

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

<b>Managing Authority:</b>	<b>Ministry of Housing, 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 – SME Support</b>
<b>Call Reference:</b>	<b>OC33R18P 0791</b>
<b>Local Enterprise Partnership Area:</b>	<b>Swindon and Wiltshire</b>
<b>Area Indicative Fund Allocation:</b>	<b>£1,200,000</b>
<b>Call Open:</b>	<b>Friday 5 October 2018</b>
<b>Call Closes:</b>	<b>23:59 on Friday 23 November 2018</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 Government has confirmed that it will guarantee funding for ERDF projects that are contracted by the end of 2020.

All contracted ERDF projects must be completed by the end of the programme period, 31 December 2023. Each application for ERDF will be required to demonstrate that it delivers good value for money and domestic strategic priorities.

The Funds are managed by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government for the European Regional Development Fund, Department for Work and Pensions for the European Social Fund and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for the 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. In some other areas, intermediate bodies are being designated by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the Department for Work and Pensions to perform the following tasks:

- Input into project calls in respect of local development needs (with reference to ESI Funds strategies); and
- Assessment of applications against certain selection criteria in relation to fit with local priorities in respect of the European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund.

The managing authorities and intermediate bodies work closely with local partners on ESI Funds sub-committees in each local enterprise partnership area. Partners on these sub-committees provide:

- Practical advice and information to the managing authorities to assist in the preparation of local plans that contribute towards operational programme priorities and targets;
- Local intelligence to the managing authorities (or intermediate bodies where designated) in the development of project calls that reflect operational programme and local development needs as well as match funding opportunities; and

- Advice on local economic growth conditions and opportunities within the context of the operational programme and the local European Structural and Investment Funds Strategy to aid the managing authorities' (or intermediate bodies where designated) assessments at outline and full application stage.

This call is issued by the Ministry of Housing, 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 Ministry of Housing, 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 enhance the competitiveness of small and medium sized enterprises.

Any application for funding will be required to clearly demonstrate that it provides good value for money and supports domestic strategic priorities including the 2017 [Industrial Strategy](#) (or any later publication that amends or supersedes that). Applications must meet the requirement of, and make a meaningful contribution to, the delivery of the relevant Priority Axis of the [European Regional Development Fund Operational Programme](#) and where appropriate should reflect how such support will aim to improve productivity levels within small and medium sized enterprises.

In addition, applications will be expected to meet identified local development needs, as expressed in the scope of this call and as set out in the [Swindon and Wiltshire local economic partnership area](#) 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.

Government is working with local enterprise partnership (LEPs) across England to establish a network of private sector-led growth hubs connecting businesses to the right support including access to local and Government funded support services. Applicants under this call will need to demonstrate how activity and delivery will be co-ordinated and made accessible through the growth hub in the local enterprise partnership area covered by this call. Applicants will also need to demonstrate how they will work locally with their growth hub and all business support provision provided by local public and private sector partners and not duplicate any existing services, including that provided by the growth hub. Where relevant, further detail on growth hubs is set out below and in the Annex at the end.

Export advice is provided by UK Trade & Investment through contracts for International Trade Services and UK Export Finance. The Greater London Authority work with a number of additional organisations providing export advice. Contact the Greater London Authority for further details.

