

2014 to 2020 European Structural and Investment  
Funds Growth Programme

Call for Proposals  
European Regional Development Fund

Priority Axis 3: Enhancing the  
Competitiveness of Small and Medium  
Sized Enterprises

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|---|---|
| <b>Managing Authority:</b>                | <b>Department for Communities and Local Government</b>                                      |
| <b>Fund:</b>                              | <b>European Regional Development Fund</b>   |
| <b>Priority Axis:</b>                     | <b>Priority Axis 3: Enhancing the Competitiveness of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises</b> |
| <b>Call Reference:</b>                    | <b>OC38R15P 0198</b>  |
| <b>Local Enterprise Partnership Area:</b> | <b>Worcestershire</b>   |
| <b>Call Open:</b>                         | <b>3 August 2015</b>  |
| <b>Call Closes:</b>                       | <b>23:59 25 September 2015</b>  |

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# 1. Introduction

The 2014 to 2020 European Structural and Investment Funds bring the European Regional Development Fund, European Social Fund and part of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development together into a single European Union Structural and Investment Funds Growth Programme for England supporting the key growth priorities of innovation, research and development, support for Small and Medium sized Enterprises, low carbon, skills, employment, and social inclusion.

The Funds are managed by the Department for Communities and Local Government for European Regional Development Fund, Department for Work and Pensions for European Social Fund and the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs for European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. These Departments are the Managing Authorities for each Fund. In London, the Greater London Authority acts as an Intermediate Body for the European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund programmes. Unless stated otherwise, the term “Managing Authority” will apply to all these organisations. The Managing Authorities work closely with local partners who provide:

1. Practical advice and information to the Managing Authorities to assist in the preparation of local plans that contribute towards Operational Programme priorities and targets;
2. Local intelligence to the Managing Authorities in the development of project calls (decided by the Managing Authorities) that reflect Operational Programme and local development needs as well as match funding opportunities; and
3. Advice on local economic growth conditions and opportunities within the context of the Operational Programme and the local European Structural Investment Fund Strategy to aid the Managing Authority’s assessments at outline and full application stage.

This call is issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government and invites Outline Applications in respect of the European Regional Development Fund for England 2014 to 2020.

## 2. Call Context

On behalf of the national Growth Programme Board, the Department for Communities and Local Government (the Managing Authority) invites applications seeking European Regional Development Fund support under:

### **Priority Axis 3      Enhancing the Competitiveness of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises**

#### **Investment Priorities:**

- 3a**      Promoting entrepreneurship, in particular by facilitating the economic exploitation of new ideas and fostering the creation of new firms, including through business incubators.
  
- 3c**      Supporting the creation and the extension of advanced capacities for products, services and development.
  
- 3d**      Supporting the capacity of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises to grow in regional, national and international markets and to engage in innovation processes

The **European Regional Development Fund Operational Programme for England 2014 to 2020** sets out how the European Regional Development Fund will focus on investment to support economic growth and job creation. **Priority Axis 3** of the Operational Programme aims to improve the competitiveness of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises by increasing capacity and capability and promoting entrepreneurship.

Any application for funding will be required to clearly demonstrate that it meets the requirement of, and makes a meaningful contribution to, the delivery of the relevant Priority Axis of the [European Regional Development Fund Operational Programme](#).

In addition, applications will be expected to meet identified local development need, as expressed in the scope of this call and as set out in the [Worcestershire](#) European Structural and Investment Funds Strategy.

Applicants are advised to familiarise themselves with the detail of the Operational Programme, local European Structural and Investment Funds Strategy and the relevant documentation listed in sections 5 through to 8 **prior to** submitting an Outline Application.

In responding to this call, applicants should also note the following.

The Business Growth Service provides specialist advice to businesses with the right level of ambition, capability and capacity to improve and grow. The service brings together the help available through Growth Accelerator, Manufacturing Advisory

Service, Designing Demand and IP Audits. The Service forms part of an integrated package of support that seamlessly connects businesses to Export advice which is provided by UK Trade & Investment through contracts for International Trade Services and UK Export Finance.

Government is working with partners across England to establish a series of business-led Growth Hubs which will include access to trade, investment and business growth services. The Hubs will provide good links and referral arrangements for national growth programmes, especially those in the Business Growth Service

Applicants under this call will need to:

4. demonstrate that the proposed project does not duplicate the Business Growth Service, demonstrating in particular how operations will complement and align with the Business Growth Service to deliver additional outcomes. This will be particularly important in cases where projects seek to provide related services e.g. business advice, consultancy, mentoring and peer-to-peer support and leadership and management coaching/advice to growth potential Small and Medium sized Enterprises or supply chain development;
5. demonstrate how activity and delivery will be integrated with the business-led, single point of access Growth Hub in the area covered by this call and work locally with all business support provision provided by local public and private sector partners. Where relevant, further detail on Growth Hubs is set out below and in the Annex at the end.

