



Department for
Science, Innovation
& Technology

Research Ventures Catalyst Stage 1 application guidance

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Scheme summary

The Research Ventures Catalyst (RVC) is a two-stage programme inviting proposals for new organisational models to tackle a research challenge. This application guidance is intended to support potential participants through the stage 1 open call process for the RVC scheme.

Stage 1

The Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) are initially inviting proposals and bids for up to £100,000 of 'seed corn' funding, which is available to support successful applicants in developing full plans for their new research ventures.

We are looking for proposals that will bring together researchers¹, experts and operators from different disciplines and sectors, or with complementary forms of technical expertise, to tackle a complex problem in a new organisational setting. The RVC aims to seed, and ultimately back with multi-million-multi-year funding, new partnerships and ways of working to address shared challenges.

Stage 2

Successful applicants at stage 1 will progress to stage 2 of the programme where we expect the seed corn funding to be used to further develop proposals into full technical plans for new organisations.

Further detail on these final technical plans is set out later in this guidance.

Dates & deadlines

The competition process for stage 1 will follow these steps:

- Applications will undergo a three-part assessment against the application and assessment guidance.
 - Part 1: Initial sift against section B of the application form (100-word proposal summary).
 - Part 2: Sift against the responses to section C (organisational structure & technical basis).
 - Part 3: in-person or virtual (tbc) assessment day. This will involve applicants that pass the sift being asked to come in to present to assessors on their proposal and why they should be progressed to the next stage of the process.
- The highest scoring applications will be selected to receive seed corn funding.

¹ Those working in all disciplines who produce reliable knowledge and insights about the natural world, ourselves, and our societies.

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- All applicants will be notified of the funding decision.
- We anticipate applicants will have c.6 months to develop full technical plans at stage 2.

The indicative timeline for stage 1 is below:

Milestone	Date
Competition opens	26 July 2023
Applicant Q&A sessions	14 August & 13 September 2023
Application deadline	23 October 2023, 23:59pm
Written proposal assessment period	23 October – 30 November 2023
In-person/virtual assessment days	4 - 15 December 2023
Decisions communicated to successful applicants	From 15 December 2023

Applicant Q&A session

Further details on these events, and invitations, will be shared with those that registered their interest in the scheme. If you have not registered your interest, but would like to attend, please [register](#) before September 12th 2023 at the latest. We will make recordings of these sessions available on the gov.uk page for those that cannot attend.

Who can apply?

Who are we looking for?

We are seeking lead applicants with a clear vision to grow a new venture from the ground up and deliver high impact research in a new way. You will need to have an entrepreneurial spirit, proven leadership skills and an aptitude for forging relationships and thinking creatively about organisational design. You must have demonstrable expertise in your research area, and the ability to build consensus and interest in your proposal, bringing together experts and financial backers to invest time and money in your idea. We encourage applications from individuals at all stages of their career: there is no minimum years of experience required to apply.

Eligibility criteria for stage 1

To lead a project in Stage 1 of the RVC, you must meet the following criteria:

- Applicants must be hosted at a [research organisation](#) or a [small or medium size enterprise \(SME\)](#). If you are not hosted at an organisation on this list, then we would encourage you to look for opportunities to team up with others that are to submit your

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application. For example, large businesses may like to consider forming a consortium with an academic institution or SME, or express a broader interest in partnering with proposals we receive as a co-investor.

- Applicants must be eligible to work in the UK and intend to exploit results in or from the UK. Non-UK institutions cannot lead an application however they can partner on a proposal².
- Evidence of your ability to deliver the proposed work in line with the requirements of the opportunity.
- Compliant with the UK Subsidy control regime if a UK business enterprise or consortium.
- Permission from the organisation which you are currently employed by, or affiliated to, to apply to the RVC.

DSIT is unable to award organisations that are not financially viable and will conduct financial viability and eligibility tests to confirm this is not the case for successful applicants following the stage 1 application.

This is a DSIT call that is being run and managed by DSIT. For applicants requesting seed corn funding, the funding will be disbursed by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) on behalf of DSIT, and so applicants requesting funding must either be already eligible for UKRI funding or be prepared to undertake all required checks to receive funding. If you are not already eligible for UKRI funding but wish to apply as a lead applicant and receive seed corn funding, we recommend you contact the DSIT Research Ventures Catalyst team (researchventures@dsit.gov.uk) at an early opportunity to discuss your application.

