

EMERGE RehabTech Impact Acceleration Fund: Round Two

Opportunity status: Open

Funders: UKRI via EMERGE RehabTech

Funding type: Grant

Total fund: £750,000

Award range: up to £100,000

Publication date: 01 July 2026

Opening date: 01 July 2026

Submission deadline: 30 September 2026

Apply for funding to deliver impact through advances in rehabilitation technologies (rehabtech) by improving health outcomes, promoting wellbeing, and enhancing quality of life for individuals and communities, with a focus on supporting the growth of the East Midlands rehabilitation technologies economy. EMERGE RehabTech will accelerate the translation of excellent research with clear benefits tailored to meet the needs of communities.

We will fund two types of project through this funding call:

1) Impact Accelerator

These larger projects should aim to take significant steps toward commercialising a rehabtech product or service, accelerate innovation through technology readiness levels (TRL) 5 and 6, develop next-stage technology demonstrators designed for engagement with clinicians, industry and end-users, and conduct essential market validation. Successful projects will start from 1 April 2027 and last up to 18 months. Up to £100,000 is available for Impact Accelerator projects.

2) Concept Primer

These projects will be smaller pieces of work that aim to demonstrate the deployment potential for proven novel rehabtech prototypes and concepts, establishing both the market need and route to addressing an unmet clinical need, moving innovations through TRL 4 and 5. Successful projects will start from 1 February 2027 and are expected to last 6-12 months. Up to £50,000 is available for Concept Primer projects.

EMERGE RehabTech projects should aim to contribute to the growth of the UK's MedTech economy by progressing rehabtech solutions toward commercialisation and/or viable products and services. They should also address three key challenges for the rehabtech pipeline in the East Midlands:

- Widening health inequalities within the East Midlands
- Engaging people, groups and communities who typically do not engage with rehab programmes and opportunities, with particular interest in at-risk groups
- Disconnect between rehab research infrastructure and businesses in the region

Who can apply

UKRI eligibility rules apply.

Impact Acceleration Fund grants are open to individuals from:

- UK higher education institutions
- public sector research establishments
- research council institutes
- UKRI-approved independent research organisations and NHS bodies with research capacity

[Read the guidance on institutional eligibility.](#)

Please note, applicants from non-academic organisations and academic organisations outside of the UK are not eligible to apply for this funding call. UKRI individual eligibility criteria will apply. Applicants must be academic employees – lecturer or equivalent – of an eligible organisation and must be resident in the UK.

Principal investigators should normally hold a permanent post, but fixed-term employees may be eligible provided the host research organisation is prepared to give the individual all the support normal for a permanent employee. The term of employment of a fixed-term employee must extend beyond the duration of the proposed research project.

Co-investigators are expected to meet all the eligibility criteria for principal investigators except for the requirement to hold a contract that extends beyond the end date of the proposal.

Holders of Fellowships from UKRI, the Royal Society, or Royal Academy of Engineering aimed at later career stages are eligible to apply. Holders of fellowships under other schemes should contact us to establish eligibility, which will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

[Read the guidance on individual eligibility](#)

Ensuring rehabilitation approaches and technologies are universally equitable requires innovators to embrace interdisciplinarity, and to adopt principles of Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity (EDI), Trusted Research, and Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI).

EMERGE RehabTech is particularly interested in supporting under-represented groups of researchers and research stakeholders/end-users, and will actively look to fund projects that aim to address urgent societal needs and social disparities identified through proactive Patient and Public Involvement and Engagement (PPIE).

We encourage researchers and academics from all disciplines that are supported by UKRI to apply and welcome interdisciplinary collaborations that accelerate the development, delivery, and uptake of new rehabtech. We also encourage teams to consider how to involve early career researchers in their teams. Proposals should be within EPSRC remit, but do not need to directly link to prior EPSRC funding. Successful applicants will be expected to engage with the wider EMERGE RehabTech programme.

What we are looking for

Background

Rehabtech that is based on engineering and physical sciences, encompasses tools, equipment, and digital solutions designed to support people in recovering, maintaining, or improving physical, cognitive, or functional abilities following injury, illness, surgery, or age-related decline. They include devices and systems such as mobility aids, therapeutic equipment, assistive technologies, remote monitoring tools, digital platforms, and robotics. Rehabtech accelerates recovery, reduces disability, and enhances independence, ensuring safe and effective therapy, and empowering people to manage their health and daily activities.

As people live longer and chronic health conditions increase, rehabtech demand is soaring; developing new approaches that improve health outcomes and are more efficient and cost effective is essential.

