



EPSRC Network+: Social Justice through the Digital Economy

Call for Collaborative Proposals: Application Form

We are seeking to fund proposals for Not-Equal’s second call for collaborative proposals. For full guidance please see details of the call on the Not-Equal [website](#).

Pilot research projects can be between 6-8 months in length. We expect to fund up to 7 projects of up to £40k (80% FEC) for this funding call (will consider shorter projects with smaller budgets).

Please submit this form before the deadline of **5pm, 29th May 2020** to notequal@newcastle.ac.uk, with the subject line ‘Application Submission’.

Applicants will be advised on the outcome of their proposal by the 30th July 2020.

GENERAL INFORMATION	
Lead Applicant (PI): Dr James Muldoon Email address: j.muldoon@exeter.ac.uk Job Title: Lecturer in Political Science Department: Department of Political Science Organisation: the University of Exeter	Co-Investigators (names and organisations): 1) Julian Siravo, Autonomy think tank 2) Phil Jones, Autonomy think tank Email address: julian@Autonomy.work phil@Autonomy.work Collaborative Partner(s): Autonomy think tank Project Title: Co-Designing a Food Delivery Platform Co-operative Project Tagline: How can we design an equitable alternative to exploitative food delivery platforms?

WHICH CHALLENGE AREA AND TOPICS DOES YOUR PROPOSAL RESPOND TO?			
CHALLENGE AREA	X	TOPIC	X
Algorithmic Social Justice		Recognition	
Digital Security for All		Re-distribution	X



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Fairer Futures for Business and Workforce	X	Enablement & Radical Trust	
Topics across challenge areas		Proactive Resilience & Reparation	
		Accountability & Care	

1. SUMMARY

Please provide a summary of your proposed research project. Please include an overview of the aims, impact, innovations, method, team and how it aligns with Not-Equal. This section should be understandable to the general public (<400 words).

The food delivery industry delivered 7.5 billion orders last year in the UK, a figure which will likely increase due to the effects of the coronavirus. However, the rapid rise of this platform delivery economy has also led to negative consequences such as a lack of employment law protections for so-called “self-employed” workers, low wages, precarious work and an extractive model of data harvesting and profit making.

Platform co-operatives offer a fairer model of doing business which offers improved conditions for workers, a more equitable distribution of profits, democratic governance over the business and genuine engagement with stakeholders. However, as an emergent model of doing business more research is needed to better understand the challenges and possibilities of platform co-operatives, particularly as they could operate in the food delivery industry.

This project aims to develop an understanding of the challenges facing a food delivery platform co-operative and to co-design principles, strategies and systems to overcome these challenges. It will provide a road map for the creation of the systems and democratic governance structure of a platform co-operative that would draw on the best practices and ideas within the digital co-operative economy in addition to creating new innovations.

To do this we will engage in a review of existing literature and also undertake empirical analysis of two case studies of platform co-operatives in the food delivery industry to develop an understanding of their structure and pathways. We will conduct discovery workshops, semi-structured interviews and co-production workshops in order to engage external stakeholders in a collaborative process of problem solving and system design.

Platform co-operatives are an innovative model of doing business that is currently under-studied in academia. The digital co-operative economy is an interdisciplinary field that exists at the margins of other academic disciplines such as labour studies, co-operatives studies and critical sociology. Drawing on the team’s existing expertise in researching the democratisation of the economy and designing new economic policy, we employ an innovative participation action research methodology to develop new practical solutions and systems design for platform co-operatives.

This project seeks to further NotEqual’s goals of interdisciplinary research that develops new tools and designs for alternative economic systems that enable technology to support social justice. We aim for this research to radically reconfigure the food delivery industry by enabling platform co-operatives through the development of new systems and pathways for implementation.

2. HOW DOES YOUR PROPOSAL ALIGN WITH THE THEMES AND OBJECTIVES OF NOT-EQUAL?

Please describe how your proposal responds to the second call for collaborations and how does your proposal enhance a cross-disciplinary way of working. (<300 words).