Overall scope of the programme

At stage 1, we will only assess applications against the criteria outlined in the application and assessment section of this guidance. However, research ventures must ultimately meet all of the following requirements:

- Secure private co-investment that at least matches the level of government investment. For example, to be successful in your bid for £8m of Government funding you must secure an additional £8m from other sources such as, but not limited to, philanthropy, businesses or the third sector.
- Have a commitment from the project lead and other key organisational staff members to devote a least 50% of working time (full time equivalent) to the project, if successful after stage 2.

² Further guidance on working with international partners can be found on UKRI's website [Trusted research and innovation](#). The advice on UKRI's Trusted Research website has been produced in consultation with the research and university community and is designed to help the UK's world-leading research and innovation sector get the most out of international scientific collaboration whilst protecting intellectual property, sensitive research and personal information.

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- Have a defined timeline (maximum 8 years), associated with the requested public spend, with a clear and defined goal and/or output at the end of that period. This defined goal does not necessarily determine the end of any future work on the venture, but there should be no expectation of further funding from government beyond the defined timeline. Examples of suitable defined goals include proving an initial organisational concept which could then be scaled up into a larger research institution, advancing an understanding in a particular field, or developing research to a higher [Technology Readiness Level \(TRL\)](#) such that it is ready to be spun out into a private company.
- Require up to £25 million of government funding.
- Present a new way of solving a complex problem outside of the existing UK Research & Development landscape, such as new funding routes or organisational structures.
- Ensure the outputs supported by government funding are publicly available.
- Be set up as a new legal entity or hosted within an existing organisation such as a university, research institute, or business, but there must be a clear explanation for why a new organisational model is needed to meet the research aims.
- Be set up to focus on research and development activities between Technology Readiness Levels (TRL) 1-6. We are not looking to fund truly exploratory science but neither do we want to fund technologies that are deployable and very close to commercialisation.

We will not support research ventures that:

- Do not meet the overall above requirements.
- Intend to use funding for “bricks and mortar” infrastructure. We encourage applicants to use established headquarters or bases, that are equipped to meet the needs of the project, to embed collaboration into the venture.
- Are aimed at the deployment stage of technology readiness (TRL 7-9).

How to apply

What to complete

The following document needs to be completed as part of your application:

- Stage 1 application form - see Application and Assessment section below for further details of the application.

How to submit your application

You must submit your application to DSIT via the [Microsoft Form](#). You will receive an acknowledgement of your submission.

Applications must be submitted by **23:59, 23 October 2023**.

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We strongly advise submitting your application in advance of the application deadline date to ensure that your application is submitted on time.

Application format

You can only use the application form provided. It is important that you complete each field and submit a fully completed form. Incomplete forms may be considered ineligible and not sent for assessment.

DSIT reserves the right to ask for additional clarifications and correction following the submission deadline.

The application form and templates must not be altered, converted or submitted as a different file type.

Additional information submitted at the request of DSIT must meet any timing, format and length requirements we may specify at the time.

The submission must conform to the maximum length specifications stated in the “Application” section below. Information in excess of this will be disregarded.

Hyperlinks referencing further information may be included to inform more detailed understanding post-selection but will be disregarded during the assessment of applications.

Your response should provide sufficient evidence to support any assertions made and state any underlying principles or assumptions.

Application and Assessment

Application

The application is split into 4 sections.

Section A: Application details - This section is not assessed.

- Lead applicants’ details – name, current role, and organisation.

You will be asked if you agree to the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology sharing your proposal with potential co-investors and other interested parties as part of your application form. If you opt out of this option, then the Department is unable to support you in securing co-investment.

Section B: Proposal summary – assessors will conduct an initial sift based on the proposal summary. The broad scope of this programme means that the assessment of applications will be carried out by individuals with expertise in varying disciplines. Proposals should be tailored to be accessible for a general audience.

- The lead applicant must complete this section, providing the project's title, a brief summary (no more than 100 words) outlining the proposed organisational model and project aims, and a short outline of the research area the venture would focus on.

