

Proposal: increased membership contribution



PhD Network University of Twente

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20.2.2025

Summary

P-NUT is a constantly growing and evolving network. In fact, we are one of the most active promovendi networks in the Netherlands. P-NUT informs its members about all changes in their promovendi trajectory and goings-on at UT, we connect people in social events and represent our community towards the university with the goal of improving the promovendi experience. However, P-NUT needs to modernize. We need better training for our board and improve our handling of sensitive information and managing our members. Our events are popular, but we must carry the weight of inflation, just as our contractors do. We want to offer more activities and more significant events, especially educational events. This is especially important in the current reduction of TGS courses. This brings us to the budget cuts at the UT. They showed us we need to be self-reliant and independent and cannot rely on incentive funds and donors. Therefore, we want to ask our members to vote on an increase of their membership contribution. 2 options are proposed here, increase from 1 to 3 € per month or increase from 1 to 5 € a month. This proposal will be discussed in the general members meeting on march 6th 2025.

1. Problem statement

The goal of this section is to explain what P-NUT spends money on and what value is gathered from that for the paying members. This is intended to clarify why an increase of an independent budget is needed. In the end you can find a very short summary of the problem statement.

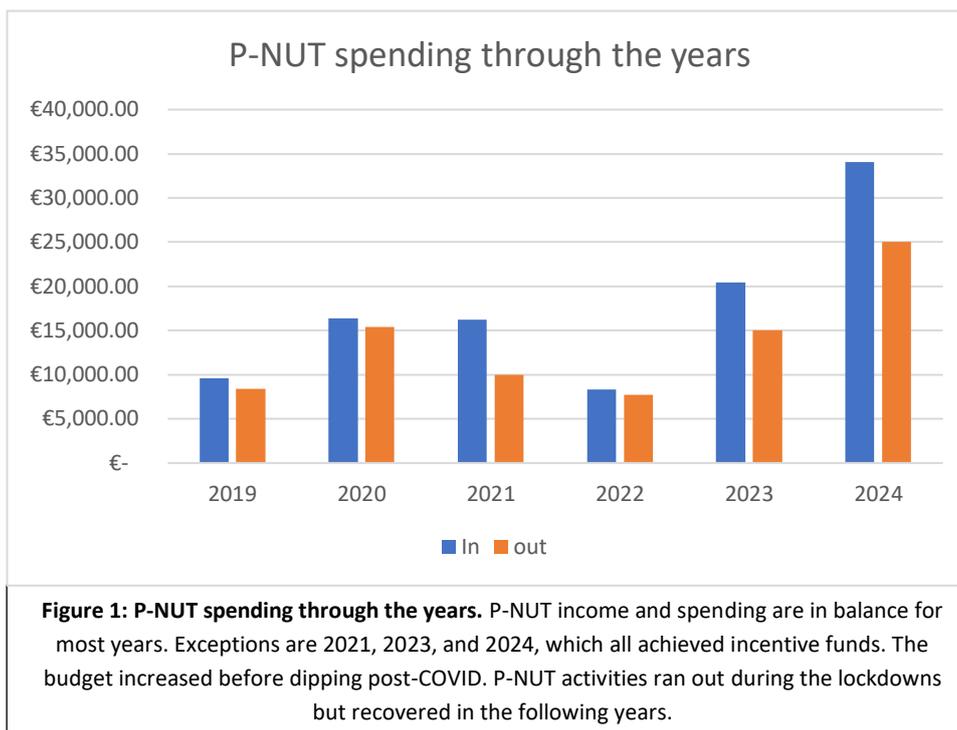
P-NUT is the biggest promovendi network at the University of Twente (UT) and one of the most active promovendi networks in the Netherlands. Our goal is the improvement of the promovendi trajectory, which is included in the PhD Charter. We inform, connect and represent all doctoral candidates at UT. This makes P-NUT an essential part of doctoral well-being.

P-NUT is a KvK registered association and financed by the UT and its members. The university contributes about 3800 € per year. Since 2022, this amount increases in accordance with inflation. Our 230 members pay an annual fee of 12 € at the end of a board year. In return, they get to vote in the general members meeting (GMM), be active in the P-NUT committees, board and elected board and most importantly for them: cheap or free events organized for them in the company of other promovendi.