This interdisciplinary project will draw from the social sciences, digital design and architecture to create a series of innovative research, design and policy outputs to develop the system and business model of a food delivery platform cooperative. It responds to the call for applications by co-designing a new co-operative economic model as an



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alternative to the exploitative nature of existing food delivery platforms. In collaboration with two existing platforms, the project will research how platform co-operativism can distribute the benefits of the food delivery industry more equitably. Against the standard platform model of companies like Deliveroo and Just Eat, this project will consider how technological innovation can make food delivery services benefit all stakeholders and the communities in which they are embedded. Platform co-operativism promises to make new digital technologies benefit “the many” by offering better conditions for workers, democratic ownership, and wealth produced and distributed in the local community.

Prioritising the needs of the broader community over shareholders, the project seeks to move the dominant socio-economic model of food delivery away from platform capitalism to platform co-operativism by: 1) exploring new financial models and ways of distributing wealth through the cooperative model; 2) enhancing the socio-technical systems of existent platform cooperatives; and 3) mapping how platform co-operatives could sustainably expand their operations and services. Exploitative business models are built into the very logistical and organisational design of a company like Deliveroo, meaning that workers are often overworked, underpaid and at risk of harm. This project will foster forms of system design that pursue social justice goals. It will do so by designing logistics systems that prioritise workers’ interests, democratic engagement and community wealth building. This would guarantee that workers get breaks, receive decent pay and a democratic voice, while value remains in the local community.

3. CASE FOR SUPPORT

Please describe your proposed project. This should include your aims and objectives, the design and method of your project, context, background literature and data to be collected. Please also indicate why this research is important and for whom (<1000 words).

A. Aims and Objectives

This research project aims to develop an understanding of the complex challenges faced by a food delivery platform co-operative and co-design solutions to these challenges through an innovative design methodology and participatory action research. To achieve this overarching aim we have established three specific research objectives:

O1. To examine the challenges and opportunities of a platform co-operative in the food delivery industry in moving from start-up phase to trading consistently by using interviews, descriptive data and co-created workshops from two case studies.

O2. To co-design a report through collaborative workshops in which we develop the principles, strategies and system design for how a platform co-operative could be developed and operate in the food delivery industry. This will map out governance structures, logistics and business models through infographics and network mapping alongside qualitative research and analysis.

O3. To produce a policy paper targeted at local councils and national government bodies with policy recommendations for how to support the growth of the digital co-operative economy through an adequate funding and regulatory environment.

B. Context and Background Literature

The food delivery industry in the UK (Deliveroo, Foodora, Just Eats, etc.) was worth an estimated £8.5bn in 2019. With Covid-19 disrupting traditional cooking and eating practices, it is likely the sector will continue to grow exponentially. However, there are troubling aspects of the business models of these platform companies, including a decline in labour standards, an extractive model of harvesting data and a deliberate attempt to misclassify workers



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as “self-employed” to deny them workers’ rights (Srnicek, 2017). This research aims to foster the development of an alternative model of platform economy for the food industry through a “platform co-operative” - a workers’ co-operative with a democratic ownership and governance structure that utilises a digital platform for the sale of goods and services (Scholz, 2017). This would guarantee broad-based ownership, improved conditions for workers, genuine engagement with stakeholders, and a more equitable distribution of economic benefits (including more to delivery riders and restaurants).

In 2018 in the UK, Unfound was launched to support platform co-operatives with seed funding and practical advice. A small collection of articles, reports and books have since contributed to our understanding of this concept in theoretical terms and provided the first overview of different cases (Scholz and Schneider, 2017; McCann and Yazici, 2018; Lawrence and Laybourn-Langton, 2018; Scholz, 2018; Borkin, 2019). What is currently lacking – and what this project will develop – is in-depth case studies that provide more detailed knowledge of specific pathways of platform co-operatives and how to overcome barriers from startup phase to trading consistently (Bohman, 2017; Burnicka and Zygmuntowski, 2019; Borkin, 2019).

