

NetDRIVE: Pathways to Value and Change

Third Funding Call – Part A

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Announcement and guidance

1. Preamble

Funders:	NetDRIVE, University of Leeds
Funding source:	Grant UKRI910
Funding Type:	Flexible Fund
Total Fund:	£320,000

Award Range:	£50,000 - £120,000
Collaboration Building Event:	Oxford, Friday, July 17th
Closing Date:	Monday, September 5th, 10:00am
Contact:	netdrive@eng.ox.ac.uk

Apply for funding to explore the individual, organisation, and societal opportunities and challenges confronting UKRI and the research community in the transformation to a net zero digital research infrastructure.

The Network for sustainable Digital Research Infrastructure Vision and Expertise ([NetDRIVE](#)) has been set up to provide a forum for managers, software engineers, academics and others to come together to build a common vision for a sustainable future and to incite a transition to sustainable working practices in the Digital Research Infrastructure (DRI) communities. More details about the project aims are given in the NetDRIVE open workplan ([Juckes and Sparrow, 2025](#)) and in reports from the net-zero DRI scoping study which preceded NetDRIVE (Juckes et al., [2022, 2023](#)). NetDRIVE is part of the UKRI DRI programme and provides advice to UKRI and to managers and users of the UKRI DRI.

NetDRIVE ensures comprehensive coverage by working on [four parallel themes](#) which span technical and behavioural aspects of the transformational challenge that we face. Two themes encompass different elements of the technical challenges: one revolving around machine rooms and hardware (including hardware in small server rooms and connected devices such as laptops) and the other around software and algorithms. Another two themes span behavioural issues: one aligned with organisational challenges and the other with personal motivation. **This opportunity is inviting proposals from investigators with social science qualifications to address these last two themes.**

Climate science is clear about the need to achieve a timely and durable net zero in our anthropogenic carbon budget.

Projects addressing issues outside the topic list ([section 3.4 below](#)) may be considered, but applicants must demonstrate a clear contribution to at least two of the three NetDRIVE objectives: immediate progress towards net zero DRI, enhancing community confidence in the roadmap to net zero DRI, and international leadership.

This section of the call will fund projects to a value of £320,000 at 100% FEC. Institutions will receive 80% of FEC costs under standard UKRI grant conditions.

You must work for an organisation that is based in the UK and is eligible for UKRI funding under FEC.

The full economic cost (FEC) of your project can be up to £120,000. NetDRIVE will fund 80% of the FEC.

Projects must complete by January 30th, 2028.

2. Who can apply

This opportunity is open to organisations eligible for UKRI grant funding. [Check if your organisation is eligible here.](#)

3. What we are looking for

UKRI and the academic community are well informed about the dangers of the climate crisis and well-motivated to be part of the transition to a sustainable economy. There is a clear commitment for an ethical, inclusive and equitable transition. Yet there is uncertainty about how, when, and where this transition will take place and who will drive it. NetDRIVE focusses on the challenges of transformational change within the UKRI Digital Research Infrastructure (DRI). This focus brings its own challenges.

This call is for projects addressing what is going on within the operation and use of the UKRI DRI: the people and the processes, the production of value and the flow of knowledge. Projects should consider both the context of transformations driven or enabled by digital technology as well as the challenges of achieving net zero. Projects are sought for evaluation of the status quo and for research leading to practical guidance on pathways to a green transformation.

We are looking for projects exploiting methods and insights of social science, led by investigators with a relevant doctorate in the social sciences or equivalent research experience.

We welcome projects which exploit the strength inherent in the diversity of the stakeholder community, particularly by reaching elements of the community which may be underrepresented in decision making processes. In this context we recognise the importance of professional, organisational, academic and geographical diversity in addition to protected characteristics such as age, gender, and ethnicity.

Within professional diversity, we would like to see consideration of multiple career stages and well as consideration of different professional roles such as librarians, information technology staff, estates offices in addition to software engineers and computational researchers.

Successful projects will have full academic freedom to set their own research priorities, and they will have access to NetDRIVE community meetings and communications platforms to engage with delegates. Where useful, projects may look at broader communities which intersect the UKRI DRI community, such as academia as a whole or the IT sector, provided that proposals can indicate clearly how such work will assist in guiding the UKRI DRI.

We welcome proposals which address both the current status and the outlook for future change. We expect at least one third of funds to be allocated to evaluation tasks developing and conducting surveys in consultation with the NetDRIVE core team and champions, and at least one third of the funds to be allocated to research tasks.

