigator (PI):
  - Only one person on an application can be named as Principal Investigator.
  - The Principal Investigator is expected to be based at, and supported by, the organisation submitting the application.
  - We particularly encourage Early Career Researchers to be the named PI.
  - Please ensure the PI has the support of their institution to be able to conduct the proposed research
  - The PI should be employed by their UK research organisation with a contract of employment that does not end before the proposed project end.
  - A PI can only submit one application to the Innovation Fund, but can be Co-I on other applications
- Organisations outside the UK are not eligible to apply to lead an Innovation Fund application. Those based at organisations outside the UK are eligible to be included on Innovation Fund applications as Co-investigators or Consultants (please note, consultants cannot be named as Co-investigators). Please see the ESRC guidance on Co-investigators from outside the UK [here](#) and the 'Funding' section of this document regarding costings for international Co-investigators.
- We would normally expect applications to include collaborations with external organisations, such as businesses, public service organisations, third sector organisations, etc. Non-academic applicants can also co-lead projects; however, the research funded must be academic research and no more than 30% of FEC can be allocated to such partners.
- Digit Innovation Funds will be transferred from the University of Sussex to eligible ROs.
- We are not able to fund PhD studentships or Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs)
- Awards funded through the Digit Innovation Fund should follow UKRI's standard funding rules, [terms and conditions](#) and align to the [ESRC's research funding guide](#). Please note, however, that all correspondence should come to Digit.
- Those Principal Investigator and Co-Investigators on the original Digit application to the ESRC are not eligible to be PI or Co-I of any Innovation Fund (IF) applications but they can be included as a part of an IF applicant's Project Team. This also applies to Digit Advisory Board members.

## Requirements & stipulations

- The focus of the project should have direct relevance to both Digit research objectives, and be applicable to the UK.
- Applications should be social science-focused, though can be interdisciplinary.
- All resulting data will be securely made available to the [Digit Data Observatory](#), which will in turn be made available to the [UK Data Service](#)
- If successful, you will be asked to undertake a risk assessment as per your institution's requirements.
- If successful, you will need to adhere to data protection and [GDPR](#) guidelines.

- If successful, you will need to adhere to the UKRI's guidelines and procedures on research integrity, according to the UKRI's [Policy and Guidelines on the Governance of Good Research Conduct](#), as well as your institutions – and the [ESRC's](#) - ethics policies and procedures
- If successful, you will need to adhere to the procurement policies for the lead RO and to the ESRC indications in their [Research Funding Guide](#)
- We expect projects to take no longer than one year.
- We ask that successful applicants be willing to participate in Digit future events or meetings, particularly for the purpose of sharing experience and building capacity
- The information and application of those who are funded through the Innovation Fund may be shared with relevant organisations, e.g. ESRC.
- Any costings for non-academic organisations cannot amount to more than 30% of the budget. Non-academic organisations will receive 80% full economic costing.

## Funding

All projects must be costed at their full economic costing (fEC), that is 100% of costs. Projects will be awarded at 80% fEC, according to UKRI funding rules. Panel members will be given the discretion to make awards, which means funding awards may differ from the amount requested.

Information regarding costing Co-Is from outside the UK, a UK business, the third sector or a government body can be found in the [ESRC's Research Funding Guide](#). Please note: the combined costs for Co-Is from outside the UK, or from UK business, third sector and government bodies must not exceed 30% of the total fEC of the grant application. Non-academic, non-UK investigators involved as project team members must bring their own funds. Further information on eligible costs can be found [here](#).

Please note: we are not using the joint electronic submission system (Je-S) so those details on ESRC guidance documents do not directly apply. All funding awarded will be received via the University of Sussex, not directly from the ESRC. Financial reporting will be required according to Digit and University of Sussex requirements.

## Eligible & ineligible costs

- Eligible costs include:
  - Travel & subsistence
  - Estate and indirect costs for UK HEIs
  - Research expenses & consumables, e.g. participant reimbursement for time; transcription fees; access to datasets; consumables related to surveys or other data collection, books; etc.
  - Expenses related to engagement with external stakeholders
  - Costs associated with engagement and dissemination events
  - Research assistant costs
  - Any consultancy costs
  - PI / Co-I time – e.g. to cover teaching time, but it must be at the rate of teaching replacement, rather than at PI cost
- Ineligible costs include:
  - Overheads for UK businesses and government bodies

- Funds cannot be used for purchase of items of equipment worth £10,000 (including VAT) or more and should not be for items that would normally be expected for applicants to provide (e.g. computer hardware including laptops, electronic notebooks, digital cameras, software, etc.)
- Conference registration, travel and subsistence costs would not normally be eligible
- Article publication costs (as per [ESRC research funding guide](#) regarding [open access](#))

If you are in doubt about an item, please contact Megan McMichael ([m.mcmichael@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:m.mcmichael@sussex.ac.uk)) prior to your submission.