Section C: Organisational structure, team skills, and research question proposal

This section will be scored by the assessors and should cover the following content:

- **Question 1: Operational model proposed – 50% of score** (no more than 500 words). What is the operational model proposed? How it is innovative and additive to the UK's research, development, and innovation landscape? Why can existing organisations or models not meet the proposal's aims and objectives?
- **Question 2: Team skills – 25% of score** (no more than 300 words). Have you (and your team) got the necessary skills and experience to deliver a novel venture? What different disciplines or complementary forms of technical expertise are evidenced amongst your team? Or, if your team is not yet complete, please explain what skills your proposal will require and how you will recruit the necessary expertise?
- **Question 3: Basis of the research proposal – 25% of score** (no more than 300 words). What are the outcomes your model and research intend to achieve, with a focus on the project's alignment to societal goals and needs? What research is this building on? What TRL is the research aimed at? You may want to describe how your proposal aligns to Government strategies.

Section D: Other supporting questions for your proposal

The responses to the following questions will not be scored but applicants are asked to provide evidence as part of their stage 1 assessment. Detail provided here may be used to decide between applications with equal scores in section C.

- **Question 1:** Seed corn funding requested (no more than 150 words). How much seed corn funding would be required to develop a full technical plan for your project, with a breakdown of anticipated costs to justify the amount sought. If you do not require seed corn funding, please explain why in this section.
- **Question 2:** Financial case (no more than 150 words). Estimated initial lifetime and financial contribution requested from Government for the proposed venture (noting requirements of <8 years and <£25m in applicant guidance). More detail will be requested if you are successful at stage 1.
- **Question 3:** Additional information (no more than 150 words). Any additional comments you would like to add to your application - for example, any evidence that co-investors may be interested in your proposal.

Assessment process

1 – Initial sift

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Assessors will conduct an initial sift against **Section B: proposal summary** of the application form. This will be a high-level assessment of adherence to the application requirements. If an application passes the initial sift it will progress to the full sift. If an application does not pass the sift, we will notify the applicant that their proposal has been withdrawn from the competition.

2 – Full sift

Assessors will conduct a full sift against **Section C: Organisational structure, team skills, and scientific basis**. The weighting for each question and the scoring criteria are both included as part of this guide. Applicants must score at least a 3 for each question assessed.

Applications will be scored out of 20. 10 marks are available for the organisational structure and will be assessed for the following:

1. Is the proposal innovative and additive to the UK's Research & Development landscape? (up to 5 marks)
2. Is a new operational model needed for this specific proposal? (up to 5 marks)

5 marks are available for the team structure and skill and will be assessed for the following:

3. Are the required skills and experience evidenced amongst the proposed team members? If not, is there evidence of a proposal to source the required skills and experience? (up to 5 marks)

5 marks are available for the research basis of the proposal and will be assessed for the following:

4. Is the proposal technically valid, building on existing research and expertise in an appropriate way? (up to 5 marks)

The top scoring proposals will move onto the in-person or virtual assessment day for their final evaluation.

3 – In person/virtual assessment

The top scoring applicants will be invited to attend an assessment day where they will pitch their proposals to our assessment panel. The panel will conduct their final evaluation as part of this discussion. They will then decide which projects to recommend for grant funding award. DSIT will decide which applications to fund based on the assessment panel's recommendations.

Further details on the assessment process and criteria for the in-person/virtual assessment stage, as well as the proposed dates and costs covered, will be provided to successful applications alongside their invitation to attend the assessment. We want to ensure no applicants are disadvantaged by the in-person/virtual assessment so we will also contact successful applicants about any necessary adjustments.

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4 - Outcome of the competition

The outcome of the competition will be communicated with all applicants.

All funding decisions are subject to DSIT ministerial approval, and we reserve the right to filter proposals in accordance with their guidance.

Scoring

1-5 Scoring Range:

Individual responses to the evaluated questions will be scored in line with the following scheme. Applicants must score at least a 3 for each question assessed.