### 3. Scope of the Call

#### 3.1. Scope

This call invites outline applications which support the delivery of Priority Axis 3 of the European Regional Development Fund operational programme and respond to the local development need set out in the [Swindon and Wiltshire local enterprise partnership area](#) 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 £1,200,000.</p> <p>The managing authority reserves the right to invite to full application (and subsequently approve) projects that have a cumulative value that is higher or lower than this indicative allocation, subject to the volume and quality of proposals received. The managing authority may also decide to place some projects submitted through this call on a reserve list and invite them to proceed at a later date, subject to the</p>
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	<p>availability of funding.</p> <p>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>
<b>Minimum application level</b>	<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 normally be supported under this call</p>
<b>Duration of project activity</b>	<p>Projects should plan to deliver activity for a maximum of three years, however the managing authority reserves the right to vary the maximum duration, upwards or downwards.</p>
<b>Geographical scope</b>	<p>The England European Regional Development Fund operational programme operates on a national basis. All eligible European Regional Development Fund expenditure must benefit organisations located in England.</p> <p>Revenue projects should predominantly support businesses based within the local enterprise partnership area of this call.</p>
<b>Specific call requirements</b>	<p>This call seeks proposals which deliver start up and scale up activities. Proposals which seek to deliver workspace will not be supported.</p> <p>Although it may be possible to extend an existing project delivering in the area, newly proposed operations are more likely to be able to address the current economic development concerns of the area.</p> <p>Please also note that a separate call to provide specialist support to the area's manufacturing sector (call reference number OC33R18P0892) is concurrently open for the Swindon and Wiltshire area. In order to achieve value for money, applicants should not duplicate these services.</p> <p><b>Please note: Value for Money and alignment with Strategic Domestic Priorities <a href="#">including the 2017 Industrial Strategy</a> (or any later publication that amends or supersedes that) will form a key part of the assessment and</b></p>

	appraisal of all applications. Therefore proposals should clearly articulate and demonstrate how activities align with domestic strategic priorities and offer good value for money.
<b>Call deadlines</b>	<p>For this specific call, applications will be assessed after the close of the single deadline.</p> <p>Applications received after the published call close date will not be considered. All applications will be assessed following closure of the call.</p>

### 3.2. 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 growth priorities:</b></p> <p>The <a href="#">Swindon and Wiltshire local enterprise partnership European Structural and Investment Funds Strategy</a> seeks to “improve conditions for competitiveness and increase Gross Value Added through resource efficiency, access to finance, support and advice, innovation and internationalisation”.</p> <p>This call invites applications that help meet this challenge by providing two types of support service: ‘Start-Up’ and ‘Scale-Up’.</p> <p>The call focuses on European Regional Development Fund investment priorities 3a, 3c and 3d for entrepreneurship, capacity and capability. Support should be focused on supporting small and medium-sized enterprise competitiveness and productivity, and increasing businesses’ propensity to be innovative.</p> <p>The Swindon and Wiltshire local enterprise partnership area is aligned with Swindon and Wiltshire unitary authority boundaries, and is home to over 706,300 people. The Swindon and Wiltshire <a href="#">Local Economic Assessment</a> (May, 2018) confirms that Swindon and Wiltshire is largely a small business economy. The assessment draws on independent evidence from the Scale Up Institute to suggest growth potential for small and medium sized enterprises, with a ratio of turnover to numbers of scale-ups on a par with Thames Valley areas in Buckinghamshire and Berkshire. Other independent evidence from the <a href="#">UK Local Growth Dashboard 2018</a> suggests that start-ups in Swindon and Wiltshire have the highest creation of small businesses in the South West with 62 per 10,000 of the population, with nearly 60% surviving for at least three years.</p> <p>The <a href="#">Swindon and Wiltshire local enterprise partnership European Structural and</a></p>

[Investment Funds Strategy](#) suggests three outcomes in relation to its theme of small and medium sized enterprise growth:

- Improving the competitiveness of small and medium sized enterprises (including micro-businesses) in the Swindon and Wiltshire area;
- Improving the impact of national policy by signposting or brokering business support services;
- Better integrated business support service across Swindon and Wiltshire.

The performance of the Swindon and Wiltshire local enterprise partnership area economy, in terms of start-ups and scale-ups, suggests consolidation and further integration of support services will sustain and improve all three outcomes.

### **Local priorities:**

Proposals should demonstrate alignment with local development need and priorities including:

- Describing how the proposal will work with the Swindon and Wiltshire Growth Hub and its core offer to integrate referrals, as well as practical links with other Hub-linked support services (including export services) to avoid duplication and add value to the small and medium sized enterprise support 'infrastructure' in Swindon and Wiltshire;
- Delivering two sets of support services: one for start-ups and one for scale-ups. Proposals could be to set up one or both of those services, and should demonstrate the required expertise and experience to help entrepreneurs in the early years of founding a business, and/or support businesses once they're more established to realise growth plans and scale-up ambitions;
- Explaining the activities to be provided by both sets of support services, and the resulting expected outputs and, importantly, outcomes. Proposals should include services that offer both one-to-one bespoke diagnosis, advice and growth planning, and one-to-many seminars, workshops and introductory sessions, all focussing on the two stages, start up and/or scale up;
- Providing grants, vouchers and other incentives, and facilitating access to finance and funding that promote increased productivity and investment for growth. A growth planning support service could also include mentoring and dedicated finance development partners for specific projects potential beneficiaries might propose;
- Showing how the proposal will support small and medium sized enterprises to increase productivity, especially through digitalisation, and access to funding and financial investment.