We define **rehabilitation** as person-centred approaches that support individuals to recover, maintain, or improve physical, cognitive, or emotional function following serious injury, illness, surgery, or age-related decline. It aims to help people regain independence, enhance quality of life, and participate fully in daily activities through coordinated therapies, support services, and adaptive strategies.

Also in scope for EMERGE RehabTech is **prehabilitation**, which includes proactive approaches to prepare for upcoming medical treatments, surgery, or health challenges by optimising physical, psychological, and nutritional wellbeing. The aim is to build resilience and enhance recovery outcomes through tailored interventions such as exercise, education, lifestyle changes, and emotional support, improving both short- and long-term health and independence.

The East Midlands is at the forefront of rehabilitation and associated technologies, establishing a thriving ecosystem of world-class facilities, networks, and centres, and recognised at a national level by the Government's £105M investment in the National Rehabilitation Centre (NRC). In parallel, economic decline in the region is causing widening health inequalities, with more people living in income-deprived areas and with higher rates of preventable disease, e.g. heart disease, stroke, and COPD, in East Midlands cities compared with the UK average. In the East Midlands, 18.6% of the population have a limiting long-term illness or disability, compared to 17.6% in England.

EMERGE RehabTech is a UKRI-funded Place-Based Impact Acceleration Account. The work we fund will deliver impact for communities in the East Midlands, and beyond, through advances in rehabtech. We will consider rehabtech in the broadest sense; we want to fund ambitious projects that deliver tangible, quantifiable benefits in *any* field of rehabilitation. For instance, this might be (but not limited to):

- advances in sensor technologies and imaging for non-invasive health monitoring
- medical device materials and custom-fit device design
- smart medical wearables (physical and mental health)
- bioengineering
- robotics
- artificial intelligence
- data and synthetic data
- data for therapeutic use and in silico
- digital twin modelling
- biomaterials
- software, including apps for movement and mental cognition

- collaboration with SHAPE disciplines to embed interdisciplinary approaches to complex challenges

We are particularly interested in receiving proposals for projects that address a clearly identified health inequality in our region, such as people experiencing homelessness, drug and alcohol dependence, vulnerable migrants, those in the justice system, or inequality linked to income and poverty, geography, education, housing provision, or ethnicity and language. These barriers introduce and exacerbate fear of stigma, lack of identification, limited awareness of the healthcare system, language barriers, and digital exclusion. Innovations that increase access to rehabilitation and recovery services on an equal footing are essential to reduce inequalities.

What do we mean by ‘Impact’?

Impact encompasses real-world applications and influence of research outcomes. It refers to demonstrable effects, changes, or benefits of research that extend beyond academia, influencing the economy, society, culture, public policy, services, health, the environment, or quality of life.

Fundamental research projects primarily focus on generating new knowledge, understanding, or theoretical insights without requiring an immediate pathway to application. Fundamental research is driven by curiosity, discovery, and methodological advancement.

In contrast, an impact project is designed to translate research into real world benefits, delivering measurable improvements for people, organisations, public services, or the economy. These projects emphasise implementation, scalability, and collaboration with users, practitioners, or industry partners. While fundamental research builds the evidence base, impact projects ensure that this knowledge is applied in ways that create tangible societal, economic, health, environmental, or cultural outcomes.

EMERGE Rehabtech will only fund impact projects. Projects must focus on translational or applied activities that build upon existing research to progress technologies toward real-world use, such as refining prototypes, conducting user studies, or progressing commercialisation or clinical pathways.

The EMERGE RehabTech programme aims to boost and accelerate impact from cutting-edge translational research at the intersection of engineering and physical sciences, and rehabilitation. We are looking to support projects that move rehabtech innovations beyond the laboratory and into real-world health, care, or commercial settings, through clinical deployment, partnership with industry, or scale-up strategies.

Scope

Projects should explore innovative and creative approaches to addressing key challenges for the rehabtech pipeline in the East Midlands: widening health inequalities, difficulties engaging people and communities who typically do not engage with rehab programmes, and the disconnect between rehab research infrastructure and businesses in the region.

We will consider proposals for funding to develop rehabtech at different stages of maturity, with no specific requirement for projects to meet set criteria around TRL. However, our expectation is that Concept Primer projects will most likely advance innovations from TRL 4 to 5, and Impact Accelerator projects advance from TRL 5 to 6.

Projects must build on existing engineering and physical sciences research with demonstrable outputs and look to achieve some form of impact within the lifetime of the project or demonstrate strong potential for impact soon after the project is completed. Furthermore, we expect proof-of-concept to be in place prior to applying for EMERGE funding, for example in the form of an initial

prototype or work undertaken to prove the approach and technology is viable. We aim to support projects that are ready to deliver impact; where proposals still need to conduct research to demonstrate proof-of-concept or the project involves further development to progress to a concept that works, and will undertake research to establish efficacy, there is a significant risk in terms of delivering our aims for the programme and projects are likely to be considered out of scope. Thus, we would ordinarily expect to see proposals at TRL 4 and above with an initial prototype in place.

