#1684 Digitalisation of the Public Sector – Research and Innovation Projects

Final submission date   16.01.2020 13:00

Who can apply

The Project Owner must be a research-performing organisation* in one of the following countries; Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, United Kingdom, Latvia or Estonia. Project partners may include:

- Research-performing organisations
- Public sector entities
- Small, medium and large private companies
- Non-profitable organisations
- Non-governmental organisations
- Other legal entities

Please consult with national funding rules in [appendix 1](#).

* A research-performing organisation is a legal entity which is a university, university college or a research institute, and is characterised by the following:

- *A primary goal to independently conduct fundamental research and/or applied research and/or research-based innovation where results are published or disseminated on a non-profit basis.*
- *The entity may be private or public but must not pay out dividends from its activities.*
- *The entity must have a production of academic, published research and/or patents.*

Funding amount available

The total funding available under this call is EUR 7.4 million and up to 10 projects may be funded. The maximum amount of funding available per project is EUR 1 million.

Project duration

Projects are expected to run for maximum three years.

Background

[The Research and Innovation Programme on Digitalisation of the Public Sector](#), hereafter the Digitalisation Programme, is a collaborative effort between the Research Council of Norway; Academy of Finland; Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare (Forte); Innovation Fund Denmark; Estonian Research Council; Latvian Ministry for Education and Science; Economic and Social Research Council (part of UK Research and Innovation) and NordForsk.

The Digitalisation Programme is now issuing a call for proposals for research and innovation projects.

Nordic Added Value

The Nordic region is high-performing and digitally mature with regards to the public sector. However, it is a strong political imperative in the Nordic countries, as well as in Estonia, Latvia and the United Kingdom, to further improve the efficiency, effectiveness and governance of public services design, infrastructure and delivery by means of additional digitalisation. This includes aspects such as public infrastructure and foundational services, service design, service development and delivery, service automation and self-enablement, etc.

All the countries involved in this call have developed digital strategies that contain high ambitions for modernising, simplifying and improving the public sector.

These strategies emphasise knowledge development, user centricity, digital skills, digital security, AI application and e-administration, for the further development and digitalisation of the public sector. Under this programme, the Nordic, Latvian, Estonian and UK collaboration will create outcomes and impacts of greater value for the countries involved than could be achieved through national activities alone.

Aim of the Call and Thematic Framework

The Digitalisation Programme focuses on three interrelated areas that enable and shape the digital transformation of the public sector: (1) the enabling factors of digitalisation; (2) digital innovation; and (3) society and the end-user perspective. The overarching aim of the call is to combine and integrate knowledge-based, digital innovation efforts related to the public sector with research on the related drivers, effects and impact on society and end-users.

Specifically, the programme aims to:

- strengthen research and knowledge related to the long-term effects and impacts of digital transformation on the public sector and society as a whole;
- Engage with the processes and outcomes of the adoption and adaption of these new technologies, practices and regulation mechanisms;
- advance interdisciplinary research related to drivers and enablers for successful digital transformation of the public sector;
- strengthen knowledge-based innovation capability in the Nordic public sector and beyond, and encourage stronger cooperation and collaboration between innovation agents and research communities across the public, civic and private sectors;
- encourage comparative research and the exchange of best practice and innovative processes/solutions within participating countries and across borders;
- produce useful knowledge and support to potentially inform policy development and the development of the public sector throughout the Nordic region, in the UK, Estonia, and Latvia and beyond.

The project proposals should address at least three of the core objectives mentioned below:

- advance cutting-edge interdisciplinary research in this area, through theoretical, methodological and/or experimental innovation;
- motivate and support excellence and capacity-building for interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral research on public sector digitalisation;
generate applied research, useful to practitioners and policy makers both within and across participating countries;
- promote increased knowledge exchange and co-production between researchers, providers and users of public services across public, civic and private sectors;
- develop and test specific innovations and new digital solutions in the public sector, as well as develop an understanding of the drivers and challenges for uptake and scaling of innovations, and the potential impact of digitalisation on public sector organisations and on public sector employees and citizens;
- consider the security and privacy implications of digitalisation, including ethical, legal, social and behavioural considerations, e.g. cyber security and data governance.

Project proposals are encouraged to employ an explicitly interdisciplinary perspective and to consider all three interrelated areas that comprise the thematic framework. Examples of issues within these broad areas that projects could investigate include:

1.The enabling factors of digitalisation:

   a. The emerging technologies themselves;
   b. The emerging organisational practices and networks that support and enable digital transformation of public sector;
   c. The emerging regulatory frameworks and governance mechanisms that are conditional for digital transformation of public sector;
   d. The Social drivers/ inhibitors / contexts that affect uptake, scaling and spread of digital transformation of public sector.

2. The digital innovations themselves, such as:

   a. Service/process automation, self-enablement;
   b. Data-/insight-driven services (personalisation, differentiation);
   c. MyData and personal approval-based services;
   d. Open data-based innovation.