3.1 Background

Juckles et al. (2023) found that “The journey to net zero computing requires transformational change which can deliver huge benefits as part of the broader transformation to a new generation of digitally enabled research.” The NetDRIVE project is funded to enable this transformational change and is working across four themes: buildings, hardware and code, organisations, and people (Juckles and Sparrow, 2025). Work by McGuire (2023), in a study funded through the Net Zero DRI Scoping project which preceded NetDRIVE, found a generally positive attitudes towards pro-environmental choices in the DRI community, both in explicit and implicit tests. However, many reported uncertainties prevented conversion of intention into practice. NetDRIVE is funding training activities which begin to address this¹, but where are the pathways to transformational change. [Jecker et al. \(2026\)](#) introduce a [special issue](#) on environmental sustainability and health care: can academia learn from the efforts of health care professionals to work for the public good within new environmental constraints? Stoddard et al. (2021) look at factors which have undermined previous sustainability attempts. Does the concept of sufficiency provide an avenue for change (Santarius et al., 2023)? Oancea et al. (2024) review the growing field of research on research: can this understanding of how we work help us to find new, less environmentally damaging approaches to research?

3.2 NetDRIVE Project Aims

1. Deliver immediate and tangible progress to Net Zero DRI through actionable advice to UKRI and the UKRI DRI community.
2. Provide national and international thought leadership on the transition to sustainable DRI.

¹ <https://uknetdrive.org/netdrive-community-projects>

3. Build trust and confidence in our transition to a sustainable DRI by 2040 or sooner.

3.3 Objectives of Pathways to Value and Change Opportunity

1. **Mapping** out the human and organisational position on climate change, looking at knowledge, feelings and belief.
2. **Exploring** barriers, opportunities and possible pathways to effective transformational change in pursuit of the NetDRIVE project aims.
3. **Alignment with roadmap:** provide clarity about how the UKRI DRI is progressing and can continue to progress in order to achieve a timely and durable net zero through an inclusive and equitable transition.
4. **Strengthen** inclusivity of engagement and diversity of representation within NetDRIVE and within the transformation to a sustainable UKRI DRI (NetDRIVE is aiming to reach and learn from the professional, organisational, academic and geographical diversity of the UKRI DRI community, as well as from societal diversity, including age, gender, and ethnicity).

3.4 Topics

Applicants are asked to address one or more of these seven topics:

1. **Why** do we need digital infrastructure in research: what is the public value or research enabled through this infrastructure?
2. **How** is the digital infrastructure supporting UK research funded and managed?
3. **Who** is running and using this infrastructure to deliver value? What are the associated cultures and careers?
4. **What** knowledge is being created? Where does it come from and where does it go?
5. When are decisions taken and what are the lines of input?
6. Where do the funds supporting the DRI come from and what are the associated management and governance structures?
7. Where is the DRI located in academic organisations and communities?

4. How to apply

Creating an application and submitting

Completed application forms should be submitted to netdrive@eng.ox.ac.uk no later than 10am, Monday, September 5th.

Any enquiries about the process should be submitted to netdrive@eng.ox.ac.uk. Before submitting an enquiry, please check the updates section of [the call page](#).

If possible, please join the collaboration building event in Oxford.

Before completing the form, please take time to consider the [assessment areas](#) listed below and the guidance to the review panel which explains the process of assessment

Collaboration Building Event

The NetDRIVE project will host a collaboration building event in Oxford on **Friday July 17th**. Attendance is not required, but we encourage potential applicants to join the event. Spaces may be restricted and registration in advance is required.

The meeting will run from 10:30am to 3:00pm in central Oxford (venue yet to be finalised).

The event will be an opportunity to learn more about the call and also to exchange ideas with potential partners.

We encourage people to attend in person but will make allowance for remote attendance.

Applicants for funding are not required to attend, but it is encouraged and we are particularly keen to see new consortia being built.

To attend, please fill out the Registration Form ([see call web page](#)) before 12 noon, Friday 10th July.

After the event, all information shared by the project team with the attendees will be shared on the call web site.

Templates and updates

For templates and updates please visit the call web site:

<https://uknetdrive.org/netdrive-calls/third-funding-call-part-a>. On this page you will find:

- Registration form for the Collaboration Building Event on July 17th.
- Proposal template.
- Guidance for the review panel
- Guidance for applicants (this document)
- Clarifications and responses to enquiries.