Events are the heart of P-NUT. Members and their friends can come together, enjoy themselves, and share stories and problems. Many events are social get-togethers, like our monthly drinks or board game nights. But P-NUT is more than just parties: P-NUT day is our biggest annual event, with speakers and workshops about topics relevant to all promovendi. EQUITY and Include-U organize events about equality, cultural exchange and lifting up other experiences. Finally, P-NUT aims to include more educational events, like the Creer café 2024, in its portfolio. Whilst these events are hugely popular, they cost us a lot of money.

If events are the heart of P-NUT's work the board and its active members are the brain. The 4 elected board members and 7 committee heads are funded by the university, as they receive compensation for their work via contract extensions or ECs. Additionally, the board of 2024/25 decided to let board members attend events for free. The elected board in recent years profited from a team building session with a professional coach – an offer by the university for higher productivity that runs out in 2025. The committees consist of active members who work endlessly to survey members, organize meetings with various shareholders and execute events. They can get compensated with ECs, too. All active members meet on a regular basis to strengthen the group spirit during board integration events. They are recruited at events and get initialized by talking to a board member over coffee or lunch. Their work is highly valued and are the core of what P-NUT has to offer to its members: enthusiastic people, ready to spend their time to improve the experience of the people around them.

P-NUT's spending has increased through the years (Figure 1). Part of this is COVID-19, which diminished P-NUT activity. But by now, P-NUT has tripled its spending compared to the pre-covid years. This was, in big parts, achieved through applying for incentive funds (IF). These grants offer up to 10000 € for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion projects at all of UT. This influx is, of course, welcome, and the leftover money can be used for P-NUT events. But it needs to be noted that this entails big parts of P-NUT's budget is bundled in projects that are not promovendi specific. Additionally, these projects continue past the initial IF and their valuable work then needs to be funded by P-NUT itself like IncludeU or they need to continuously reapply for IF as EQUITY does. The amount of work to apply for and execute these projects is significant for our active members, who mostly focus on this and nothing else, therefore also bundling our limited workforce.



If we do not include an incentive fund in 2024, P-NUT will face a dent of about 1000 € (see annual report 2025). This is noticeable in the budget of 2025. Although the board of 2024 managed to receive an IF of 9000 €, we will still have to cut back on spending immensely, because this money is bound to the neurodiversity project. Table 1 shows the budget for 2025, with spending cut as much as possible while still being as active as years prior. In the end the budget shows a gap of 3144,78 €. Again, this is keeping P-NUT as active as now, while reducing all budget posts as much as possible.

Tabel 1: P-NUT Budet 2025, normal spending

Budget P-NUT 2025	In (expected)		Out (expected)	
Fixed income				
Membership contribution	€	2.700,00	€	-
UT contribution	€	3.830,22	€	-
Total fixed income	€	6.530,22	€	-
Fixed expenses				
Triodos bank account	€	-	€	87,50
ING bank account	€	-	€	262,50
ICT costs (website, SNT etc.)	€	-	€	75,00
Merchandizing (PR)	€	-	€	100,00
GMM	€	-	€	400,00
Total fixed expenses	€	-	€	925,00
Activities				
Social events	€	1.000,00	€	6.300,00
Educational events	€	300,00	€	500,00

Summer Party + BBQ	€	200,00	€	400,00
Christmas Market			€	250,00
New Years party (2026)	€	200,00	€	300,00
PhD Day	€	2.100,00	€	3.100,00
Total activities	€	3.800,00	€	10.850,00
Other				
Acquisition new active members	€	-	€	200,00
Board integration activities	€	-	€	200,00
EQUITY	€	-	€	500,00
Minds of all kinds	€	8.900,00	€	8.900,00
Include-U project	€	-	€	200,00
Miscellaneous (Notary)	€	-	€	600,00
Total other	€	8.900,00	€	10.600,00
Grand total	€	19.230,22	€	22.375,00

In the annual report of 2025 this gap was closed, by cutting the active member acquisition and activities, educational events and social events (Table 2). This means amputating our heart and brain. As the work of our active members is P-NUTs most prized but also most limited asset, reducing all the small events for active members will severely limit our future activities. Active members spending less time will limit cohesion and make us less effective. Additionally, it will remove all incentives outside of EC's for people to be active in P-NUT. Many active members cite the social aspect of their work making it worthwhile. The biggest gash in the below budget is for events. They will have to be smaller, more cost effective and less collaborative. Especially the educational events will have to be self sustaining, so we cannot offer them cheaper for our members. Especially with the university cutting back on personal development course P-NUT could try to alleviate some of the pressure on promovendi by offering some courses ourselves, specifically for promovendi, but this will be out of discussion now.