### 3. Scope of the Call

#### 1. Scope

This call invites Outline Applications which support the delivery of **Priority Axis 3** of the European Regional Development Fund Operational Programme and responds to the local development need set out in the [Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership European Structural and Investment Funds Strategy](#).

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>Indicative Fund Allocation:</b></p>   | <p>Indicatively, through this call the Managing Authority expects to allocate up to £3.25 million.</p> <p>The Managing Authority reserves the right to increase or decrease the indicative allocation, or support more or fewer projects subject to the volume and quality of proposals received. There is no indicative allocation of European Regional Development Fund funding between capital and revenue activity, both capital and revenue is eligible dependent on the nature of activities/Investment Priorities set out in the call.</p>   |
| <p><b>Minimum application level</b></p>     | <p>European Regional Development Fund investment is intended to make a significant impact on local growth. Applications are expected to demonstrate appropriate scale and impact. The Managing Authority does not intend to allocate less than £500,000 European Regional Development Fund to any single project. Consequently projects with a total value of less than £1,000,000 will not be supported under this call.</p>   |
| <p><b>Duration of project approvals</b></p> | <p>Projects should be for a maximum of three years, however the Managing Authority reserves the right to vary the maximum duration in exceptional circumstances.</p>  |
| <p><b>Geographical Scope</b></p>            | <p>All interventions are confined to activity and beneficiaries within England. Projects should predominantly support businesses based within Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership area.</p>   |
| <p><b>Specific call requirements</b></p>    | <p>This call will focus on the provision of interventions that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a Growth Hub within Worcestershire (£0.5m);</li> <li>• Support growth and investment by Small and Medium-sized Enterprises including attracting new businesses (£0.5m);</li> <li>• Grow, in particular, the Cyber sector (£1.75m)</li> <li>• Provide small and medium sized enterprises with low carbon business support (£0.5m) – linked to the corresponding Priority Axis 4 Low Carbon Call</li> </ul> <p>Applicants should note that financial instrument activity (i.e. where the project involves the provision of loans or risk</p> |

|                       |  |
|-----------------------|--|
|                       | finance investment) is <u>excluded</u> from this call  |
| <b>Call Deadlines</b> | For this specific call, applications will be assessed after the close of the single deadline.<br>Applications received after the published call close date will not be considered.<br>All applications will be assessed following closure of the call. |

## 2. Local Development Need

Projects must deliver activity which directly contributes to the objectives of Priority Axis 3 of the Operational Programme, one or more of the relevant Investment Priorities and meet the **local development need** expressed in the table below.

| LOCAL DEVELOPMENT NEED  |
|---|
| <p><b>Local Economic Context :</b></p> <p>In terms of small and medium sized enterprise competitiveness, relevant recent economic indicators include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In 2013, there were 22,015 value added tax (VAT) and/ or pay as you earn tax (PAYE) based enterprises in Worcestershire<sup>1</sup>. The greatest proportion of these are in the professional, scientific and technical sector (14.3%), with a further 13.4% involved in construction and 8.1% involved in production.</li> <li>• Since 2010, the total number of value added tax (VAT) and/ or pay as you earn tax (PAYE) based enterprises in Worcestershire has decreased by 3,910 (or 15.1%).</li> <li>• Worcestershire has a slightly higher proportion of value added tax (VAT) and/ or pay as you earn tax (PAYE) based enterprises that can be classed as micro businesses. The Worcestershire enterprise base is also characterised by a relatively large proportion (21%) of enterprises with a turnover of less than £49,000. The England average is 18%.</li> <li>• Another distinctive characteristic of many Worcestershire enterprises is that compared to the national average, they have been in operation for a relatively long time. Indeed, nearly half of all value added tax (VAT) and/ or pay as you earn tax (PAYE) based enterprises have been in operation for 10 years or more.</li> <li>• Whilst the level of enterprise births remains below pre-recession levels, there has been a growing trend since 2009. This combined with a falling death rate has had a positive impact on net business creation in Worcestershire. Nevertheless, the overall levels of enterprise churn continues to be below the national average.</li> </ul> |

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that there are a number of micro-businesses in Worcestershire that are not yet at the level where they can register for VAT and are therefore not accounted for in these figures.