3. The broader societal and end-user perspectives and impacts, such as:

   a. skill requirements, inclusion and user adoption;
   b. labour markets and need for training and life-long-learning;
   c. security, privacy and risk;
   d. longer-term effects and impact of digital transformation of the public sector, in particular on UN SDGs (e.g. SDG 16);
   e. ethical, social, behavioural and legal considerations and consequences.

Project proposals submitted under this call are encouraged to combine the three areas in the thematic framework. To strengthen the knowledge base for practice and for research-informed policy, applicants are expected to incorporate early, continuous and active involvement of end-users and stakeholders.

Projects must therefore have a detailed strategy for knowledge exchange and communication. Where appropriate, the strategy should describe the processes by which research-based knowledge can feed into practice and policy in collaboration with stakeholders. The creation of new models of collaboration between research and practice is encouraged.

Financial Framework

The total budget for this call is NOK 70.1 million (EUR 7.1 million). maximum amount of funding available per project is EUR 1 million.

The projects awarded support will be funded through a virtual common pot, which means that the national funding agencies will fund their respective participants in the funded projects. The participants are therefore strongly advised to consult their respective funding agencies for further guidance (see also Annex 1 to this document) and to contact the funding agencies if they require further information on eligibility of particular costs.

Subject to national funding rules, funding may be used for:

- salaries and indirect costs (including overheads);
- PhD and post-doctoral positions;
- research-related costs (such as data collection and analysis, Open Access charges);
- project-related costs (such as collaboration with stakeholders, communication, dissemination and knowledge exchange activities and other relevant costs);
- travel/accommodation costs and mobility for the consortium partners;
- travel/accommodation costs for international participants;
- administrative expenses.

The research and innovation consortium is expected to contribute a significant amount of its own financing in addition to the NordForsk funding it receives. This is to show that there are other resources available (cash or in-kind) to support successful implementation of the research. There is no set amount or percentage except when this is stated in national funding rules. Applicants are to estimate the appropriate amount of external funding needed, depending on the volume of the project and planned research activities. The contribution from the consortium partners must be documented in the budget specified in the application form.

Funding will be granted for Nordic*, Estonian, Latvian and UK research and innovation collaborations, as specified in the proposal. Partner institutions from outside the co-financing countries may participate with their own funding. Salaries for applicants not affiliated with an organisation in the Nordic countries, Estonia, Latvia and the UK cannot be claimed as part of the project costs, but travel and accommodation costs may be covered. For UK teams the ESRC has a policy on the inclusion of international Co-Investigators, see Annex 1 for further details.
Excluding Iceland

Eligibility criteria

To be eligible for funding, the following conditions must be met:

- Proposals must be submitted electronically through the NordForsk Application Portal by the call deadline.
- All proposals must be written in English and follow the structure set out in the application form available on the NordForsk Application Portal.
- The host institution (Project Owner) must be a research-performing organisation.
- The project leader must be employed at a research-performing organisation. All project participants must be affiliated with legal entities in their respective countries.
- Projects must consist of participants from at least three co-funding countries, of which at least two must be Nordic co-funding countries. Participants from non-funding countries may participate in projects by providing their own financing as long as the overall aim is to pursue the aims of this call. For UK teams, the ESRC has a policy on the inclusion of international Co-Investigators, see Annex 1 for further details.
- Letters of commitment are required from all partners involved in the proposal. Letters of commitment must be signed by a person authorised to take on financial commitments on behalf of the institution for the entire duration of the project.
- An individual may only be listed as project leader for one project proposal under this call. An individual listed as project leader in one proposal may, however, have other roles in other grant applications, and other project participants may be involved in multiple proposals to this call.
- Applicants and project participants must comply with national rules (see Annex 1).
- In compliance with NordForsk's gender policy, all proposals must provide a description of gender balance in the project consortium, as well as gender perspectives in the proposed research. Please consult the NordForsk policy guidelines on gender policy.

Applications that do not fulfil the above criteria will not be processed.

Submission of proposals

The project leader must submit the project proposal electronically through the NordForsk Application Portal no later than 13.00 CET on 16 January 2020. To access the application form, the project leader must register as a user at the NordForsk Application Portal.

The proposal must contain all supporting documents as requested below:

- NordForsk proposal form as specified in application portal.
- Project plan (maximum 10 pages, including references).
- Management plan (maximum two pages).
- Communication and knowledge exchange strategy (maximum two pages).
- Data management plan (maximum one page).
- A description of the relevant legal and ethical frameworks and procedures needed to perform the research.
- An overall budget detailing the expected costs for the project.
- A specification of how the costs will be distributed among the different funding sources, including funding sought from NordForsk. The project partners' own contribution (cash and in-kind) to the project must be documented (see instructions in the application portal).
- CV, including a short list of maximum 10 publications (maximum three pages for the project leader and max one page for each key researcher).
- Description of research teams (standard template), gender balance in the project consortium and gender perspectives. Please consult the NordForsk's guidelines on gender policy and open science.
- Letters of Commitment from all project partners.

Important note: Applicants should take into account that their proposals will be assessed by an international referee panel that may encompass both academic and non-academic experts within the different areas of the call.

