

Open call for small projects with potential to generate transformational impact on the lives of people living with dementia.

Indoor & Outdoor Spaces

What is the BRIDGES for Dementia Network+

The BRIDGES for Dementia Network+ is a national research initiative led by the University of Sheffield. BRIDGES stands for 'Building Research Innovation co-Developing Greater Empowerment and Support' for people living with Dementia.

Our aim is to explore how technology can support people with dementia to live full, connected and independent lives. Working across arts, health, social care and technology, we co-design solutions with people who have lived experience to ensure they are meaningful and usable. We encourage a person-centered approach to develop new technologies across four themes of:

- Indoor and outdoor spaces
- Arts, sports and culture
- In-person and online communication
- Digital technology development and translation

BRIDGES Network+ vision

- Develop a better understanding of the lives of people living with dementia and how technology might support this
- Amplify voices and increase understanding of different experiences of dementia (e.g. Lewy Bodies), and different trajectories (e.g. rapid progression) where the requirements may be different.
- Change the perspective and perception of what living well with dementia really means, beyond the medical symptoms, to address aspects such as boredom and loneliness

Scope of the Call

BRIDGES N+ is looking to fund high quality small projects that can improve indoor and outdoor spaces for people living with dementia. The focus of this call is Indoor & Outdoor Spaces. We welcome practical, early-stage ideas that bring together technology, design, environmental science, community knowledge, policy, health and social care, and lived experience.

Projects should help people living with dementia to feel more confident, comfortable and connected in everyday places. This may include homes, gardens, streets, parks, shops, hospitals, transport settings, community venues and other public or shared spaces.

The call is deliberately open. Applicants may propose new ideas, test early prototypes, explore feasibility, build partnerships, or generate evidence that can inform future research, policy, design guidance, services or larger funding applications.

All projects must involve people with lived experience of dementia in a meaningful way from design through delivery. This includes people

living with dementia, family carers and other supporters. Their involvement should shape the research question, the design of the work, the interpretation of findings and the way outputs are shared.

Priority areas

Projects may focus on one or more of the following priority areas. These examples come from the Indoor & Outdoor Spaces workshop and are not intended to limit other strong ideas:

- Indoor air quality, temperature and fresh air, including comfort, ventilation, overheating, cold homes, energy use and ways to sense or respond to distress linked to the indoor environment.
- Indoor digital tools, lighting and multi-sensory support, including calm spaces, circadian lighting, sound, visual contrast, sensory overload, and tools that help people understand and control their surroundings.
- Indoor navigation in confusing spaces, such as hospitals, shops, transport hubs, care settings and public buildings, including wayfinding, waiting, changes in layout, obstacles and step-by-step support.
- Technology that helps people move through the places that matter in their daily lives with confidence. This may include support for safer and more familiar walking routes, landmark-based wayfinding, dementia-friendly use of parks, gardens and local amenities, and the everyday infrastructure of seating, lighting, surfaces and rest points that makes going out feasible. Approaches that draw on computer vision, large language models or spatial AI to *understand the environment and describe it helpfully to the person*, for example, recognising surroundings, offering one next step at a time, or reassuring

someone they are on a familiar route, are in scope, provided they meet the privacy and design conditions below.

- Technology that makes it easy to ask for help, share a plan, receive reassurance, or connect with a carer or service when needed, without constant surveillance. We are interested in friendly, low-burden tools that check in on how a person is doing, use calm and reassuring language, and involve a family member or service only when there is a genuine need. The strongest proposals will connect data to a helpful action while keeping the person, not the system, in control.
- Low-cost adaptations and technologies for private housing, including affordable changes to everyday homes, simple environmental feedback, unobtrusive sensors, and solutions that can work for people with different incomes and housing situations.

Cross-cutting expectations

Strong applications should show how the project will:

- be co-designed with people living with dementia and carers, with fair recognition or payment for their time where appropriate;
- be feasible within the small-project budget and timeline;
- protect privacy, consent and dignity, especially where monitoring, sensors, AI or data-driven tools are involved;
- avoid surveillance-led, high-burden or stigmatising approaches;
- be affordable, usable and suitable for real homes, streets and communities;
- support inclusive access across different places, identities, abilities, cultures, ages and dementia experiences;

- create a credible route to future research, policy, practice, commercialisation, service improvement or follow-on funding.

The impact of such projects will be to:

- improve confidence, comfort and independence for people living with dementia;
- reduce avoidable confusion, distress or exclusion in indoor and outdoor spaces;
- support safer participation in homes, neighbourhoods and public places;
- produce evidence that can inform future policy, design guidance, services, products or larger research grants.

The above list is not exclusive. We welcome ideas from engineering and physical sciences, social sciences and the arts and humanities. Applicants may wish to consider the ideas generated at the 28th May 2026 sandpit on indoor and outdoor spaces¹.