- In Worcestershire, some 86% of the businesses born in 2010 survived their first year. This represents a significant fall since 2006 when the one year survival rate was 96.7%. Notably, Worcestershire has also fallen further behind the national and regional averages.
- Worcestershire has a relatively large proportion of employment being in sectors that have got a higher than average propensity for trade. However, this potential is currently not being fully realised by local businesses, with generally low levels of exporting.

As Worcestershire has had limited success in terms of attracting inward investment to date, growing the indigenous business base has been the key driver for improving the competitiveness of the area. Over 95% of the 25,925 businesses in Worcestershire are classed as small and medium-sized enterprises, comprising less than 50 employees.

Despite the relatively high number of small and medium-sized enterprises, the overall levels of enterprise churn and the productivity of local businesses are both lower than the national average and there is a poor record of small and medium-sized enterprises accessing both business support and finance (as noted above).

In order to encourage greater levels of entrepreneurship (particularly in higher value activities), and improve the conditions for business growth, including better integration in the global market place and improved productivity, the following key barriers to growth in Worcestershire need to be addressed:

- access to finance - in a recent survey of Worcestershire businesses (conducted by MEL Research Limited on behalf of the County Council and Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership in 2014), 81% of businesses felt that access to finance was a high or very high priority to underpin their future growth. The survey found that over half of the businesses surveyed (51%) required easier access to finance and stated that access to finance was constraining their ability to grow. Furthermore there was a reported lack of knowledge regarding the potential sources of funding available (particularly start-up finance), an understanding of the potential benefits of finance and their likely chance of success in accessing external finance. This problem is further compounded by a lack of skills required to present a viable business case or investable opportunity to potential funders; and
- access to business support - many local businesses are not aware of available business support services and/or have a lack of understanding regarding the potential benefits of such support. This is a particular problem for businesses in need of more intensive support and targeted support such as social enterprises, rural enterprises and entrepreneurship in deprived areas.

### **Local Priorities:**

Proposals should demonstrate alignment with local development need and priorities



including:

- interventions that encourage greater levels of entrepreneurship and supporting start-ups (particularly in higher value activities);
- raising the growth ambitions of small and medium-sized enterprises and supporting the development of growth strategies by supporting small and medium-sized enterprises to:
  - reach new domestic and international markets;
  - strengthen supply chains; and
  - improve productivity and resource efficiency

A critical component of supported activities will be the targeting of small and medium-sized enterprise support in order to ensure that it delivers the best value for money. Those businesses that have growth potential will be offered a more intensive package of assistance, while growing businesses in the target sectors will receive the greatest level of support. Business support provided to small and medium-sized enterprises will vary based on the following criteria:

- (i) core/basic support (accessible through the Growth Hub – which will build on Worcestershire Business Central) will be available across all sectors. This support will be available either through the online portal or alternatively in some cases may be through phone-based support;
- (ii) additional support will be available for growing companies (including through the Growth Accelerator and UK Trade and Investment (UKTI)). In these cases businesses may well be offered face-to-face support; and
- (iii) more intensive assistance and tailored support will be available for new and existing companies in the identified growth sectors [**advanced manufacturing, agri-tech, cyber security/defence; tourism**]. In these cases, the small and medium-sized enterprises will be allocated an account manager with specific packages of assistance being developed as appropriate.

Worcestershire has a particular strength in the cyber security/defence sector. It is home to a growing cluster of businesses in Cyber Security centred around Malvern. The Malvern cluster is one of a number of clusters in the UK Cyber Security Forum, and comprises in excess of 80 businesses both large and small. The companies within the cluster co-operate on a range of initiatives to grow new cyber security businesses, improve the cyber security of local enterprises, and also raise awareness of cyber security amongst young people.

In conjunction with the Forum, the Cyber Growth Partnership has also been working with the Government to develop a scheme to recognise key suppliers in the industry. Five companies within Worcestershire have recently been awarded this status by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills which will enable them to compete more effectively when pursuing export business opportunities worldwide in cyber security. In order to exploit further growth opportunities arising within the sector, Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership is seeking to provide more intensive assistance and tailored support to businesses.

Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership recognises the need to provide support to small and medium sized enterprises to expand or diversify into the Low Carbon and Environmental Goods and Services (LCECS) sector. The sector in Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership is valued at over £1 billion in terms of sales and supports an estimated 7,600 jobs and over 400 businesses<sup>2</sup>. The activities the Low Carbon and Environmental Goods and Services Sector cross many sectors – including, in particular, the advanced manufacturing and agri-tech growth sectors. The future growth of businesses involved in low carbon and environmental goods and services (LCEGS) is a key element of Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership’s European Structural and Investment Funds Strategy.