C. Research Design and Methodology

We adopt a four-step design methodology to guide our research: 1. Discover (the source of the problem), 2. Define (the nature of the problem), 3. Develop (potential solutions), 4. Deliver (effective project outcomes). As part of the first two phases of the research (Discover and Define) we will use an innovative **participatory action research approach using two case studies** in which we will collect descriptive data on the business operations of two food delivery platform co-operatives, organise workshops **and conduct interviews** with key stakeholders of these businesses. This will enable us to develop a deep empirically-grounded understanding of the challenges in collaboration with workers and users of platform co-operatives.

The two case studies are 1) **Mensakas**, a Barcelona-based food delivery co-operative; and 2) **Coopcycle.org**, an open source food delivery app licensed under *the peer-to-peer foundation* and co-operatively managed by its developers and any riders who want to use it. Cases were selected according to a small-n exploratory most similar systems design method (Halperin and Heath, 2016). Both cases have similar business models, operate in Europe, were formed by delivery riders, and are comparable on most features.

Step 1. Discover

Phase 1 (Sep 2020): **Conduct initial literature review on platform co-operatives** to learn from existing theoretical approaches.

Phase 2 (Sep 2020 – Oct 2020): **Collection of financial figures and industry information** relating to the structure and operations of the two food delivery platform co-operatives used as case studies. Researchers will request financial figures relating to revenues and expenses, taxes, business activities etc.

Step 2. Define

Phase 3 (Nov 2020 – Dec 2020) **Organise collaborative discovery workshop (via Zoom)** with worker/owners of the two platform co-operatives, service users, academics and policy specialists in which participants can work together to discuss current challenges to food delivery platform co-operatives. Second, we will conduct a series of **semi-structured interviews (via Zoom)** with twelve of the main worker/owners in the two case studies. We will ask questions about sources of capital, governance structures, diversity and inclusivity issues, and how to scale sustainably.

Step 3. Develop



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Phase 4 (Jan 2021– Feb 2021): **Analysis and interpretation of data** gathered in first phases 1-3. Data analysis of the interviews will utilise thematic analysis with open coding and NVivo software to inductively identify emerging themes.

Phase 5 (Feb 2021): **Co-production workshop (via Zoom)** involving stakeholders from phases 1-3. Participants encouraged to engage with different design possibilities and evaluate the benefits and limitations of implementation. This will lead to a set of proposals that will inform the policy paper and report.

Step 4. Deliver

Phase 6 (Feb 2021 – March 2021) **Platform design** involving design of operations, organisation, logistics, business activities and architecture. Infographics and network mapping will be used to represent the governance and organisation of the platform and develop designs for cooperative equivalents of Deliveroo's 'Dark Kitchens' (sell meals exclusively through delivery), communal restaurants and worker hubs. Data collected on revenue and profits will be used to design more equitable financial models.

Report launch (March 2021): In this phase, researchers will produce the report, policy paper, blog post, newspaper article and video based on the collaborative research to communicate the findings of the project.

This research will be important for existing platform co-operatives, people starting new platform co-ops, food delivery riders and service users, researchers of the digital economy and a broader audience interested in new economic alternatives.

4. RESILIENCE PLAN

Please describe how you would carry out your project with social distance measures in place. For example, deliver workshops via Zoom instead of in person (<300 words).

If social distancing measure are still in place for the duration of the project (Sep 2020 – April 2021) as we assume they will be, alternative arrangements will be made to ensure that researchers can still meet all of the key project objectives. Workshops with stakeholders involved in cooperative food delivery platforms will be conducted via Zoom using a subscription to the service from Autonomy think tank. Semi-structured interviews can also take place online via Skype or Zoom depending on which the participants are most comfortable with.

Weekly meetings between the principal investigator and collaborators will also take place via Zoom. These meetings will offer opportunities to keep up to date with the various sides of the project, discuss research ideas, as well as develop solutions to design problems. Monthly Zoom meetings will also be held with Autonomy's director and other research affiliates to keep the think tank's wider team abreast of the project's development.

