

Guidance

# **General guidance for applicants: UK Research and Innovation Strength in Places**

An overview of applying for funding through the UK Research and Innovation Strength in Places Fund.

This guidance was updated on 3rd July 2018 to clarify the role of collaborating partners in the Innovation Funding Service for the Strength in Places Fund. If you have any queries about the update please contact the policy team at [sipf@re.ukri.org](mailto:sipf@re.ukri.org).

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## **Overview**

The UK Research and Innovation Strength in Places application is being run as an online process via the digital Innovation Funding Service

The following sections outline the process.

## **Applying for a competition on the Innovation Funding Service**

The Innovation Funding Service is an online application process. You need to create an account in the service to start an application.

Applications are separated into sections, which all need to be completed in order to apply. You cannot submit an application unless you have correctly completed each section. Full guidance for completing each section can be found within the service.

## **Collaborating in the Innovation Funding Service**

The UK Research and Innovation Strength in Places Fund requires organisations to work with others as consortia on collaborative research and innovation projects.

Collaboration rules are set out in the competition document available on the [UK Research and Innovation website](#).

It is at the discretion of the consortium whether the application is completed by the lead applicant only, or whether collaborative partners are added to help with or view, the application preparation.

This section outlines the different roles of organisations who intend to complete a collaborative application on the service.

### **Lead applicants**

The lead applicant represents the lead organisation for the application. As the lead applicant you will be responsible for:

- starting an application
- adding and removing collaborators to the application (optional)
- assigning questions to collaborators (optional)
- answering questions relevant to you
- reviewing content entered by collaborators
- completing and uploading the financial costing attachment (showing all costs from all partners)

- submitting the application before the deadline

You should only add people who are directly involved in the project.

## **Collaborators**

Collaborators for applications can be:

- members from each of the consortium partner organisations (if more than one)
- members of the lead organisation (for example, financial directors)

Collaborators may be invited to join an application by the lead applicant. You will receive an email invitation from the Innovation Funding Service. You will need to accept the invitation to create an account.

As a collaborator you are responsible for:

- inviting other collaborators from your organisation to the application
- answering questions assigned to you by the lead applicant

Collaborators can see:

- all application questions and answers

Collaborators are not able to:

- start an application
- invite people from other organisations
- assign questions to other collaborators
- complete or upload the financial costing attachment

## **Your files and their formats**

File names and formats must follow these rules:

- appendices should be named Appendix and include the question number and application number as stated in the specific competition guidance. For example:  
AppendixQ7(application number)
- file names should only include letters or numbers and no special characters
- files should not be converted, encrypted or zipped
- finance forms should be saved as excel documents only
- appendices should be saved as pdf documents only

Please note: if your submitted appendices do not follow the specific competition guidance, your application will be ineligible and not sent for assessment.

## **What happens after you have submitted your application**

Applications must be submitted before midday on the day of the submission deadline. Late submissions will not be considered.

### **How your application is assessed**

After the deadline, valid applications will be sent for assessment. Only applications that meet the eligibility criteria and scope of the competition will be sent for assessment. You will be notified if your application is out of scope with full reasons as to why. UK Research and Innovation has the right to declare applications as out of scope.

For full assessment information, please refer to the [UK Research and Innovation](#) website for detailed information about the UKRI Strength in Places competition.

### **You will be notified of the decision**

Once all applications have been assessed, you will be told of the final decision by email. If you are the lead applicant you need to let the other collaborators and partners know the decision.

# What happens if you are successful

If you are successful with your application to this competition you will need to provide some further information.

## Project details

- the target start date
- the project location
- the name of the project manager

## Finance contact

You must provide a finance contact. This contact is responsible for supplying any additional information we need to complete our finance checks on your organisation. This is also the person who will submit the grant claims once your project is live.

## Bank details

You must supply your organisation's bank details so that we can validate them.

## Finance checks

We will perform viability checks on your organisation and check the eligibility of your project costs. If we have any queries around your finances we can use this section to contact you.

## Spend profile

Once we have confirmed your project is eligible, we will ask you to profile your costs across the duration of the project.

## Once you've submitted all documentation

We will review your project costs to check that they meet our funding rules. You may be asked to provide further information on the detail in your finance forms.

Financial viability checks will be made on all industry partner organisations.

UK Research and Innovation terms and conditions apply if you are successful in being awarded seedcorn funding for the Strength in Places Fund full stage bid development.

### **Monitoring Officer**

You will be assigned a Monitoring Officer who will work with you on the project start-up. They will help to make sure your project complies with our terms and conditions. They are not responsible for project management.

### **Claims and auditing**

Costs are only eligible if they are incurred and paid between the project start and end dates. Claims may be subject to an independent audit.

Grants should be claimed quarterly in arrears. Once audits and reports are complete, the grants will be paid to each participant.

If you require further information please contact customer support service on 0300 321 4357 or email [support@innovateuk.ukri.org](mailto:support@innovateuk.ukri.org).

## **State aid**

UKRI Strength in Places Fund includes support to UK businesses to invest in research, development and innovation. Some of the support provided operates under European Commission state aid

rules. An example of this is support offered by collaborative research and development (R&D) competitions.

## **What is state aid?**

State aid is a term used by the European Commission. It describes assistance given by a public body or publicly-funded body, to organisations on a selective basis, that take part in commercial activity which could distort competition and trade within the European Union.