This Call is in seeking to establish:

- (a) a Growth Hub for Worcestershire;
- (b) Interventions to support growth and investment by small and medium-sized enterprises including attracting new businesses;
- (c) Growth support package in particular for the Cyber sector; and
- (d) Small Medium-sized enterprises Low Carbon business support programme.

Activities will be encouraged to ensure a suitable balance of support across urban and rural areas and involve disadvantaged and/or underrepresented groups in order to support equal opportunities. Support will be available to micro-businesses, which is important in rural areas.

### 3. Operational Programme Investment Priorities

Applications must specify the activities to be delivered and are expected to directly contribute to **one or more** of the following Investment Priorities:

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| <b>Investment Priority</b> | <b>3a -Promoting entrepreneurship, in particular by facilitating the economic exploitation of new ideas and fostering the creation of new firms, including through business incubators.</b> |
| <b>Specific Objectives</b> | Increase entrepreneurship, particularly in areas with low levels of enterprise activity and amongst under-represented groups.   |
| <b>Indicative Actions</b>  | Under this investment priority indicative actions to be supported by the European Regional Development Fund   |

<sup>2</sup> BIS, 2013, Low Carbon Environmental Goods and Services (LCEGS): Report for 2011/12  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/224068/bis-13-p143-low-carbon-and-environmental-goods-and-services-report-2011-12.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/224068/bis-13-p143-low-carbon-and-environmental-goods-and-services-report-2011-12.pdf)

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|--|---|
|  | <p>may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Targeted engagement, outreach and mentoring to strengthen entrepreneurial and enterprise culture</li> <li>• Provision of advice and support for entrepreneurship and self-employment in particular amongst under-represented groups by developing entrepreneurial skills and attitudes with a focus on increasing the number of business start-ups</li> <li>• Provision of advice and support for new business start-ups to survive and grow</li> <li>• Outreach, coaching, mentoring, networking and consultancy support to promote business start-up, survival and growth</li> <li>• Grants to support productive investment</li> <li>• Provision of premises for incubation, managed workspace and grow on space for businesses in target growth sectors, where there is a compelling case.</li> </ul> <p>Operations will support individuals with ambitions to start up a business, and Small and Medium Sized Enterprises in the early stage of operation. These include social enterprises and those wishing to set up social enterprises.</p> |
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| <b>Investment Priority</b> | <b>3c –Supporting the creation and extension of advanced capacities for products, services and development.</b>  |
| <b>Specific Objectives</b> | Increase the growth capacity of small and medium sized enterprises.  |
| <b>Indicative Actions</b>  | <p>Under this investment priority indicative actions to be supported by European Regional Development Fund may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of advice to develop new business models or higher quality products, processes or services</li> <li>• Advice and support for businesses to implement</li> </ul> |

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|  | <p>productivity improvements including through the provision of resource efficiency advice,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advice to improve business processes and workforce development</li> <li>• Advice and support for supply chain interventions to strengthen and grow the domestic supplier base</li> <li>• Attracting new foreign direct investment into England through, for example, promotion of business collaborations (Small and Medium Sized Enterprises to Prime/Original Equipment Manufacturers, Small and Medium Sized Enterprise to Small and Medium Sized Enterprise), supply chain initiatives, sectoral and research and innovation propositions linked to smart specialisation and “soft landings<sup>3</sup>”.</li> <li>• Ensuring Small and Medium Sized Enterprises have access to sufficient levels of finance to implement their growth plans, including appropriate capital investment for premises and equipment to help build capacity</li> <li>• Provision of advice, consultancy support, mentoring, peer to peer support, and support for collaborative projects</li> <li>• Grant finance for business to invest for product, process and service improvements</li> <li>• Provision of independent access to finance advice.</li> <li>• Provision of premises for incubation, managed workspace and grow on space for businesses in target growth sectors, where there is a compelling case.</li> <li>• Activities will target domestic and foreign-owned Small and Medium Sized Enterprises, including social enterprises.</li> </ul> |
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| <b>Investment</b> | <b>3d –Supporting the capacity of small and medium</b> |
|-------------------|--|

<sup>3</sup> The terminology is widely used in FDI contexts. “Soft landings” are outlined here - <http://www.know-hub.eu/knowledge-base/videos/soft-landing-scheme.html>