In relation to the types of businesses to be supported:

- For scale-up small and medium size enterprises, the [OECD/Eurostat definition](#) for high-growth potential businesses should be a starting point, but should not



restrict support for other businesses which are showing strong growth potential. Some limited funded support may be available, e.g. through the [Scale-Up Institute](#), and other agencies. Proposals should show how services can access support to such schemes;

- For start-up small and medium sized enterprises, proposals should also include support that promotes and publicises social and financial inclusion through enterprise, in addition to those start-ups that are further developed and with existing plans and ideas;
- Focus should also be made on digitally-based and other highly productive start-up and scale up businesses, as well as support for firms that aim to close supply chain gaps in the local economy. Proposals should identify these gaps and explain how they can be filled.

For both services, applicants should be aware of the priorities for integrated Growth Hub services established by the Swindon and Wiltshire local economic partnership as stated below:

- Services to include easily accessible web presence, supported by dedicated phone-line staffed by appropriately qualified advisors, minimum operational hours 09:00 – 17:00 Monday to Friday;
- Customer relationship management systems to effectively track enquiries and provide up to date performance data. To include measures to develop information sharing methods that make referrals and brokerage straight forward and ease the customer journey;
- Support to be available through the network of enterprise centres – The Enterprise Network in Wiltshire and a suitable town centre location within Swindon. This will provide coverage to harder to reach rural and urban-based businesses and entrepreneurs alike;
- Providing ‘sector blind’ specialist support for small and medium-sized enterprise growth from transformative exploitation of digital technologies. This will ensure that businesses are able to fully utilise and exploit information and communications technology and digitalisation to increase capacity for transformative growth;
- Establishing handling arrangements for non-eligible businesses, in particular large enterprises and referral routes.

### 3.3. Operational programme investment priorities

Applications must specify the activities to be delivered and must 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</b>
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	<b>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>	<p>Under this investment priority indicative actions to be supported by the European Regional Development Fund 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 or scaling up high growth potential businesses;</li> <li>• Provision of advice and support for new business start-ups to survive and how scale-ups can grow;</li> <li>• Support to address market failures in the provision of start-up and scale-up finance, e.g. seed finance, start-up loans, funding growth plans;</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 non-grant finance to support start-ups or entrepreneurs where there is a clearly evidenced market failure, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Early stage growth, Equity, quasi-Equity, Loan or Mezzanine funds</li> <li>○ Microloan funds delivered by Community Development Finance Institutions and</li> <li>○ Proof of Concept funds.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Operations will support individuals with ambitions to start up a business, and high growth potential small and medium sized enterprises. These include social enterprises and those wishing to set up social enterprises.</p>

<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 productivity improvements including through the provision of resource efficiency advice;</li> <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>1</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> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> The terminology is widely used in foreign direct investment contexts. “Soft landings” are outlined here - <http://www.know-hub.eu/knowledge-base/videos/soft-landing-scheme.html>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of non-grant finance where there is a clearly evidenced market failure, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ co-investment funds, e.g. for angel investment, venture capital or debt finance</li> <li>○ Early stage growth, Equity, quasi-Equity, Loan, guarantees or Mezzanine funds, seed capital;</li> <li>○ Guarantee funds or interest rate subsidies</li> <li>○ Microloan funds delivered by Community Development Finance Institutions</li> <li>○ Proof of concept funds.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Provision of independent access to finance advice;</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 priority</b>	<b>3d – Supporting the capacity of small and medium 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</li> </ul>

	<p>business performance;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <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 EU who will move to England);</li> <li>• Leadership and management coaching where connected to the development and implementation of a business growth plan;</li> <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; and</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>
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## 4. Required Outputs under this Call

Applicants will need to demonstrate how the eligible activity, funded by the European Regional Development Fund will achieve the programme-level outputs for Priority Axis 3.