Assessment criteria

All eligible proposals will be rated using a scale 1-7 (1=poor; 2= weak, 3= fair 4= good, 5= very good, 6= excellent, 7= outstanding) based on the criteria described below, and a written statement will be provided.

The proposals will be evaluated by a panel of international experts using the following criteria:

1. Excellence and relevance in relation to call

   - Relevance to the thematic framework of the call; clear description of the technical needs and challenges.
   - Scientific quality of the project; state-of-the-art of the research, clarity and pertinence of objectives, knowledge generation.

2. Innovation quality of the project

   - The potential of the project to provide new solutions and/or to add value to existing solutions in the area.
   - Potential of the project to lead to the development of new or improved product/services/processes/outcomes and their feasibility to the public sector.
   - Competitive advantage of the product/services/processes developed in the project.
   - The potential for new and valuable insight on the drivers, effects, impacts and risk related to the end-user perspective as well as society as a whole.
   - Involvement of end-users, professionals, public sector and companies.

3. Quality in implementation of the project

   - Feasibility of the project; clearly described plans with objectives, milestones and deliverables.
   - Necessary and complementary key qualifications of the project participants and quality and competence of the project consortium to meet the objectives of the project, including a relevant mix of different actors from academia, research institutes, companies and the public sector.
   - Clarity of plans for utilisation of results from the project.
   - Feasibility of budget in relation to project plan.
   - Risk assessment; availability of resources, risk management describing threats and opportunities and ethical aspects.

4. Nordic and international impact of the project

   - Potential of the project to add value for society, citizens and the public sector in general.
   - Potential to provide Nordic added value, i.e. that Nordic collaboration generates more value than would be the case through national activities alone; and added value to the other co-funding countries as well, where they are involved in a project.
   - Potential of the project to promote a stronger international position for the Nordic countries, UK, Estonia and Latvia within digitalisation of the public sector.
   - Cost saving and potential business value.

Based on the evaluation of the referee panel, the programme committee will assess the strategic relevance of the proposals to the call according to the following criteria:

- Alignment of the proposals with overall objectives of the programme.
- A balanced portfolio of funded projects.
- A distribution of projects and participants across co-funding countries.
- An appropriate mix of project partners from different sectors (academia, SME, industry, public sector).

Processing of proposals

Eligibility: An eligibility check of submitted proposals will be carried out by the NordForsk administration and the national funding organisations according to the eligibility criteria described above and the national eligibility criteria described in Annex 1.

Peer review: All eligible proposals will be assessed by an international referee panel, using the criteria above.

Programme committee: A programme committee has been appointed by the funding parties to implement the call and will assess various strategic considerations (as outlined above) in addition to the referee assessments to provide a final recommendation on funding.

Funding decision: The NordForsk Board will take the final funding decision with respect to the NordForsk share of the budget, based on the recommendation of the programme committee. The national funding agencies will take the corresponding final funding decision with respect to the national contributions based on the recommendation of the programme committee. Funded projects will need to enter into separate agreements with the relevant national funding agencies that will provide funding to the specific project.

NordForsk's Guidelines on Impartiality will be applied throughout the entire assessment and funding process. Applicants will be notified in writing of the outcome of the funding decision. The national funding agencies will execute their respective funding processes according to local national rules and processes. Start-up of projects awarded funding is expected to take place in Q4 2020/Q1 2021.

Each party and all individuals with access to documents and information regarding projects are required to treat this as confidential information, in particular in relation to protecting business-critical information of private sector participants.

Management and monitoring of the projects

The outcome of the funding decision will be notified to the project leader. The National Funding Agencies will send out funding letters to their national project partners after national procedures have been successfully accomplished.

A consortium agreement regulating the rights and obligations of the various institutions/partners involved in the project must be signed by project partners before any funding will be disbursed, but projects can start earlier.

The project leader will be responsible for submitting annual progress reports and a final report to NordForsk describing the overall progress and final result of the project. In addition, national reports have to be sent to the respective national funding agencies according to national rules. The projects are expected to participate to a reasonable extent in meetings, conferences and other events arranged within the framework of this call. The project leaders are responsible for the implementation of human resource strategies for researchers in keeping with the basic principles of the EU Charter for Researchers and the EU Code for the Recruitment of Researchers, where applicable.

Max applied amount:

EUR 1 million

Contact:

Responsible advisers:

Lone Jessen, Senior Adviser
E-mail: lone.jessen@nordforsk.org
Phone: +47 90198037

Jens Begtrup, Senior Adviser
Email: jens.begtrup@nordforsk.org
Phone: +47 90261908

Technical support:
E-mail: support@nordforsk.org
Phone: +47 90551520

For questions concerning project needs for e-infrastructure services, please contact the Nordic e-Infrastructure Collaboration (NeIC) at helpdesk@neic.no. E-infrastructure covers resources for data storage, computing and networking, tools for data management, access, security, collaboration and other types of digital services.

Appendices   Annex 1_National funding rules.pdf