Please refer to [our website](#) for further information.

We anticipate that the nature of expected impact will vary from project to project. It may primarily be through contributing to the growth of the East Midlands' MedTech economy by progressing rehabtech solutions toward commercialisation and/or viable products and services, bringing new products to market, commercial adoption of new rehabtech, increased turnover, improved cost-effectiveness, or jobs creation. Alternatively, impact might be achieved by focussing on health outcomes and enhancing patient/user experience, promoting wellbeing, changes to clinical/public health guidelines, and enhancing quality of life for individuals and communities.

Please note, we will not fund fundamental research. This is outside the scope of EMERGE RehabTech.

All proposals submitted will be assessed equally irrespective of the type(s) of impact described. Reviewers will be asked to carefully consider feasibility and novelty alongside the potential for impact. For further details, please see the assessment criteria. Across all EMERGE RehabTech funding mechanisms, we will fund a balanced portfolio of projects in terms of impact generated and challenges addressed.

Ineligible activities

Owing to the nature of our underlying funding, we are unable to support impact activities that should be supported through other standard routes, e.g. impact activities costed as part of basic research proposals or Centres for Doctoral Training, contributions to Knowledge Transfer Partnerships, or broader activities and institutional culture change relating to impact. We are also unable to fund undergraduate or postgraduate activities or training, or core PhD training including tuition or bench fees. This funding cannot be used to support costs relating to Intellectual Property (IP) protection including but not limited to registering, maintaining, or supporting patents or property rights.

Responsible Innovation

Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) is at the heart of our plans for EMERGE RehabTech. We expect our projects to anticipate and reflect on how research and innovation might affect people and societies in the future, either through intended or unintended outcomes.

We are looking to fund projects that have dedicated time and effort to better understanding the value of their rehabtech innovation to ensure they maximise benefits and avoid harms, and to build on this throughout the life of their project, for example through carefully constructed PPIE activities. We welcome the inclusion of resource requests for activities that promote and instil responsible research and innovation.

As a general rule, we anticipate applicants submitting Impact Accelerator proposals will have carried out some foundational PPIE, while PPIE for Concept Primer proposals may be more oriented to the initial stages. We encourage applicants to carefully consider how to weave PPIE into their project plans to maximise engagement without overloading PPIE groups. For both types of project, we expect to see PPIE considered in project design and incorporated from the outset.

Intellectual Property

The responsibility for negotiating ownership and use of arising IP from an EMERGE RehabTech project resides with the award recipient's university, in consultation with the project team.

Where necessary for multi-partner projects, collaboration agreements must be in place prior to projects starting to ensure appropriate provisions are in place for managing arising IP. Where projects involve partnership-building or collaborative working that lies outside the scope of a formal collaboration agreement, the external collaborator should have sight of the application, workplan and budget in advance of submission.

All commercialisation projects funded by EMERGE should be developed in consultation with the awardee's institutional IP and Commercialisation team.

In line with the EPSRC research data policy framework, our expectation is that EMERGE projects will commit to making data open access wherever possible, subject to necessary restrictions to protect privacy, confidentiality, or IP.

What we will fund

Applicants are encouraged to contact the EMERGE management team to discuss the suitability of their proposal, if unsure. We will fund two types of activities through this funding call:

- 1) *Impact Accelerator* projects
- 2) *Concept Primer* projects

Funding available

In total, up to £750,000 funding is available for Round Two of the EMERGE RehabTech Impact Acceleration Fund. Due to the nature of our underlying funding, grants will only cover Directly Incurred costs associated with the project. Eligible Directly Incurred costs will be funded at 100%. We will not cover Directly Allocated Staff costs, Estate costs or Indirect costs. Funding can be used to support any directly incurred (DI) costs, such as staff time including for project management and commercialisation support, consumables and specialist services required for developing commercialisation plans, or travel. Equipment over £10,000 in value (including VAT) is not available through this call.

Impact Accelerator

Impact Accelerator projects will be flagship projects for the EMERGE RehabTech programme, undertaking activities over a period of up to 18 months that translate research into rehabtech innovations and take significant steps toward commercialising a rehabtech product or service. These projects will progress research towards commercialisation, accelerate innovation through TRLs, establish technology demonstrators, and conduct market validation.