For projects proposing to deliver activity against more than one investment priority, the appropriate outputs should be selected. Project will be required to report on, and evidence, the achievement of the outputs separately under each investment priority.

For projects coming forward under this call the expected outputs and results are:

<b>Investment Priority 3a</b>	
Output reference	Name
C1	Number of enterprises receiving support
C2	Number of enterprises receiving grants
C3	Number of enterprises receiving financial support other than grants
C4	Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support
C5	Number of new enterprises supported
C6	Private investment matching public support to enterprises (grants)
C7	Private investment matching public support to enterprises (non-grants)
C8	Employment increase in supported enterprises
C28	Number of enterprises supported to introduce new to the market products
P11	Number of potential entrepreneurs assisted to be enterprise ready

<b>Investment Priority 3c</b>	
Output reference	Name
C1	Number of enterprises receiving support
C2	Number of enterprises receiving grants
C3	Number of enterprises receiving financial support other than grants

C4	Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support
C5	Number of new enterprises supported
C6	Private investment matching public support to enterprises (grants)
C7	Private investment matching public support to enterprises (non-grants)
C8	Employment increase in supported enterprises
C29	Number of enterprises supported to introduce new to the firm products
P13	Number of enterprises receiving Information, Diagnostic and Brokerage support

<b>Investment Priority 3d</b>	
<b>Output reference</b>	<b>Name</b>
C1	Number of enterprises receiving support
C2	Number of enterprises receiving grants
C3	Number of enterprises receiving financial support other than grants
C4	Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support
C5	Number of new enterprises supported
C6	Private investment matching public support to enterprises (grants)
C7	Private investment matching public support to enterprises (non-grants)
C8	Employment increase in supported enterprises
C29	Number of enterprises supported to introduce new to the firm products
P13	Number of enterprises receiving information, diagnostic and brokerage support

The managing authority expects the level of outputs proposed within outline applications to be realistic and achievable and to deliver good value for money. The application should clearly state the methodology used to determine the levels of outputs proposed.

Projects will only be supported if they demonstrate good value for money. An important consideration when assessing value for money is the level of European Regional Development Fund outputs that the project would deliver.

The managing authority has not set specific output targets for this call and does not publish average or expected unit costs.

The local European Structural and Investment Fund strategy for each local enterprise partnership Area includes details of the local, notional European Regional Development Fund allocation to each priority axis and the type and number of European Regional Development Fund outputs that are expected in return for this investment.

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 outputs, a performance penalty may apply.

## 5. Application Process & Prioritisation Methodology

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

- (i) Outline application and, if successful
- (ii) 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 all of the national [selection criteria](#) except where an intermediate body has been designated to assess against some of the selection criteria. Where an intermediate body has been designated to undertake delegated tasks, the intermediate body will undertake the assessment against the selection criteria in relation to fit with local priorities.

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

The Gateway assessment is undertaken by the managing authorities and considers:

- Applicant eligibility;
- Activity and expenditure eligibility; and



- Fit with the National operational programme and the local development need set out in section 2.

Applications that fail the Gateway assessment undertaken by the managing authority will be rejected. Applications which pass the Gateway assessment will then be assessed by the managing authority in relation to all Core assessment criteria.

In areas where an intermediate body<sup>2</sup> has been designated, the following will apply:

The intermediate body will assess the application against the following Core assessment criteria:

- Local strategic fit

The managing authority will assess the application against the following Core assessment criteria:<sup>3</sup>

- National strategic fit;
- Value for money;
- Management and control;
- Deliverability;
- Compliance;
  - Procurement
  - State Aid
  - Publicity requirements
- Cross cutting themes; and
  - Environmental sustainability
  - Equal opportunities

The intermediate body will also provide advice to the managing authority to assist the managing authority to make its assessment against the following Core selection criteria:

- Value for money; and
- Deliverability.

Having assessed projects against these criteria the relevant local enterprise partnership area European Structural and Investment Funds sub-committee will advise the managing authority or intermediate body as relevant on the contribution to local economic growth conditions and opportunities within the context of the operational programme and local European Structural and Investment Funds strategy to aid the managing authority's assessments (at outline and full application stage).