Schedule

Stage	Date
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Pre-announcement	April 22nd, 2026
Announcement of Opportunity	Friday, June 19 th , 2026
Registration for Collaboration Building event closes	12 noon, Friday, July 10 th , 2026
Collaboration Building Event (in-person)	Friday, July 17 th , 2026
Deadline for Enquiries	12 noon, Friday, July 31 st , 2026
Submission deadline	10am, Monday, September 5 th , 2026
Review Panel	September 18 th , 2026
Decision	September 25 th , 2026
Contracts	November 1 st , 2026
Target date for start of work	From January 1 st , 2027

5. How we will assess your application

Assessment Areas

Proposals will be assessed in the following four areas by a review panel:

1. **Excellence:** is the proposed work breaking new ground (either in terms of more accurate and detailed evaluation or in terms of social science research) of and changing the way in which we view sustainability within the DRI.
2. **Fit to objectives:** will the proposed work produce substantial impact in the selected domain? Do they clearly address the UKRI Sustainability Strategy, the NetDRIVE aims listed above, and the selected topic? Does the lead investigator have and appropriate social science qualification (PhD or equivalent experience in relevant research domain).
3. **Inclusivity and Diversity:** do the project team and the proposal include constructive or groundbreaking elements of inclusivity and diversity? addressing both protected characteristics and additional NetDRIVE diversity targets of career stage, professional role and geographical spread? Are the benefits of inclusivity and diversity for the proposed workplan clearly articulated?
4. **Ability to deliver:** is there a clear plan of work? Have the proposal team thought through the process well enough to deliver the project? Is there a clear approach to knowledge translation planning? Do the lead investigators have clear qualifications in the social sciences

Further details of the assessment process are given in the NetDRIVE review guidance document.

Outcomes

The NetDRIVE team will notify the lead applicant of the result.

Successful proposals will be invited to set up a collaboration contract with the University of Leeds.

In rare cases, a rejected proposal may be invited for re-submission.

For proposals which have been rejected, general UKRI guidance applies. Challenges to their academic judgement will not be discussed. For further information see:

- <https://www.ukri.org/who-we-are/contact-us/about-our-decisions-for-grant-or-innovation-loan-applications/>
- <https://www.ukri.org/who-we-are/contact-us/make-a-complaint/>

Comments on the efficiency and equitability of the proposal assessment process are welcome in the context of NetDRIVE's work to develop proposals for greater sustainability but will not alter the rules under which this contest is held.

The review panel will assign each proposal to one of these four categories:

6. Successful proposals

6.1 Contract

For academic institutions the award will cover 80% of costs calculated on an FEC basis. The contract will be a collaboration agreement between Leeds University and the lead institution. If funds need to be distributed among multiple collaborating institutions, that must be done via the lead institution. Staff costs should be Directly Incurred, not Directly Allocated. The funds originate from the UKRI DRI programme and have been awarded to Leeds on grant *UKRI910: NetDRIVE2 - Network for sustainable Digital Research Infrastructure Vision and Expertise*.

We do not expect there to be any IPR restrictions. All project outputs should be open.

6.2 During the project

1. The NetDRIVE core team will provide support to projects seeking to contact DRI community members.
2. Funded projects will work with the NetDRIVE team to establish clear knowledge transfer plans but will have full academic freedom to conduct engagement activities according to their own professional standards.

3. Funded projects will have access to NetDRIVE community meetings.
4. Deliverables will be shared with other NetDRIVE community project lead investigators for a two-week review period before being accepted and project team will be asked to respond to any significant feedback. This light-touch peer review process is intended to foster exchange of information and support among projects.

7. Appendix 1: Career Stages

We have identified four career stages by merging categories used in engineering, or professionals in areas relevant to organisational change:

C1: First Stage Researcher (up to the point of PhD), or technical/support staff (degree and 2-4 years' work experience), or equivalent in other relevant professions.
C2: PhD, or 5 or more years software work experience, or equivalent
C3: Independent researcher, software engineer with management role, or equivalent.
C4: Researcher leading research area or field, or senior management.

These categories are intended to allow us to distinguish between different career stages in a meaningful way without giving undue weighting or disadvantage to specific career paths.

8. Appendix 2: Finances

The budget for the third Call Part A is £320,000 at 100% FEC. Institutions will receive 80% of the FEC value through a collaboration agreement with the University of Leeds.

The funds originate from the UKRI DRI programme and have been awarded to the University of Leeds on grant UKRI910: NetDRIVE2 - Network for sustainable Digital Research Infrastructure Vision and Expertise.

Any personal data generated during the proposed work should be managed within the project team: the NetDRIVE core team will only deal with aggregate and anonymised products suitable for sharing.

We do not expect there to be any IPR restrictions. All project outputs should be open.

9. References

Jecker, N., Richie, C., Lucivero, F., Samuel, G., Senay, E., Dupras, C., & Mackie, P. (2026). Linking human and planetary health: focus on environmental sustainability and health care. *Environmental Research: Health*, 4(1), 010201.

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