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| <b>Priority</b>            | <b>sized enterprises to grow in regional, national and international markets and to engage in innovation processes</b>  |
| <b>Specific Objectives</b> | Increase the growth capability of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises.   |
| <b>Indicative Actions</b>  | <p>The support provided through this specific objective will help businesses to develop their internal capability in order to improve their productivity, grow and create jobs:</p> <p>Under this investment priority indicative actions to be supported by European Regional Development Fund may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of efficient local referral routes to ensure that Small and Medium Sized Enterprises are able to identify and access the most appropriate and tailored support for their specific growth needs</li> <li>• Support Small and Medium Sized Enterprises to develop focused growth strategies and update or introduce new business models which will drive business performance</li> <li>• Attracting new business investments to England, including through, for example, cluster and sector initiatives, collaborations with trade associations and inward missions.</li> <li>• Advice and support for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises to enter, establish and expand in new domestic and international markets.</li> <li>• Advice and support for businesses to become investment ready</li> <li>• Provision of advice, consultancy, mentoring and peer-to-peer support to indigenous businesses and inward investors (Small and Medium Sized Enterprises from outside the European Union who will move to England)</li> <li>• Leadership and management coaching where</li> </ul> |

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|  | <p>connected to the development and implementation of a business growth plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support events, trade fairs and missions to enable Small and Medium Sized Enterprises to enter, establish and expand in new domestic and international markets</li> <li>• Targeted grant schemes to support productive investment</li> <li>• Provision of advice and consultancy on access to finance</li> </ul> <p>Activities will target domestic and foreign-owned Small and Medium Sized Enterprises, including Social Enterprises.</p> <p>Activity under this investment priority will focus primarily on addressing the barriers that business face in identifying, accessing and understanding the different types of finance that is available.</p> |
|--|---|

## 4. Required Outputs under this Call

Projects must deliver against the Priority Axis 3 outputs and results of the European Regional Development Fund 2014 to 2020 Operational Programme. For projects coming forward under this call the expected outputs and results are:

| ID  | Output Indicator  |
|-----|---|
| C1  | Number of enterprises receiving support                                 |
| C2  | Number of enterprises receiving grants                                  |
| C4  | Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support                   |
| C5  | Number of new enterprises supported                                     |
| C6  | Private investment matching public support to enterprises (grants)      |
| C8  | Employment increase in supported enterprises                            |
| C28 | Number of enterprises supported to introduce new to the market products |
| C29 | Number of enterprises supported to introduce new to the firm            |

|     |   |
|-----|---|
|     | products  |
| P2  | Public or commercial buildings built or renovated                             |
| P11 | Number of potential entrepreneurs assisted to be enterprise ready             |
| P13 | Number of enterprises receiving Information, Diagnostic and Brokerage support |

Applicants will need to demonstrate how the eligible activity, funded by the European Regional Development Fund, will achieve the deliverables committed to within the proposal. The application should clearly state the methodology used to determine the levels of outputs proposed.

All operations will be required to report regularly on progress toward achievement of targets. This will need to include both quantitative and qualitative data relevant to the appropriate geographical areas. Applicants will need to explain how they will collect and record this information to maintain a fully evidenced audit trail. It should be noted that if an operation fails to deliver contracted deliverables, a performance penalty may apply.

## 5. Application Process & Prioritisation Methodology

There are two stages to the European Regional Development Fund application process;

- Outline Application and, if successful
- Full Application.

Acceptance of an Outline Application to progress to full application stage does not in any way indicate or constitute an offer of European Regional Development Fund grant.

Applicants must fully complete the [Outline Application](#) which will be assessed by the Managing Authority against the national [Selection Criteria](#).

Outline Applications will be assessed in two stages, Gateway assessment and Core assessment.

Gateway assessment considers:

- applicant eligibility;
- activity and expenditure eligibility; and
- fit with the National Operational Programme and the local development need set out in section 2.

Proposals that fail the Gateway assessment will be rejected. Proposals which pass the Gateway assessment will then be assessed against the Core assessment criteria:

- Strategic Fit
- Value for money
- Management and control
- Deliverability
- Compliance
  - Procurement
  - State Aid
  - Publicity requirements
- Cross cutting themes
  - Environmental sustainability
  - Equal Opportunities

Having assessed projects against these criteria the relevant Local Economic Partnership area European Structural and Investment Fund Sub-Committee will advise the Managing Authority on the alignment to local economic growth conditions and opportunities within the context of the Operational Programme and local European Structural and Investment Fund Strategy to aid the Managing Authority's assessments (at outline and full application stage).

Please note that the Managing Authority's decision is final and there are no appeals. If you wish to complain about the calls and application process, please follow the procedure set out at <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-communities-and-local-government/about/complaints-procedure>

## 6. General Information

### 1. National Eligibility Rules

When developing an application, Applicants must refer to the [National Eligibility Rules](#) setting out the requirements of the 2014-2020 European Regional Development Fund Programme. It is the responsibility of the Applicant to ensure that the Rules are adhered to both at application stage and following approval. Failure to do so can lead to financial penalties leading to recovery of up to 100% of grant. Applicants are strongly advised to seek specialist advice if in doubt on any requirement.