- 1: Serious concerns: for example, does not meet requirements, and/or raises serious concerns.
- 2: Moderate confidence: for example, meets some requirements, but lacks sufficient detail in some areas.
- 3: Adequate confidence: for example, meets most requirements and provides a response that demonstrates a good understanding of the requirements.
- 4: Good confidence: for example, meets all requirements and provides a response that demonstrates a strong understanding of the requirements.
- 5: Outstandingly good confidence: for example, meets all requirements and exceptional detail that exceeds expectations in many areas and demonstrates excellent understanding of the requirements.

Funding

Funding source & amount

RVC is linked to the £50m pot announced on March 6th, 2023, as part of the Science & Technology Framework.

Successful proposals at Stage 1 will receive up to £100,000 seed corn funding to develop full technical plans. We expect to fund between 10-20 proposals at this stage.

At the initial proposal phase, if the lead organisation is a research organisation it will be eligible for the full economic cost of their stage 1 bid. If the lead organisation is a business enterprise, it will be subject to subsidy control requirements, and will need to use the Feasibility Studies category under the [Research, Development and Innovation Streamlined Route](#) to assess eligibility and the level of funding.

For stage 2, DSIT will make available public funding of up to £25m for each successful project, alongside additional co-investment from other investors. Not every application that receives seed corn funding will receive full funding.

What will we fund

You can request seed corn funding for costs such as:

- directly allocated contributions to salaries of the leadership team and other established researchers, in line with their contribution to the stage 2 technical plan.
- directly incurred salaries of research staff, technicians, support staff, and consultants where there is a clear justification for their critical role in delivering the stage 2 technical plan.
- access to resources required to develop stage 2 technical plans.
- travel costs related to the development of stage 2 technical plans.
- data preservation, data sharing and dissemination costs.
- external stakeholder activities including public engagement and involvement required to develop the stage 2 technical plans.

What we will not fund

We will not offer seed corn funding for:

- equipment
- buildings and other types of infrastructures

Additional grant conditions

Full terms and conditions of the grant will be set out in the grant letter, but we expect these will be similar to standard [UKRI](#) and [Innovate UK](#) grant terms and conditions. This is a DSIT programme, but seed corn funding will be disbursed by UKRI.

Requirements at stage 2

Securing co-investment

If successful in proceeding to stage 2, as part of developing your full technical plans you will be required to secure co-investment that at least matches any government funding. DSIT will support applicants in sourcing this co-investment if you confirm you are content with us sharing your proposal with potential co-investors on your application form.

Full technical plans

We expect full technical plans developed at stage 2 to provide a comprehensive explanation of the below areas. We will provide a full assessment criterion for stage 2 technical plans once successful stage 1 applicants have been selected.

Executive summary

<i>Summary of the proposal</i>
Background and motivation
<i>What the venture intends to achieve, the rationale for the venture, and what benefit it will deliver to the UK society and economy.</i>
Technical aims/goals
<i>What the goals of the venture are – as specific and quantitative as possible. Include a table of milestones.</i>
Research plan
<i>How the venture will be approached, including risks and mitigations. Should include detail on the ‘what’ and ‘how’ outcomes will be reached.</i>
Organisational structure
<i>The structure and hiring plan of the venture, including detail on the innovative organisational model the venture will adopt. How is it additive to the UK’s Research & Development landscape? Who will be leading the venture? How much of their time will individuals involved in the venture devote to it? What expertise will the team have to achieve the project aims?</i>
Dissemination plan
<i>How the findings will be disseminated for public benefit</i>
Transition and impact goals
<i>The vision for the venture at the end of its lifespan, having reached its defined goal. What will the legacy or lasting impact of the venture be? What will the venture transition to? This may include details on how the venture will wind down, transition to self-sufficiency, or leverage further public or private investment to progress to a further phase of research.</i>
Financial case
<i>Detail on the budget for the venture and funding requirements. This should include details on public funding requirements, private investors and/or philanthropists who have committed to the venture, and amount of private investment secured. Please also provide a cost profile over time versus available funds (using financial years), and cost breakdowns separated into all activities associated with the venture.</i>
Commercial case
<i>Detail on the procurement strategy for the venture and how these will be managed.</i>

Contact us

If you have any further questions, please contact us at researchventures@dsit.gov.uk.

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