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<sup>2</sup> This process works differently for the Greater London Authority. Please contact the Greater London Authority for further details.

Having concluded their assessments the managing authority and the intermediate body will prioritise the applications they wish to proceed based on their assessment against their respective selection criteria. Only projects that the managing authority and the intermediate body each agree should proceed, based on their respective core selection criteria, will be invited to submit a full application. Subsequently only those full applications that the managing authority and the intermediate body each agree should proceed, based on their respective selection criteria, will be approved.

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>.

Potential applicants / applicants may wish to take advantage of information and support services funded through European Regional Development Fund Technical Assistance and available to assist the design and development of compliant projects / applications for the European Regional Development Fund. Details of your local Technical Assistance funded project can be found on the [Technical Assistance website page](#).

## 6. General Information

### 6.1. National Eligibility Rules

When developing an application, applicants must refer to the [National Eligibility Rules](#) setting out the requirements of the 2014 to 2020 European Regional Development Fund programme. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that the National Eligibility 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 the grant value. If in doubt on any of the requirements, applicants are strongly advised to seek specialist advice.

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 at the full application stage, applicants will enter into [a Funding agreement](#) and must abide by the standard terms and conditions contained therein. Once a Funding agreement has been issued it should be signed and returned within 30 days, unless otherwise agreed with the Managing Authority. 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.

## **6.2. Eligible applicants**

Section 4 of the [National Eligibility Rules](#) sets out who is eligible to apply. Financial Due Diligence checks will be undertaken on non-public sector applicants that are successful at the outline application stage. Checks will be carried out following notification of a successful outline application and may exclude applicants from further consideration. These checks will include assessment of the applicant's financial standing including ability to deal with cost overruns, the ability to cash flow a project in arrears and absorb a financial irregularity. 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 (and grant recipient) 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 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.

## **6.3. Contribution rate and match funding**

European Regional Development Fund investment must not be used to replace existing funding sources. European Regional Development Fund investment must enable activity to take place that would not otherwise happen or to increase the scope, scale or intensity of activity. 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. During the application process

applicants will need to satisfy the managing authority that they have, or are able to put in place eligible match funding for the balance of costs. Other EU 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.

#### **6.4. 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 will normally be expected to:

- 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;
- 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
- Be closed by June 2023.

#### **6.5. Project extensions**

Existing grant recipients whose projects:

1. Do not involve the direct development of premises or infrastructure;
2. Have a funding agreement that ends/has a financial completion date during the period of this call or within **18 months of the closing date of this call**; and
3. Addresses the priorities set out in section 2

May apply for a second phase of delivery – this will be expected to be in the same form as the current project (i.e. a genuine continuation of activity) but may reflect improvement/some change to reflect experience of the first phase of the project. The application must be made using the standard outline application form. Where changes to the first phase of the project are significant, these should be presented as a new application. The relevant Growth Delivery Team will apply judgment in considering the significance of any change. Projects may apply to be extended for up to 3 years.

Applications in respect of the development of premises or other infrastructure should be presented as new projects, this includes applications that have a link to an existing European Regional Development Fund project e.g. further phases of the development of sites or premises.

**Please note** - extensions to existing projects will be assessed against the criteria set out in this call in the same way as 'new' projects. There is no guarantee that extensions will be selected. Extension requests relating to projects that end more than 18 months after the closing date of the call or do not meet the requirements set out in this call will be rejected. The applicant's track record and the performance of existing contracts will be taken into account during the assessment process.

## 6.6. Capital projects

In developing the budget for the outline application, applicants seeking European Regional Development Fund to support a capital project should note that:

- New build projects will normally be expected to achieve the Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) rating of 'excellent'; however BREEAM 'very good' will be accepted where this is the maximum feasible standard;
- Refurbishment projects will normally be expected to achieve the BREEAM rating of 'Very Good'; and
- Infrastructure projects will normally be expected to achieve the Civil Engineering Environmental Quality Assessment rating of 'Very Good'.

## 6.7. Cross Cutting Themes / Horizontal Principles

All applications selected as a result of this call will be required to 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 section 11 of the [European Regional Development Fund Operational Programme](#).