We will not fund projects that:

- do not include people with lived experience of dementia in an authentic and meaningful way;
- are not led by a UKRI-eligible academic;
- are purely capital works, building works or routine service delivery without a clear research or innovation question;

¹ <https://bridgesfordementia.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/Indoor-and-outdoor-spaces-Workshop-report-28th-May-2026.pdf>

- fall outside the early-stage research and proof-of-concept Technology Readiness Levels typically funded by UKRI;
- use monitoring, tracking or AI in ways that are non-consensual, unnecessarily intrusive, surveillance-led or high-burden for people living with dementia;
- only add resources to an existing project without a clear new BRIDGES contribution.

Eligibility

1. We will only accept one application per Principal Investigator, but applicants can be listed as co-investigators on other applications
2. Applications will only be accepted from applicants working in UK HEIs. If the applicant is an ECR (for the purposes of this call, an ECR is a Postdoctoral Researcher or Fellow with a fixed term contract at a UK university) a **letter of support from your supervisor or head of department is required**, stating you have their permission to apply for this funding.
3. We will not accept proposals that are to provide additional resources to a project that the applicant is currently undertaking

General Guidance

1. **Application form submission:** Applications are being accepted from 1st July 2026 to 2nd October 2026 via email: bridgesfordementia@sheffield.ac.uk

2. Document format: Please use the format of '**Name Surname**' as the file name. Files should be Word documents

3. Eligibility: If you come across any issues in seeking permission from supervisors, for example related to your current terms of employment, please speak to us so we can clarify with UKRI or your current funding body

4. Involving people with lived experience of dementia: Applications must incorporate people with lived experience of dementia meaningfully during project design and delivery. Projects that lack this will be automatically rejected.

The BRIDGES network is looking for projects and teams that involve people with dementia actively shaping the design, development, evaluation and implementation of future technologies. Meaningful involvement looks like: partnering with shared decision making at the ideation and creation stage and using flexible engagement methods in non-clinical environments to include a wide variety of people. We expect involvement to be weaved throughout the project and so will be included in the proposed budget and timeline.

In assessing your own proposed project, it can be useful to ask:

- If people living with dementia were leading the design of future technologies, what would they create, what would they prioritise, and what would they do differently?

- Did people with dementia help frame the motivation, problem, or opportunity and the proposed technology, or did we just ask them to approve our solution?
- Does our plan for involving people with dementia establish a sustainable and accessible two-way relationship, or does it feature more 'one-off' and one-way engagement that could be considered extractive?

For examples of how you may include lived experience in your research please see the video we recently published featuring a panel of lived experience experts:

<https://youtu.be/UVdlCfYgHj0?si=cvu3K7CN95CQLDgV>

For further resources, see footnotes below^{2, 3, 4, 5, 6}. If you are unsure about how to include people with lived experience of dementia into your research then please contact us bridgesfordementia@sheffield.ac.uk and we will be happy to advise.

5. Relevance: Ideal projects should demonstrate applicability across two or more of the BRIDGES technical themes. This is not mandatory but will count towards the final score.

² <https://www.dementiavoices.org.uk/deep-groups/find-a-deep-group-in-your-region/>

³ <https://uk.jkp.com/products/people-with-dementia-at-the-heart-of-research>

⁴ <https://dementiaenquirers.org.uk/publications/>

⁵ <https://www.dementiavoices.org.uk/deep-resources/involving-people-with-dementia/>

⁶ <https://www.innovationsindementia.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/accessible-writing-guide.pdf>

6. Technology Readiness Level: We will accept projects that are laboratory, field or desk based. As funding is from UKRI we expect projects to be the level that is typically funded by UKRI (TRL 1-4)⁷.

7. Resources requested

- Projects should be costed as for a standard UKRI proposal.
- The award provided will be no more than £48k at 80% FEC. The management committee reserve the right to request reductions if a budget is deemed excessive
- The costing table should include costs at 100% and the request from the BRIDGES N+ at 80% FEC. Resources can be requested for researcher and technician time, travel, subsistence, consumables and facilities. The Network+ will not fund new equipment above the £10k UKRI threshold (inc. VAT), nor student stipends.
- **Sub-contracting** is allowed but Research Organisations must ensure that expenditure on sub-contracts are subject to robust controls to ensure value for money and propriety. All costs should be fully documented/invoiced and available to UKRI if required.

Should you have any queries when costing a project, please speak to the finance team in your university in the first instance, and we are happy to offer guidance if contacted on bridgesfordementia@sheffield.ac.uk

⁷ <https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/EPsrc-11012022-the-role-of-different-funders-in-the-health-care-TRL-landscape.pdf>

8. Project duration: projects may run for between 6 and 12 months. Additional funding from other organisations may be used to extend the duration or scope of the project, e.g. to cover salary costs or provide additional resources for travel and consumables.

All approved grants are expected to start in **Jan/Feb 2027** but we have some flexibility regarding start dates- please get in touch if you need to. The BRIDGES N+ Management Committee are willing to offer mentorship to PDRAs in order to ensure that grants progress satisfactorily. Project end dates depend on the FTE of the staff costed to the project and the impact of any additional cash support. All funding is subject to UKRI standard T&Cs and the additional conditions for the BRIDGES N+ (available upon award of the funding).