The state aid rules are designed to prevent unfair subsidies.

## **Further information on state aid**

The state aid branch of the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) has lead responsibility within the UK for coordination and development of state aid policy.

The [BEIS state aid guidance](#) has further information. You can also visit the [European Commission's information on state aid](#).

The [General Block Exemption Regulation](#) (GBER) covers a range of types of state aid that, provided certain conditions are met, do not require individual approval from the European Commission in advance of being granted. Examples include aid for:

- small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)
- research and development
- innovation
- regional development
- training
- employment for disadvantaged and disabled workers
- risk capital
- environmental protection

Member states are encouraged to focus on aid that will benefit job creation and competitiveness. The GBER also reduces the

administrative burden for the public sector, the beneficiaries and the European Commission.

This website provides guidance on state aid issues but is not a substitute for taking legal advice.

## **Funding rules**

The Strength in Places Fund is a research and innovation funding programme supported by UK Research and Innovation, a national funder. It is unique in that it supports packages of interventions that are specifically tailored towards significant economic growth and regional growth of the funded locality.

Applications must be collaborative, led by and include businesses and research organisations.

The funding rates you can receive will depend on the size and type of your organisation and your role in the project.

Organisations fall into 2 categories:

1. Businesses.
2. Research organisations.

### **Business**

A business is defined as an organisation taking part in commercial activities. Businesses undertaking feasibility studies can have their eligible costs funded at the following rates:

- up to 70% of your total project costs if you are a small or micro business
- up to 60% if you are a medium-sized business
- up to 50% if you are a large business



The definition of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) used by Innovate UK is set out in the [European Commission Recommendation of 6 May 2003](#).

A large business in this context means any enterprise which is not an SME.

## **Research organisations**

When referring to research organisations, we are using Innovate UK's definition from the Framework for State aid for Research and Development and Innovation which states:

“research and knowledge dissemination organisation’ or ‘research organisation’ means an entity (such as universities or research institutes, technology transfer agencies, innovation intermediaries, research-oriented physical or virtual collaborative entities), irrespective of its legal status (organised under public or private law) or way of financing, whose primary goal is to independently conduct fundamental research, industrial research or experimental development or to widely disseminate the results of such activities by way of teaching, publication or knowledge transfer. Where such entity also pursues economic activities, the financing, the costs and the revenues of those economic activities must be accounted for separately. Undertakings that can exert a decisive influence upon such an entity, for example in the quality of shareholders or members, may not enjoy a preferential access to the results generated by it.”

Within the UK Research and Innovation Strength in Places Fund, this means:

- universities (higher education institutions)
- non-profit research and technology organisations (RTOs) including catapults
- public sector research establishments (PSRE)
- research council institutes

Projects can be led by any UK-based organisation currently registered as eligible to apply to the Research Councils (such as Higher Education Institutes, Research Council Institutes and eligible Independent Research Organisations) or Innovate UK.

Research organisations should be non-profit distributing to qualify. They should explain how they will disseminate the output of their project research as outlined in the application.

Research organisations which are engaged in economic activity as part of the project, will be treated as business enterprises for the purposes of funding.

Research organisations taking part in non-economic activity will be funded at 100% of eligible costs, not through the full economic costing (FEC) rate. They should consider the financial sustainability of the activities they are requesting funding for. When costing, the proposal institutions should follow the [Transparent Approach to Costing \(TRAC\)](#) principles, making sure that total costs are reasonable. All bids should set out the costs and the basis upon which they have been calculated.

## **Categories of research and development for business**

### **De Minimus or feasibility at EOI stage**

#### **De Minimus aid**

De Minimis aid is used to describe small amounts of state aid that do not need European Commission approval.

The total De Minimis aid which can be given to a single recipient is €200,000 over a 3 year fiscal period. This includes all aid

received under the 'De Minimis' regulation. When you apply for this competition, you must make sure that the total De Minimis aid you receive does not exceed €200,000 over 3 financial years.

## **Feasibility studies**

This means the analysis and evaluation of a project's potential, aimed at supporting the process of decision making. This is achieved by uncovering its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as well as identifying resources needed and the prospects for success. Feasibility studies will usually help businesses decide whether to work individually or collaboratively with other industrial or research organisations, before taking part in a larger project.

Individual competition scopes will define their own requirements for feasibility studies in terms of project size and length.

## **Collaboration**

Applications for the UK Research and Research Strength in Places Fund must have collaborations where:

- there is at least 2 collaborators
- the consortium includes both businesses and research organisations
- the consortium is led by either a business or a research organisation
- there is evidence of effective collaboration
- the lead organisation of the project is a grant recipient

## **Additional information**

### **Information security and confidentiality**

All submissions must include financial costing information uploaded on an excel spreadsheet, through the Innovation Funding Service (IFS). IFS uses secure sites such as https for you to upload your appendices safely. Secure sites enable information between your browser and our server to be encrypted and decrypted.

### **Expert reviewers' confidentiality and potential conflicts of interest**

Expert reviewers must accept confidentiality agreements and declare any potential conflicts of interest. All applications must be treated in the strictest of confidence. Expert reviewers must assess all applications themselves and should not allow any other person to assess the application on their behalf. Expert reviewer identities are kept confidential including under any Freedom of Information request.