Some groups lack entrepreneurial understanding and appropriate skills and face entrenched attitudinal barriers. People in difficult social or economic circumstances face barriers to enterprise, but some groups have additional ones – for example women and black and minority ethnic groups are often under-represented in enterprise compared to the wider population, so investments under priority axis 3 should actively address barriers to business start-up and other types of business opportunities for such groups.

In providing support for small and medium sized enterprises, applicants under priority axis 3 are required to demonstrate, where appropriate, how resource

efficiency is embedded into the business support offer. Where it is not thought appropriate a detailed explanation why it's not appropriate should be provided in the Cross Cutting Theme Section of the application.

## **6.8. 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.

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

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

## **6.9. State Aid and 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. Grant funding to any economic undertaking which is State Aid can only be awarded if it is compatible aid, in that it complies with the terms of a notified scheme under the General Block Exemption Regulation (EU) 651/2014.

Only if this is not possible should Applicants use the De Minimis Regulation or 'no aid'. [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.

## **6.10. 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 EU regulations. Procurement will be subject to audit and verification and any irregularity will result in a 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 EU.

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 grants.

## 7. Support

Please note that this is a competitive call and to preserve impartiality the managing authority and, where appropriate, the intermediate body are unable to enter into correspondence with applicants over their outline application. Details of where guidance can be found are contained throughout this call document. In exceptional circumstances, if there are issues with accessing this guidance, please contact: [SW.ERDFenquiries@communities.gov.uk](mailto:SW.ERDFenquiries@communities.gov.uk)

Whilst the decision of the managing authority is final, if you think consideration of your application has not followed the published ERDF process, please refer to the MHCLG complaints procedure available on [GOV.UK](http://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;
- Funding agreement (revenue and / or capital);
- Summative assessments guidance; and
- 2017 [Industrial Strategy](#) (or any later publication that amends or supersedes that).

## 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. Applicants are asked to quote the call reference and project name in the subject line of your email as this will greatly assist the managing authority.

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

The managing authority will normally acknowledge receipt of your application by email.

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



# ANNEX

## **2014 to 2020 European Regional Development Funding for local business growth hub activities**

Growth hubs (those governed by local enterprise partnerships) will ensure that support for business is simpler, more joined up and easier to access, providing targeted support to businesses tailored to local needs, for instance priority sectors, business start-up and those businesses with the potential to grow and scale-up. In the 2014 to 2020 European Regional Development Fund programme period, some growth hubs will also have a physical presence in the local area for businesses to seek advice, support and to network whilst others will offer a hub and spoke or virtual service via digital, telephone based and social media channels.

Whilst growth hubs are open to all businesses, regardless of size or sector, they will be able to offer European Regional Development Fund support only to those small and medium sized enterprises that are eligible under European Regional Development Fund priority axis 3. Local enterprise partnerships and their delivery partners in some localities have therefore sought further clarification as to whether the 2014 to 2020 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 business advisers, telephone support services);
- Facilitation of peer to peer networking events;
- Growth hub marketing activity;
- Development of website and customer relationship management systems (CRM) and maintenance and/or enhancements/development of new on-line tools;
- Growth hub back office and administration roles; and
- Managerial oversight of the growth hub.

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has therefore worked with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) to update this annex in relation to growth hub activities and how they may be supported by the 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 sized enterprises by increasing the capacity

and capability of small and medium sized enterprises and promoting entrepreneurship.

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

Local enterprise partnerships and other delivery 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 requires that 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 sized 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 and 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 sized enterprises and potential entrepreneurs eligible for support from European Regional Development Fund.
7. Growth hub marketing collateral and peer to peer events; purchase, set up and maintenance of enhancements to the customer relationship management (CRM)

systems to assist with client management; website content, tools and diagnostics may **only** be supported where developed specifically for the purpose of helping to deliver European Regional Development Fund project activity and outputs.

8. Strategic 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 diagnostic and brokerage support for eligible small and medium sized 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 and analysis), 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 sized enterprises.
- c. Support for research or other development activity for the growth hub and/or Local Enterprise Partnership, including the production of annual growth hub performance reports.
- 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 day to day growth hub strategic 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.