Due to the online nature of research during distancing measures, the team has also developed a data management plan to store and manage data generated during the project. Data from the project will comprise: 1) Workshop notes, recorded by the researchers during the two workshops and stored on Microsoft Word documents in addition to photographs of designs and pictorial representations taken during the workshops stored as .jpg files; 2) interview transcripts, recorded and transcribed by the researchers into Microsoft Word documents; 3) business data, will consist of financial figures relating to revenues and expenses, organisational structure, strategic orientation, etc. This data will be stored in Excel spread sheets and Microsoft Word documents. All data collected by this project will be stored on a University of Exeter network drive in accordance with the University of Exeter Information Security Policy (<http://as.exeter.ac.uk/it/regulations/infosec/policy/>). It will only be accessed by the PI and the two



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collaborators.

5. INNOVATION

Please explain the innovative aspects of the proposed research project (<150 words).

Platform co-operativism is an innovative business model which remains under-researched. While broad typologies of such platforms already exist, this project will offer the first in-depth analysis of individual case studies. By using an innovative participatory action research method and design process to look in detail at the structure, organisation and operations of specific co-ops, the project will offer the first empirical analysis of platform co-operativism. The research project also draws on a unique and interdisciplinary skill-set from our team which consists of social scientists, designers/architects and policy experts. In collaboration with stakeholders, the project will develop innovative digital and urban design solutions to problems with the standard platform model, including diagrams of new logistics systems and design plans. The project will produce the first detailed analysis for the design and implementation of a platform co-operative that can act as a guide for those wishing to establish an alternative business model.

6. NON-ACADEMIC PARTNERS

Please explain how your non-academic partners will engage with the project e.g. in-kind time, use of facilities, etc. (<150 words).

Julian Siravo is an architect and digital design consultant. His primary role will be creating infographics, network maps and architectural designs for the logistics, organisation and infrastructure of the platform. Phil Jones is a policy specialist who has research expertise in platform labour and digital cooperatives. He will carry out the majority of research into the logistics, organisation and activities of cooperative food delivery platforms. He will also work with the PI in analysing the data and co-authoring the main outcomes from the project including the report and policy paper.

As part of its support, Autonomy think tank will also:

- Organise regular online Zoom meetings and workshops
- Engage stakeholders across the cooperative sector and through its extensive network of affiliates
- Assist with editing the project outputs
- Design the format and layout of the report and policy paper
- Assist with the production of a video and podcast

7. SOCIAL IMPACT



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Please describe the expected social impact of your project (<300 words). This should be understandable to the general public. Please note that the community panel will consider and assess this section against the following criteria. To what extent does the proposal:

- 1) Consider and respond to the needs of a community (e.g. provide an example of the beneficiaries of your project and the value it would generate for them);
- 2) Help to overcome/reduce/avoid barriers to access and participation in technology and services (e.g. provide an example of the barriers and how your project addresses such barriers);
- 3) Support new connections between communities of interest (e.g. provide an example of how the project creates opportunities for new connections between people and/or fosters community building).

This project aims to co-design the structure and systems for a food delivery platform co-operative to operate in the UK. The project responds to calls from Outlandish, a platform co-operative and digital agency that designs digital tools for social impact, for new designs for an alternative to existing food delivery platforms. The community of developers, designers and workers around Outlandish, which provides a hub for platform workers in London, have requested more research into this area to support the development of a platform co-operative. This project would benefit this community group by providing them with the knowledge and tools to develop this alternative system. It would also benefit broader groups such as existing platform co-operatives in the food delivery industry who would learn about improving their systems as well as other platform co-operatives and workers in the digital economy who would be able to draw lessons from the research and also potentially benefit from any changes to local or national government policy as a result of the policy paper. By co-designing new pathways and systems for platform co-ops this project will significantly reduce barriers for emerging co-ops seeking to make use of the co-operative model but without any support for how to do it. Co-operatives have significant regulatory hurdles to becoming established and represent a complicated business model that is often cited as off-putting for new businesses. Our report would help simplify the steps needed and show the advantages of different models and designs. Our two collaborative workshops (conducted via Zoom) would also provide an opportunity for different stakeholders to establish new relationships build a broader community of interest and create new opportunities for further collaboration. Our aim is to support the creation of a new network around platform co-operatives that will outlive the project.