Tabel 2: balanced P-NUT budget 2025

Budget P-NUT 2025	In (expected)		Out (expected)	
Fixed income				
Membership contribution	€	2.700,00	€	-
UT contribution	€	3.830,22	€	-
Total fixed income	€	6.530,22	€	-
Fixed expenses				
Triodos bank account	€	-	€	87,50
ING bank account	€	-	€	262,50
ICT costs (website, SNT etc.)	€	-	€	75,00
Merchandizing (PR)	€	-	€	100,00
GMM	€	-	€	400,00
Total fixed expenses	€	-	€	925,00
Activities				
Social events	€	1.000,00	€	3.805,22
Educational events	€	300,00	€	300,00
Summer Party + BBQ	€	200,00	€	400,00
Christmas Market	€	-	€	200,00
New Years party (2026)	€	200,00	€	300,00
PhD Day	€	2.100,00	€	3.100,00

Total activities	€	3.800,00	€	8.105,22
Other				
Acquisition new Board members	€	-	€	-
Board integration activities	€	-	€	-
EQUITY	€	-	€	500,00
Minds of all kinds	€	8.900,00	€	8.900,00
Include-U project	€	-	€	200,00
Miscellaneous (Notary)	€	-	€	600,00
Total other	€	8.900,00	€	10.200,00
Grand total	€	19.230,22	€	19.230,22

Overall, these cuts will make P-NUT less attractive to members and active members. Fewer members mean less income and fewer active members. Less active members mean fewer events and representational activity. The workload on the active members that are left will increase, making becoming active even less attractive. Already finding candidates for the elected board every year is difficult, this will make it impossible. P-NUT will shrink and deteriorate, which is to the advantage of no one and needs to be prevented.

The problem is clear: P-NUT spends a lot of money on valuable projects that should not be cut back. The only option is to increase our income. We would like to avoid doing this with IF as the work of getting and executing them is significant, and the outcome is project-bound and, therefore, less flexible.

P-NUT needs more income.

2. Possible solutions

I propose three possible solutions to avoid future budget crunches: 1. Getting sponsors, 2. tripling the annual membership fee, and 3. increasing the membership fee to 5 € per month. I will mention the advantages and disadvantages. This proposal will be presented during the general members meeting (GMM) on March 6th, 2025, and our members will vote on their favorite option in accordance with the P-NUT statutes.

Two important notes in the beginning: in the current financial situation it is not possible to ask the university for more money. P-NUT negotiated a budget increase in 2022 and the university contribution increases annually by 2,5 %. Both measures are intended to counter inflation.

Sponsors have been considered in the past and are still on the table. However, this money would most likely not cover the needs of P-NUT and would not reduce the need to apply for outside funding.

2.1 Tripling the annual membership contribution

If we are looking for independent income sources, our members would be the only option. Increasing the annual fee from 12 € to 36 €, would cover the budget gap mentioned above. It is only a small increase for current members and would not discourage new members from joining. "Join P-NUT; it's just 3 € per month" would sell quite nicely.

We would actually have 2250 € more. We could use this money to increase the budget for educational events, enabling P-NUT to be more flexible and offer a wider array of events with professional speakers. We could also take back the budget cuts requested for the limited budget in Table 1.

With the extra money P-NUT could invest in a professional management system, like Congressus. Online signup and payments would be possible, and our management would be GDPR compliant and more efficient.

Asking for this would not require any extra work of our active members. With this they could focus on organizing more events and representing P-NUT at various shareholders at UT.

Advantages:

- Budget gap is more than covered, committees would not have to cut back costs
- Increased educational events budget
- Online membership management
- No extra work for active members

Disadvantages:

- Members have to pay 3 € more per month, 36 € more in total

Tabel 3: possible budget with 36 € annual fee, highlighted are the budget posts that would profit compared to table 1.