We are looking for proposals that take creative approaches to delivering translational activities and enabling knowledge exchange (KE) for rehabtech. We would like to see projects that will elevate regional growth and productivity and enable local businesses to secure a share of a growing market in the East Midlands. They will accelerate delivery of innovations into health and care pathways, and will transform how people recover and regain fitness and function following injury and illness. They will promote an inclusive, diverse, and collaborative research and innovation culture in rehabtech that actively listens and responds to clinical and patient need.

Projects must involve at least one external non-academic partner to enhance translational research impact, embed real-world benefit, and instil confidence in terms of technical and commercial feasibility. Ideally, partners will be actively involved in proposal development from the outset. Partners may be clinical, or from industry, government or the third sector.

EMERGE RehabTech comprises a large consortium of partners. A number of these partners would like to work with researchers to co-create projects. Please contact the team at EMERGErehabtech@ntu.ac.uk for support connecting with our consortium partners.

Funding is available for up to five grants in this category. EMERGE RehabTech will fund up to £100,000 of eligible Directly Incurred costs, for projects lasting up to 18 months.

Concept Primer

Smaller in scale, Concept Primer projects will aim to first establish deployment potential for novel rehabtech prototypes and concepts, before seeking more significant funding. We expect proposals in this category to generally be at an earlier stage of development. Activities might for example include aspects of market research, exploring end user/patient requirements, or technical validation of prototypes to further explore and demonstrate efficacy, with the aim of developing a robust plan for commercialisation.

Funding is available for up to five projects. We will fund up to £50,000 of eligible Directly Incurred costs. Projects in this category are anticipated to run for 6-12 months; however, there is flexibility to adapt duration to best fit the work proposed, if appropriately and robustly justified.

Projects must involve at least one external non-academic partner, ideally involved in co-creating the proposal. Partners may be clinical, or from industry, government or the third sector.

Please contact the team at EMERGErehabtech@ntu.ac.uk for support connecting with prospective partners from our consortium.

Please note receiving Concept Primer funding does not preclude applicants from applying for an Impact Accelerator grant in future rounds, nor will it be considered a precursor should applicants choose to submit further proposals for funding.

Ineligible costs

- Directly Allocated Investigator costs
- Other Directly Allocated costs, including Estates and Indirect costs
- Items of equipment over £10,000 in value (including VAT)
- Undergraduate or postgraduate costs including stipend, training, tuition or bench fees
- Any costs relating to IP protection, e.g. registering, maintaining, or supporting patents or property rights.

How to apply

Applicants should ensure they are aware of, and comply with, any internal institutional deadlines that may be in place. The lead applicant is responsible for completing the application process on behalf of the project team.

Impact Accelerator

Stage 1: Outline submission

The Outline submission stage will open on 1 July 2026. The deadline for submitting your Outline is **16:00 BST 30 September**.

Please complete the online Outline form, available here: [Outline Application form](#).

Applicants should be explicit about the need for this funding and how it will result in tangible, measurable impact for rehabilitation.

Following a panel-based assessment process, we will invite a select group of proposals to prepare full applications.

Stage 2: Full Application

Full Applications will be by invitation only, determined by assessment of Outline applications. This stage is expected to open on 20 October 2026, with a deadline to submit of **18 November 2026 (16:00 GMT)**.

Invited applicants will receive further details about the requirements for a Full Application and instructions on how to submit by 20 October. The Full Application will require further details on your plans for the project, including a detailed costing and justification of resources, and greater depth around a range of other aspects such as IP strategy, responsible innovation approach, and contributions from partners.

Please note, letters of support from key partners will be required at Stage 2; letters are not required for Stage 1 Outlines.

A proposal template will be made available to applicants invited to Stage 2; the template will not be made available prior to this. All sections of this template should be completed, and it should be submitted as a single PDF, including relevant Letters of Support.

Concept Primer

Applications for Concept Primer projects will follow a single stage process.

Submission will open on 1 July 2026, and the deadline for submitting your proposal is **16:00 BST 30 September**.

Prior to submitting an application, applicants are required to complete the short Intention to Submit form, available here: [Intention to Submit form](#). A submission pro forma template and further instructions will be sent to applicants once the Intention to Submit form has been completed.

How we will assess your application

EMERGE RehabTech reserves the right not to fund a project if ethical concerns are raised by reviewers or panels members. Awards are conditional upon acceptance of the Terms and Conditions, which will be set out in the Award Letter.

The same Assessment Criteria will be applied to proposals for both funding streams; however, reviewers will be instructed to consider whether activities are appropriate to development stage, and thus whether proposals are suitable for Impact Accelerator or Concept Primer funding.