## Application guidelines and requirements

- Please consider each section on the application form as it relates to all other sections. All sections together can be considered to constitute a project plan and could contribute to your [Theory of Change](#) for achieving impact, if you use it.
- Your application and all attachments required should be integrated into one .pdf document.
- DETAILS (Section 1) – please complete this as thoroughly as possible.
  - Please provide all details indicated.
  - Please provide a 150-word maximum summary of the proposed project in clear language. Please note this will form the basis of a website description, if successful.
  - Please note that maximum duration of an award is 12 months.
  - Please state your final funding request (100% fEC) as detailed in Section 6.
- PROJECT TEAM (Section 2) – please include full details for each member of the proposed team, adding lines to the table on the application form if necessary. A 2-page CV of each team member must additionally be submitted as appendices to the single application document.
- PROJECT PROPOSAL (Section 3) – please read thoroughly and answer each question and try to adhere to the maximum number of words in each section.
  - Aims & objectives – please clearly state your aims and objectives of the proposed Digit-related research. We expect that all bids should clearly indicate how they will contribute to the work of the Digit research centre.
  - Research design & methods – please state your research question, your framework for determining data collection, and your intended methods for collecting and analysing data. Include your relevant previous research.
  - Project management - please indicate how you propose to undertake the research, your plan and activities, milestones, within a realistic time frame, and indicative start and end dates for elements of the plan. Please consider and include any issues around equality, diversity and inclusion. Please also include any risks and assumptions involved.
  - Collaborators / partners - please indicate the non-academic end users with whom you intend to engage, if not listed above, including any existing links, if applicable. Please describe the strategy for engaging.
  - Deliverables & impact - please describe what you will deliver (your outputs), according to the milestones indicated above, and anything that may follow, e.g. follow-on funding, etc. Please indicate how this project can lead to significant changes (impact) in policy, practice, etc., clearly discussing what you would like to change, for whom, and the

pathways for achieving it. Please refer to the ESRC's Impact Toolkit

<https://esrc.ukri.org/research/impact-toolkit/>

- ETHICS (Section 4) – be as thorough as possible as to how you will handle Ethics within your project and your institution, including deadlines.
- DATA MANAGEMENT PLAN (Section 5) – outline your plan for managing the resulting data, how they will be made secure, and your ability and willingness to share with the Digit Data Observatory, which will in turn be shared with the [UK Data Service](#)
- BUDGET & JUSTIFICATION OF RESOURCES (Section 6) – be as clear and as specific as possible in your description of costs and please justify them in the space given, indicating which part of the project they relate to and their necessity.
- STATEMENT OF SUPPORT (Section 7) – please provide a letter of support from – at minimum – the Head of the over-arching school/faculty/department of the PI's institution. Please also attach additional letters of support from project partners into the single .pdf submission.

## Assessment of the Innovation Fund applications

Applications will be assessed according to the evaluation criteria of the project proposal as such:

1. Aims & objectives & contribution to Digit research centre
2. Research design & methods
3. Project management
4. Strength of the project team and collaborators / partners
5. Deliverables & impact
6. Value for money

Applications will enter a 2-stage evaluation process:

*Review* – Reviewers will score each item above on a scale of 1-5. Each reviewer will also be asked to comment on each application in terms of the major strengths, weaknesses, and whether the weaknesses are sufficient to prevent the proposal from being funded.

*Panel* – The evaluation panel consists of both an independent chair, a non-Digit academic, a member of the Digit Advisory Board, the Co-Directors of Digit (Prof Jacqueline O'Reilly and Prof Mark Stuart), and an ESRC representative. The panel will consider the ranking of the reviewers and the fit with the Digit research programme. Any panel member who has a conflict of interest in relation to one or more applicants or applications will be required to notify the Digit Centre Manager immediately.

The application process aims to ensure maximum equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). This will be done by 1) requiring panel members to refresh their EDI training through these resources ([here](#) & [here](#)) and 2) adhering to the assessment criteria and 3) by challenging each other on any signs of unconscious bias in the assessment procedure. Reviewers will be required to follow [University of Sussex Equality & Diversity policy](#) by ensuring that applicants are assessed solely against the guidelines, and not according to “age, disability, gender reassignment or trans identity, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, trade union membership or non- membership, socio-economic background, or any other inappropriate distinction”.

Applicants should ensure applications are written clearly, as they will not necessarily be evaluated by experts in a particular field.

## Monitoring and Reporting

Successful applicants will be required to submit a final narrative report at the end of the project and must be accompanied by a financial report. Follow-up reports may be requested after the funding has ended to ensure we can capture outputs to feedback to ESRC.

Digit will report the relevant findings from all successful awards to the ESRC.

All awards will be announced on the Digit website

## Key dates

- Call issued: Monday, 20 April 2020
- Webinar: Monday, 4 May 2020, 10am – *see Digit website for details*
- Application closing date: Monday, 15 June 2020 by 5pm UK time
- Assessment panel meeting: week commencing 20 July 2020
- Decision to applicants anticipated: by Friday, 24 July 2020
- Project start date: projects should start no later than 1 September 2020
- Project end dates: projects should aim to end by 31 August 2021 or before and submit a final report

For further information and to apply

Please contact Megan McMichael ([m.mcmichael@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:m.mcmichael@sussex.ac.uk)), Centre Manager, and cc: [digit@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:digit@sussex.ac.uk) for any information or questions.

**Please email all applications and attachments in *one* .pdf document to [digit@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:digit@sussex.ac.uk) by the closing date: Monday, 15 June 2020 at 5pm (BST).**