Budget P-NUT 2025	In (expected)		Out (expected)	
Fixed income				
Membership contribution	€	8.100,00	€	-
UT contribution	€	3.830,22	€	-
Total fixed income	€	11.930,22	€	-
Fixed expenses				
Triodos bank account	€	-	€	87,50

ING bank account	€	-	€	262,50
ICT costs (website, SNT etc.)	€	-	€	75,00
Merchandizing (PR)	€	-	€	155,22
GMM	€	-	€	400,00
Online mebership management	€	-	€	850,00
Total fixed expenses	€	-	€	1.830,22
Activities				
Social events	€	1.000,00	€	6.300,00
Educational events	€	300,00	€	1.500,00
Summer Party + BBQ	€	200,00	€	400,00
Christmas Market			€	250,00
New Years party (2026)	€	200,00	€	300,00
PhD Day	€	2.100,00	€	3.100,00
Total activities	€	3.800,00	€	11.850,00
Other				
Acquisition new Board members	€	-	€	150,00
Board integration activities	€	-	€	200,00
EQUITY	€	-	€	600,00
Minds of all kinds	€	8.900,00	€	8.900,00
Include-U project	€	-	€	500,00
Miscellaneous (Notary)	€	-	€	600,00
Total other	€	8.900,00	€	10.950,00
Grand total	€	24.630,22	€	24.630,22

2.2 5 € monthly membership fee

The final option is a 5 € monthly membership fee. This is a huge increase in our current budget and would give us about 7500 € extra to work with. The amount of money would keep us on incentive fund money level in terms of spending ability but below 20000 € annual income, which would circumvent the tax authorities, which means less work for active members and more money for our events.

We could use the extra money for even bigger events, especially in the educational area. The board could become more attractive with better funded regular events, and more active members could organize more events in for example EQUITY and IncludeU for cultural exchange and equality projects. PR could grow by reinstating P-NUT merchandise and enabling sponsored posts for a bigger reach. Finally, the elected board could be more efficient by rehiring our team coach. We had to continue working with him as the university no longer pays for his services. This helps the board to be better at working together and be effective representatives for the P-NUT community.

For members more advantages could present itself: member exclusive events and courses, free entry to most events, writing retreats, excursions, business networking events and courses with professional lecturers for personal and career development. All on campus, with snacks and lunch.

Advantages:

- Bigger budget, making IF unnecessary
- Better quality of events
- More educational events bridging the gap of the lack of TGS courses

- More attractive for active members
- More longevity

Disadvantages:

- Higher contribution for members, 5 € a month, 60 € in total
- Might discourage new members

Tabel 4: possible P-NUT budget WITH 5 € monthly contribution

Budget P-NUT 2025	In (expected)	Out (expected)
Fixed income		
Membership contribution	€ 13.500,00	€ -
UT contribution	€ 3.830,22	€ -
Total fixed income	€ 17.330,22	€ -
Fixed expenses		
Triodos bank account	€ -	€ 87,50
ING bank account	€ -	€ 262,50
ICT costs (website, SNT etc.)	€ -	€ 75,00
Merchandizing (PR)	€ -	€ 500,00
GMM	€ -	€ 400,00
Online mebership management	€ -	€ 850,00
Total fixed expenses	€ -	€ 2.175,00
Activities		
Social events	€ 1.000,00	€ 7.605,22
Educational events	€ 300,00	€ 2.000,00
Summer Party + BBQ	€ 200,00	€ 400,00
Christmas Market		€ 250,00
New Years party (2026)	€ 200,00	€ 300,00
PhD Day	€ 2.100,00	€ 3.100,00
Total activities	€ 3.800,00	€ 13.655,22
Other		
Acquisition new Board members	€ -	€ 200,00
Board integration activities	€ -	€ 1.000,00
EQUITY	€ -	€ 1.500,00
Minds of all kinds	€ 8.900,00	€ 8.900,00
Include-U project	€ -	€ 1.500,00
Miscellaneous (Notary, coach)	€ -	€ 1.100,00
Total other	€ 8.900,00	€ 14.200,00
Grand total	€ 30.030,22	€ 30.030,22

3. Conclusion

P-NUT is doing a lot of valuable work for its members. In many years the membership contribution has not been increased. We cannot keep compensating this with IF, therefore we need to explore more income streams.

The proposals above give various budget spaces to be explored. The main goal is to alleviate pressure on active members and making the board more attractive while keeping or even increasing the quality of service by P-NUT in terms of membership management, representation and information.

I am looking forward to our discussions on March 6th 2025. If there are any questions before hand, feel free to email me at p-nut@utwente.nl.