8. WORK PLAN

Please outline the work-plan for your proposed research/activity (<200 words).

See “case for support” for full description of research design and outline of phases 1-6 of research.

September 2020: Co-Is to conduct literature review on platform co-operatives and draft analysis for research team.

Sep 2020 – Oct 2020: Co-I Jones to engage in research of existing platform co-ops in food delivery industry and request information from case study participants.

Nov 2020 – Dec 2020: PI and two Co-Is to organise collaborative discovery workshop with stakeholders. PI to lead on delivery of workshop, Co-Is to actively participate, lead breakout sessions and takes notes for further analysis.

Nov 2020 – Dec 2020: Co-Is to conduct and record semi-structured interviews with project participants. PI to arrange for transcriptions to be made and data stored securely.

Jan 2021– Feb 2021: PI to lead on analysis and interpretation of data. PI and Co-I to create outlines for design of platform co-operative. PI and Co-Is to organise co-production workshop with project participants.

Feb 2021 – March 2021: PI to work with two co-Is to write report and policy paper. Co-Is to lead on blog, video and newspaper article.



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9. HOW WILL YOU COMMUNICATE THE FINDINGS OF YOUR RESEARCH TO THE PUBLIC?

Please outline your dissemination plans e.g. events, networking with local support groups, creating vlogs, writing blogs, etc. (<200 words).

1. Report – This will offer a detailed analysis of food delivery platform cooperatives as well as design solutions to existent problems with the model. This will be aimed primarily at existing platform co-ops and new start-ups.
2. Policy paper – Aimed at local and national government, this will include a list of policies that can be enacted to foster an economic environment hospitable to platform cooperatives. For local authorities, this will include information on how they can assist local co-operative businesses and keep value in their communities.
3. Blog post on Autonomy website – This will offer an introduction to platform co-operativism and introduce the project to a wider audience and research network.
4. Newspaper article – an opinion piece about the project will appear in a national newspaper – the Guardian, the Independent or New Statesman.
5. Video – this will offer a narrated account of the platform cooperative model with animation.
6. Podcast – the researchers will discuss the project on Autonomy's podcast.

10. EXISTING FUNDING

Will any existing funding be used on this project (e.g. PhD funding)? If so, please provide information about these and how they will be used for the project (<150 words).

This research will continue the work of two existing grants of the PI, which have been used to establish the knowledge base upon which this project can build:

Research England, Strategic Priorities Fund – Policy Engagement Fund - Evidenced-Based Policy Making “Fostering the Development of Platform Co-operatives” £9900

University of Exeter Strategic Discretionary Fund, 'The Future of Work' £2000

11. EXPERIENCE & INTERACTION OF TEAM

Please indicate any previous relevant experience, qualifications and publications of the lead applicant and team. If applicable, please detail how the PI-postdoctoral partnership will be beneficial (<300 words).

The collaboration of the research team began with a CHASE-funded, co-organised, interdisciplinary conference on 27-28 September 2019, entitled “Challenging the Work Society”. From here, the PI consulted on a report for the



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regional government of Valencia, Spain, developed by one of the Co-Investigators, entitled ‘The Future of Work and Employment Policies in the Comunitat Valenciana’.

This current project builds upon the PI’s previous research into the challenges of democratising the economy, examined in a series of historical and theoretical studies, most recently in *Building Power to Change the World*, forthcoming with Oxford University Press. The PI has also developed expertise in the field of platform co-operatives through acting as lead investigator on a project funded by Research England entitled “Democratising the Digital Economy: Improving Policy Outcomes for Platform Co-operatives,” with Autonomy think tank as an external partner on the project.

The first co-investigator, Julian Siravo, is an architect and digital design consultant. He has specific expertise in the platform economy. He was the lead researcher on a collaborative project with the Valencian government developing policies and designs for the region, including designing new worker spaces. He has also developed a cooperative, council-led model for ‘dark kitchens’ as part of Autonomy’s ‘New Foundational Infrastructures’.