European Regional Development Fund eligibility rules apply to **all** project spend within the eligible costs, including match funding.



The European Regional Development Fund is governed by European regulations and national rules. Applicants are advised to familiarise themselves with the relevant documentation, (Section 8 Key Document refers) prior to submitting an Outline Application. If successful, Applicants will enter into a Funding Agreement and must abide by the standard terms and conditions contained therein. Applicants are therefore strongly advised to read these terms and conditions to ensure that they are able to enter into such an agreement prior to responding to the call. Once a Funding Agreement has been issued it should be signed and returned within 30 days, unless otherwise agreed with the Managing Authority.

## **2. Eligible Applicants**

Section 4 of the [National Eligibility Rules](#) sets out who is eligible to apply.

Applicants must be legally constituted at the point of signing a Funding Agreement. If the application is approved the Applicant organisation will enter into a legally binding Funding Agreement and therefore will carry the liability for ensuring that the terms and conditions of the Funding Agreement are met.

If there is more than one organisation applying for the funds, a lead organisation must be selected to become the Applicant with the remaining organisation(s) acting as Delivery Partner(s). In this situation the Applicant would be responsible and liable for the Delivery Partner(s) and ensuring the project is operating compliantly.

During the application process the Managing Authority will consider the Applicant's track record, both positive and negative. If the Applicant has been involved in the delivery of previous European grants and any irregularities have been identified, the Managing Authority will expect to see how and what steps have been taken to ensure that the risk of further irregularities in the future is mitigated. It is acknowledged that some organisations will be new to European Structural and Investment Funds funding and will not have a track record.

## **3. Contribution Rate & Match Funding**

European Regional Development Fund is normally expected to intervene where no other funding can be obtained (i.e. the funder of last resort). The level of European Regional Development Fund awarded will be the minimum in order for the project to proceed.

The maximum Contribution Rate is 50% of the total eligible project costs subject to State Aid regulations.

The remaining 50% or more must come from other eligible sources as specified under section 6 of the National Eligibility Rules. Applicants will need to demonstrate

that they have eligible match funding in place for the balance of costs. Other European Union funds cannot be used as a source of match funding.

European Regional Development Fund investment is limited by State Aid regulations and where the award of European Regional Development Fund would constitute State Aid the European Regional Development Fund grant rate may fall below the 50% maximum.

European Regional Development Fund is paid quarterly in arrears and expenditure must be defrayed prior to the submission of any Grant claims. Applicants may be asked to demonstrate how they are able to cash flow the operation.

#### **4. Project Timescales**

European Regional Development Fund funding will normally be approved for three years, however the Managing Authority reserves the right to extend the contract term in exceptional circumstances.

Projects approved through this call are expected to:

- (i) Submit a detailed and complete full application within three months of formal selection at outline stage. Projects which fail to meet this deadline may be deselected,
- (ii) Commence delivery (defraying European Regional Development Fund eligible costs) within three months of formal approval. Projects which fail to meet this deadline may be deselected, and
- (iii) Be completed by June 2023.

#### **5. Capital Projects**

Applicants seeking European Regional Development Fund to support a capital project (i.e. land and/or property) will need to meet Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method or Civil Engineering Environmental Quality Assessment 'Excellent' for new builds and 'Very Good' for refurbishments.

Applicants will need to provide evidence of how they will achieve the rating required (unless otherwise agreed with the Managing Authority).

Applicants will need to demonstrate that they have the rights and permissions to undertake the project and must provide:

1. Proof of current interest in the land and/or property, which includes evidence of the freehold ownership or any lease arrangements that may be in place; and
2. Evidence of the approval of any planning permission, or in certain circumstances a clear statement on the process for securing such consents and any risks to the project.

Royal Institute of British Architects Stage D costs must be supplied with the Full Application and be certified by an independent Quantity Surveyor and Land/Property contributions certified by a Real Estate Valuation expert who are current and chartered members of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors/ Chartered Institute of Builders or equivalent body.

Successful Applicants will be required to provide security to the Managing Authority in the form of a Legal Charge and/or Deed of Covenant over the land and/or property. Applicants will be responsible for registering the charge at their own cost.

## **6. Cross Cutting Themes/Horizontal Principles**

All applications received under this call should demonstrate how the Cross Cutting Themes have been addressed in the project design and development. Cross Cutting Themes for European Regional Development Fund are 'equality and anti-discrimination' and 'sustainable development'. Further information is available in the [European Regional Development Fund Operational Programme](#).