9. Guidance on case for support:

For any queries about any part of the application, please contact bridgesfordementia@sheffield.ac.uk

Section 1: Applicant team details

List academic co-investigators and non-academic project partners. Please explain the expertise and roles of the academic research team and project partners in the project delivery (max 250 words). What are non-academic project partners contributing to the project in terms of finances or access to facilities for example? Separate letters of support from non-academic project partners outlining cash or in-kind contributions are required.

Section 2: Case for support

- 1. Lay summary of the project (max 250 words).** This will be used to explain your project to a non-specialist audience and will be published on our website. What is the challenge, how do you intend to address it and what is potential benefit of a positive outcome?
- 2. Scientific and technical description (max 1000 words, images allowed; take into account UKRI guidelines on the use of generative AI⁸).** Describe the gap in the current knowledge that this project is addressing. State which Indoor & Outdoor Spaces priority area(s), if any, the project addresses. What is the opportunity, your proposed solution, and methodology? Please include a SWOT-based risk assessment with credible mitigation strategies. This section will be assessed by a subject matter expert.

⁸ <https://www.ukri.org/publications/generative-artificial-intelligence-in-application-and-assessment-policy/use-of-generative-artificial-intelligence-in-application-preparation-and-assessment/>

- 3. Aims and objectives (with indicative timescales, max 250 words).** List some key objectives. Define objectives as SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound). Accompany objectives with probable timelines, e.g. Objective 1: Month X. A bullet point list is sufficient. An alternative such as a Gantt chart is acceptable
- 4. Involving people with lived experience of dementia (max 250 words).** The involvement of people with lived experience of dementia is mandatory. Explain how people with lived experience have been involved in the design of the project. If not in the initial planning stages of the project, what are your plans to involve them in the delivery of your project? How will they help shape the research question, design, delivery, findings and outputs?
- 5. Equity, diversity and inclusion (250 words).** Describe your approach to involving **(A)** a diverse range of people living with dementia and **(B)** a diverse research team of applicants, such as Early Career Researchers, disability confident applicants or applicants of different gender. How does your project ensure equitable participation and positive impact across different demographics, such as ethnicity, age, location, and diagnosis type? We do not expect your project to cover every demographic, but consider how it has (or may have) wider impact. Avoid

generic statements. State the specific, actionable steps the project team will take to promote EDI in recruitment, project delivery, and dissemination.

- 6. Long term impact (max 250 words).** Explain how a successful outcome to your project will have a positive impact on the lives of people with dementia and/or their carers. Clearly delineate between tangible outputs (e.g., prototype, papers) and ultimate societal outcomes (e.g., reduced burden, cost savings).
- 7. Future plans to progress your research (max 200 words):** What are your plans to continue this work? For example, what is the critical path and final milestone, such as the submission of a follow-on scaling grant? How might this project be continued and what funding sources will you consider? How might the results of your work be applied in an impactful manner?
- 8. Summary of costs requested (max 250 words):** Describe briefly how the funding will be used. Justify every cost item and highlight "Value for Money" by detailing in-kind or zero-cost contributions (e.g., leveraging existing infrastructure). Any requests for small items of equipment (<£10k) must be closely aligned to the aims and objectives of the project. Consider the impact of Directly Allocated staff costs on the overall project cost and its viability.

Section 3: Table of resources required: This table is for costs up to £48k at 80% FEC and must detail the Full Economic Cost (A) and the BRIDGES N+ Contribution (80% of A). Include directly incurred and directly allocated costs and overheads. Please seek advice from your research finance team if required.

Section 4 for Early Career Researchers on fixed term contracts: please confirm you have sought the approval of your academic supervisor or head of department to submit this application. This is to ensure that your project does not clash with current commitments or your current funder regulations.

Section 5 Potential Reviewers: Please include the names of two academics outside of your institution we can approach to help review the proposal.

Timeline

- Call opens **1st July 2026**
- Deadline for applications: **2nd October 2026**
- Funding decision: **by end of November 2026**
- Project start date: **January/February 2027**
- End date: variable, but expected to be 6-12 months from start date

Assessment Criteria Projects will be scored on the basis of:

1. Scientific excellence. This is the primary criteria and projects must demonstrate scientific excellence, novelty and potential impact
2. Involvement of people who have lived experience of dementia

3. Impact on people with lived experience of dementia
4. Third-party support. The level of cash and/or in-kind contributions to the project will be considered

Selection Process

1. Peer review by academic subject matter experts and people with lived experience of dementia
2. Ranking based on score
3. In the event of two or more projects being equally ranked, special consideration will be given to under-represented groups. Please contact Neil Lowrie if you qualify for EDI consideration. This information will be treated as confidential and, in line with GDPR requirements, your information will not be shared outside of the review process.
4. Panel review and confirmation of final ranking

Contact: If you have any questions about this BRIDGES N+ call for projects, please contact bridgesfordementia@sheffield.ac.uk