The second co-investigator, Phil Jones is a researcher with specific expertise in platform labour. He is writing a book for Verso about crowdwork and platform cooperatives. He has written a number of policy reports and briefings for Autonomy, and is currently writing a policy report on platform labour. He and Julian (first co-investigator) co-authored a policy briefing on how to develop a national food delivery service for Rebecca Long-Bailey’s policy team. He has written extensively about the platform economy for the UK media.

12. BUDGET BREAKDOWN

Please provide a detailed budget breakdown and justification for your budget - for example: salary grade, point, duration and %FTE: specified journeys or conferences; identified items and quantities of consumables (<300 words).

Staffing:

40% FTE PI (438 hours): Dr James Muldoon, 8 months 40% commitment to ensure effective project management, conducting research, knowledge exchange and producing research outcomes. The PI’s time will be used for planning the workshops, undertaking analysis of the data and preparing the report and policy paper. The PI will supervise and manage every aspect of the project and will co-ordinate the team to deliver project outputs.

Total = £13,738

Non-academic staff time (subcontracted)

Collaborative Partner 45% FTE salary X 2: 8 months conducting research, organising interviews, liaising with stakeholders, organising production of materials and designing documents. A significant amount of the Co-I’s time will be required to be taken from other activities to devote to this research project. £30k annual salary for 8 months @ 45%. 2 x £9,000+VAT = **£21,600 (inc. VAT)** (paid as subcontract)

NON-STAFF Consumables:

Interview Incentives: Participants who have been offered what they consider to be a generous incentive are more eager and favorably disposed toward participating in a study. We therefore include a small incentive here to ensure high-quality participation.

24 interviews @ £20 + £160 per workshop. = **£800**

Transcription costs. To facilitate verbatim transcript of audio files for 20 semi-structured interviews @1hr each transcription costs have been calculated to include: a total of 1200 interview minutes @£1 per/m +VAT. = **£1440**



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Production of 1. Report and 2. Policy Paper

Design and production costs: 2 x £1200 = **£2,400**

Total: £39,977 (at 100% FEC)

13. TOTAL PROJECT COST

Please list in GBP under the headings – Overall Cost, Staff, Travel and Other

	Directly incurred costs (80%)	Directly incurred costs (100%)
Staff	£28,269	£35,337
Non-Staff Costs: Consumables	£3,712	£4,640
Non-Staff Costs: Facilities/Equipment		
Non-Staff Costs: Travel		
Non-Staff Costs: Estates (RA's only)		
Non-Staff Costs: Indirect (RA's only)		
Overall Cost*	Total Not-Equal Funding Requested: £31,981	Total for information only: £39,977

Directly Incurred Posts

Role	Post	Start Date	Period on Project (months)	% of Full Time	Scale	Increment Date	Basic Starting Salary	Super-Annuation and NI (£)	Total cost on grant-80% FEC (£)	Total cost on grant-100% FEC (£)

*Please note you are able to claim for RA time and RA relevant FTE related costs, PI/Co-I time and other non-staff costs. You are not able to claim for FTE related costs attributed to PI/Co-I time.

Further Information

If you have any further questions regarding this call for proposals, please contact notequal@newcastle.ac.uk or Rachel Sparks (Not-Equal Project Manager) on 0191 2088268.

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Not-Equal is collecting your data to record submission of your application, and we will only contact you to provide you with information about the application and related Not-Equal activities.

You have provided your consent for the University to process your personal data for the purposes detailed above. You have the right to request that the University deletes this personal data at any time, noting if you do so, the University will be unable to provide you with information relating to Not-Equal. On an annual basis we will ask you to confirm that you wish to continue to receive this information: if you don't or you do not respond, we will delete your personal details within one calendar month.

We won't share your data with anyone outside the University, unless required to by law, and it will be stored securely within Open Lab at Newcastle University.

If you would like to discuss this further, please contact rec-man@newcastle.ac.uk

If you would like more information about how we manage personal data more generally, including your rights under law, and the contact details of the University's Data Protection Officer, please see our website: <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/data.protection/PrivacyNotice.htm>



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