## **7. Additionality, Duplication and Displacement**

Additionality is a core principle of European Regional Development Funding. Applicants must be able to demonstrate that the activity paid for out of European Regional Development Funding adds value to new or existing activity. Projects need to demonstrate that without the support of European Regional Development Funding the activity would not have taken place.

European Regional Development Funding cannot support activities that duplicate existing provision/services within the region.

Applications need to identify and evidence the beneficiaries will use the service and demonstrate that the project does not displace other activity available in the market place.

## **8. State Aid & Revenue Generation**

Applicants are required, in the Outline Application, to provide a view on how their proposal complies with State Aid law. Applicants must ensure that projects comply with the law on State Aid.<sup>4</sup> Grant funding to any economic undertaking which is State

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<sup>4</sup> Article 107(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union provides that: "Save as otherwise provided in the Treaties, any aid granted by a Member State or through state resources in any form whatsoever which distorts or threatens to distort competition by favouring certain undertakings or the production of certain goods shall, in so far as it affects trade between Member States, be incompatible with the internal market."

Aid can only be awarded if it is compatible aid, in that it complies with the terms of a notified scheme or is covered by the De Minimis Regulation. Guidance for Grant Recipients, explaining more about [State Aid](#), is available; it is important that Applicants take responsibility for understanding the importance of the State Aid rules and securing their full compliance with them throughout the project, if it is selected into the Programme.

The Managing Authority is not able to give legal advice on State Aid. It is the responsibility of the Applicant to ensure that the operation is State Aid compliant.

Where the Applicant does not perceive that there is any State Aid, it should state whether or not it considers Articles 61 and 65(8) of regulation 1303/2013 to apply. Article 61 refers to monitoring revenues generated after completion of the project, and Article 65(8) how to deal with differences in the forecast and actual revenues at the end of the operation. This revenue should be taken into account in calculating eligible expenditure. The details of this will be tested at the full application stage.

## **9. Funding Agreement**

The Funding Agreement is a standard, non-negotiable and legally binding document. Any successful Applicant will be subject to the terms and conditions contained within this agreement. Applicants are strongly advised to seek relevant advice to ensure that they would be able to enter into and abide by the terms of the Funding Agreement.

Applicants are advised that additional provisions and securities may be included within the Funding Agreement to protect the investment. Detailed advice will be given if appropriate at the Full Application stage.

Failure to meet any of the conditions of the Funding Agreement or the commitments within the application will result in claw back of the Grant (which may include interest).

## **10. Procurement**

All costs claimed by the Applicant (Grant Recipient and/or Delivery Partner(s)) must be recovered on an actual cost basis. Other costs must be procured in line with National (including [Public Procurement Regulation 2015](#)) and European Union regulations. Procurement will be subject to audit and verification and any irregularity will result in financial penalty of up to 100% of the grant paid. Robust and transparent procurement is required to ensure that Grant Recipients:

- Consider value for money;
- Maximise efficient use of public money; and
- Maintain competitiveness and fairness across the European Union.

It is **strongly recommended** that Applicants seek and follow legal advice in respect of procurement requirements. Procurement irregularities remain the most substantive cause of error and clawback of grant.

## 7. Support

Please note that this is a competitive call and to preserve impartiality we are unable to enter into correspondence with applicants over their Outline Application. Details of where guidance can be found are contained throughout this calls document. In exceptional circumstances, if there are issues with accessing this guidance, please contact: [WM.ERDFenquiries@communities.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:WM.ERDFenquiries@communities.gsi.gov.uk).

## 8. Key Documents

- European Regional Development Fund Operational Programme;
- Outline Application Form;
- Outline Application Form Guidance;
- Local Enterprise Partnership area's European Structural and Investment Funds Strategy;
- Eligibility Guidance;
- Target Definitions; and
- Funding Agreement (Revenue and/or Capital).

## 9. Document Checklist

Incomplete applications will be rejected. Please ensure the following information (documents) are submitted.

Outline Stage:

- Fully completed Outline Application;
- Financial Tables; and
- Outputs, Results and Indicators Tables.

## 10. Document Submission

Completed Outline Applications must be submitted via **email** to the address in Section 7.

Outline Application forms not received by the deadline will not be assessed. Outline Applications which are not fully completed will be excluded.

For this call applications will normally be required to **commence delivery/activity within three months** of the award of Funding Agreement.

Any changes related to the deadline for the submission of the Outline Application form will be notified on the [European Growth Funding](#) website pages.

## **2014-20 ERDF FUNDING FOR GROWTH HUB ACTIVITIES**

Growth hubs will ensure that support for business is simpler, more joined up and easier to access. Some will also provide targeted support to businesses tailored to local needs e.g. priority sectors, groups. In the new 2014-20 European Regional Development Fund Programme period, some growth hubs will have a physical presence in the local area for businesses to seek advice, support and to network whilst others will offer a virtual service.