Impact Accelerator Outline proposals will be considered by a panel of experts in order to select a limited number of proposals to prepare Full Applications. Assessment at this stage will focus on the Applicant and their team, the merits and ambition of the proposed impact, and whether the planned activities are realistic and appropriate to delivering the proposed impact.

Impact Accelerator Full Applications and Concept Primer proposals deemed to meet the Assessment Criteria will undergo postal peer review before being considered by a panel of experts. Funding decisions will be made based on a rank ordered list, taking into account the nature of projects to ensure a balance across domains.

Contact details

For help and advice on costings and writing your proposal please contact your research office in the first instance, allowing sufficient time for your organisation's submission process.

Any queries regarding the call or submission of proposals should be directed to the EMERGE RehabTech team: EMERGErehabtech@ntu.ac.uk

Assessment Criteria

Vision

- Excellent quality, with clearly articulated importance of the rehabtech innovation
- Builds on an identified base of relevant high-quality research
- Has the potential to enhance impact and drive growth in the region
- Is timely in the current local context, meeting local needs and civic ambitions
- Articulates how widening health inequalities and difficulties engaging at-risk people, groups and communities with rehabilitation services in the region will be addressed

Approach

- Realistic, ambitious, and achievable objectives and workplan
- Clear and feasible impact evaluation and evidencing plan, including plans to monitor and capture evidence of impact beyond the end of the project
- Feasibility of the proposed activities and transparent methodologies
- Identifies risks to delivery, includes appropriate risk mitigation
- Develops capabilities, skills and capacity to generate impact in the East Midlands
- Evidence of co-creation with civic bodies and businesses
- Builds capacity and promotes knowledge exchange within and beyond the cluster
- Appropriate strategy to access and protect existing and arising intellectual property
- Embeds equality, diversity and inclusion, including in the approach to impact activities
- Costs are appropriate and well justified, and optimised to achieve intended outcomes

Applicant and team

- Relevant experience (appropriate to career stage), track record and balance of skills in the team, including leadership and management, to deliver the work
- Inclusion of researchers, research stakeholders/end-users from under-represented groups
- Evidence of steps to promote a positive research culture and environment
- Suitable partners with clear roles in the project

Stakeholder engagement

- Relevance of the project to identified stakeholders and sectors
- Clear consideration of impact pathways
- Ethical and mutually beneficial real user engagement, builds relationships with partners
- Planned Patient and Public Involvement and Engagement (PPiE), where appropriate, to address urgent societal needs and social disparities
- Includes activities to target new business collaborations within the region
- Seeks to strategically maximise the broader value of engaging with research communities, businesses, community groups and the public across the East Midlands

Responsible research and innovation (RRI)

- Relevant RRI and ethical considerations evaluated

Management and governance

- Appropriate governance and management structure tailored to supporting project delivery
- Describes credible targets and success measures, including anticipated outputs, outcomes, and real-world impacts
- Demonstrates clear understanding of appropriate impact evidence types to underpin reporting against impact-related KPIs

Additional info

Ethics and regulatory approval

We do not necessarily require ethics permissions and regulatory approvals to be in place when you apply for an Impact Accelerator or a Concept Primer. However, applicants will need to adequately demonstrate an understanding of the likely ethical and regulatory issues, as well as the approvals that will be required for the project to proceed.

Applicants should also consider how this will impact on project timeline and build in appropriate contingencies to ensure the identified objectives, milestones and deliverables are achievable. Where possible, early discussions with regulatory bodies are advised to ensure that all requirements can be met in a timely manner.

For successful projects, it is the responsibility of the project team and their host organisation to ensure that the appropriate ethics and regulatory approval has been obtained and that no activities requiring approvals are initiated before it has been granted.

EMERGE RehabTech will not fund a project if it is felt that ethical concerns have been overlooked or not appropriately accounted for. We reserve the right to pause or terminate projects experiencing significant delays associated with ethical or regulatory approvals where such delays are not outlined and mitigated for in the application for funding.

Conflicts of interest

Applicants are expected to declare any potential or actual conflicts of interest between parties, explaining the nature of these conflicts and providing details of how they will be managed, including in relation to managing IP.

Academic applicants must declare any interests in the commercial owners of background technologies or IP, such as shareholding options or consultancy fees.

Grant additional conditions (GACs)

Please note that due to the nature of this funding, there will be specific monitoring and evaluation requirements. The project team from each funded project will be expected to engage fully with the programme, including participating in EMERGE RehabTech activities and events, alongside fulfilling monitoring and reporting requirements during the lifetime of the project. In addition, within one month of the end of the project, a final report will be submitted to the EMERGE RehabTech Executive Committee highlighting and evidencing the project outcomes and impact.