Although growth hubs are open to all businesses, regardless of size or sector, they will be able to offer European Regional Development Fund-funded support only to eligible Small and Medium Enterprises under European Regional Development Fund Priority Axis 3. Local Enterprise Partnerships and other partners in some localities have therefore sought clarification as to whether the 2014-20 European Regional Development Fund Programme for England can be used to fund the following activities:

- Signposting and diagnostic activity (e.g. salary costs associated with to face-to-face business advisers, telephone support services)
- Facilitation of peer to peer networking events
- Growth hub marketing activity
- Website development/ maintenance and/or enhancements/development of new on-line tools
- Back office, administration
- Management of the growth hub

The Department for Communities and Local Government has therefore worked with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to produce this Annex on growth hub activities and how they may be supported by European Regional Development Fund.

### **European Regional Development Fund objectives**

Where growth hub activity is eligible for European Regional Development Fund support, it will be supported under Priority Axis 3 of the European Regional Development Fund Operational Programme which is designed to improve the competitiveness of Small and Medium Enterprises by increasing the capacity and capability of Small and Medium Enterprises and promoting entrepreneurship

## **Eligibility of growth hub activities for European Regional Development Fund support**

Local Enterprise Partnerships and other partners are asked to note:

1. European Regional Development Fund requires minimum match funding of between 20% and 50%, depending on where in England the growth hub is located. As a result, a robust match funding package needs to be in place for a project to proceed.
2. European Regional Development Fund, the match funding and associated outputs must be accounted for and auditable, so transparent reporting systems for both funding and impacts will need to be in place.
3. As a general principle, European Regional Development Fund can support core functions (and revenue costs) of growth hubs, where they directly contribute to Operational Programme activity and outputs.
4. Any European Regional Development Fund support under Priority Axis 3 is limited to European Regional Development Fund-eligible sectors, Small and Medium Enterprises (not large companies) and potential entrepreneurs. This means that a universal offer for *all* businesses cannot be funded by European Regional Development Fund – we can only fund those parts that provide support to eligible potential entrepreneurs or enterprises.
5. Delivery of information, diagnosis, brokerage (IDB) is permitted, however, integrated delivery *with* further support, advice or grant is preferred (for reasons of practicality, deliverability and Value For Money), rather than standalone information, diagnosis, brokerage.
6. Growth hub staff directly associated with the delivery of European Regional Development Fund project activity are eligible for European Regional Development Fund support, e.g. staff costs for posts directly related to the European Regional Development Fund project in terms of project delivery, management, co-ordination and monitoring; and posts directly related to referrals, signposting and diagnosis of needs of Small and Medium Enterprises and potential entrepreneurs eligible for support from European Regional Development Fund.
7. Growth hub marketing collateral, website content and tools where developed specifically for the purpose of helping to deliver European Regional Development Fund Operational Programme activity and outputs may be supported.
8. Partnership development between Growth Hubs and organisations/institutions involved in providing business support that involves agreeing appropriate referral mechanisms that are clearly linked to signposting and information, diagnosis, brokerage, for eligible Small and Medium Enterprises and outputs



under European Regional Development Fund Priority Axis 3 may be supported.

9. 15% flat rate overheads are available (based on 15% of direct staff costs) and cover eligible overheads and back office costs – for example, indirect staff costs such as receptionists, Human Resources, legal, procurement support, governance and partnership development time (also see 7 and 8 above), Information Technology, shared premises costs and other associated costs.

European Regional Development Fund will **not** be able to support generalised local growth hub activity that does not deliver support to eligible individuals or enterprises, such as:

- a. Support for strategy development (including sector strategies).
- b. Support to simplify the business support landscape (e.g. mapping), except where this relates to the development of referrals and protocols linked to European Regional Development Fund project delivery and eligible European Regional Development Fund Small and Medium Enterprises e.g. integration of Business Growth Service (BGS).
- c. Support for research or other development activity for the growth hub and/or Local Enterprise Partnership, including annual review of growth hub performance.
- d. General growth hub website maintenance and tools development unrelated to the delivery of the European Regional Development Fund Operational Programme.
- e. Support for general growth hub partnership activity and governance.

Inevitably, this will result in some functions (or parts thereof) of each growth hub that must be funded from other sources, such as private contributions or other public funds, in line with the sustainability principle set out in Business, Innovation and Skills grant offer letters for 2015-16 funding. Your Business, Innovation and Skills Business Local Manager will engage with and support each Local Enterprise Partnership and broader partnership in this process.