

2014 to 2020 European Structural and Investment
Funds Growth Programme

Call for Proposals
European Regional Development Fund

Priority Axis 1: Promoting Research and
Innovation

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| Managing Authority: | Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government |
| Fund: | European Regional Development Fund |
| Priority Axis: | Priority Axis 1: Promoting Research and Innovation |
| Call Reference: | OC29R19P 1023 |
| Local Enterprise Partnership Area: | Solent |
| Indicative Funding Available: | £2,907,068 |
| Call Open: | Friday 28 June 2019 |
| Call Closes: | 23:59 on Monday 30 September 2019 |

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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, 30 June 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:

1. Input into project calls in respect of local development needs (with reference to ESI Funds Strategies); and
2. 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:

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 (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

3. 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 1 Promoting Research and Innovation

Investment Priorities:

- 1a** enhancing research and innovation infrastructure and capacities to develop research and innovation excellence, and promoting centres of competence, in particular those of European interest
- 1b** promoting business investment in research and innovation
 - developing links and synergies between enterprises, research and development centres and the Higher Education sector, in particular promoting investment in product and service development, technology transfer, social innovation, eco-innovation, public service applications, demand stimulation, networking, clusters and open innovation through smart specialisation
 - supporting technological and applied research, pilot lines, early product validation actions, advance manufacturing capabilities and first production, in particular in key enabling technologies and diffusion of general purpose technologies.

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 1** of the operational programme aims to improve how small and medium sized enterprises commercialise research and how they collaborate with research institutions.

The 2017 [UK Industrial Strategy](#) sets out the government's ambition to make the UK the world's most innovative economy. The government has committed to reaching

2.4% of GDP investment in R&D by 2027 and to reach 3% of GDP in the longer term. Currently, R&D expenditure is unevenly distributed across England and focused on the South East and East of England, which accounts for 37% of total UK R&D expenditure. Large firms continue to innovate more than SMEs across the UK ¹. Whilst disparity has been decreasing in recent years, SMEs in England continue to introduce fewer new products and processes than their European competitors and it is essential that they innovate more. These challenges will need to be tackled in order to achieve Industrial Strategy goals.

Evidence also suggests that most of the social value of innovation relates to diffusion and adoption by other firms, which increases productivity. However, despite having a strong track record of innovation, the UK lags behind competitors on knowledge diffusion. We need to strengthen our ability to commercialise the ideas and discoveries made here, which will otherwise be exploited overseas.

Important guiding principles for the selection of ERDF operations within Priority Axis 1 will therefore include:

Any application for funding will be required to clearly demonstrate that it provides good value for money and supports the [UK Industrial Strategy goals, the Business Productivity Review and other](#) domestic strategic priorities, including measures to support the national target for increasing investment in R&D to 2.4% of GDP by 2027.

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.

Applications should demonstrate:

- a close fit with the policy priorities set out in “Smart Specialisation in England”. Elements that in the document refer to outdated policies should be discounted and relevant elements of the Industrial Strategy, in particular support for the four [Grand Challenges](#), be considered in their place;
- an understanding of evolving national science, innovation and research strategies, including ensuring that national science, research and innovation capabilities impact on local growth;
- sound evidence, developed by a partnership of businesses, the research base and public sector organisations, of the existing strengths and future potential of sectors and technologies prioritised for support within a local area;

¹ BEIS, 2018. *The UK Innovation Survey 2017: Headline Findings*. Online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-innovation-survey-2017-headline-findings>

- evidence that these partners working collaboratively have shown the leadership required to prioritise investments in a genuinely limited number of sectors and technologies ensuring that investments are made with sufficient scale and depth to create significant impact on prioritised sectors and technologies; and
- good arrangements are in place to monitor and evaluate the impact of investments and on-going systems are in place to review priorities.

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 [Solent Local Enterprise Partnership area](#) European Structural and Investment Funds strategy, as well as the Local Industrial Strategy where it has been published.

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.

3. Scope of the Call

1. Scope

This call invites outline applications which support the delivery of Priority Axis 1 of the European Regional Development Fund Operational Programme and respond to the local development need set out in the [Solent Local Enterprise Partnership area](#) European Structural and Investment Funds strategy.

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| <p>Indicative fund allocation</p> | <p>Indicatively, through this call the managing authority expects to allocate up to £2,907,068.</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.</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> |
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| <p>Minimum application level</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.</p> <p>The managing authority does not intend to allocate less than £500,000 European Regional Development Fund resources to any single project. Consequently, new projects with a total value of less than £1,000,000 will not normally be supported under this call. Applications for less than £500,000 ERDF for extensions to existing projects will be considered.</p> |
| <p>Duration of project activity</p> | <p>Projects should plan to complete delivery of project activity by the end of June 2023; however, the managing authority reserves the right to vary this date.</p> |
| <p>Geographical scope</p> | <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> |
| <p>Specific call requirements</p> | <p>Applications are expected to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to the wider strategic priorities of the Solent LEP. • Complement and add value to existing local and national provision and other ESIF projects as they become operational in Solent. • Complement and not duplicate business support activities to be delivered through the Solent Growth Hub. • Proposals for capital and revenue expenditure are invited. <p>Please note: Value for Money and alignment with Strategic Domestic Priorities, including the 2017 Industrial Strategy, (or any later publication that amends or supersedes that), will form a key part of the assessment and appraisal of all applications. Therefore proposals should clearly articulate and demonstrate how activities</p> |

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| | align with domestic strategic priorities and offer good value for money. |
| Call deadlines | <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> |

2. Local development need

Projects must deliver activity which directly contributes to the objectives of Priority Axis 1 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 |
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| <p>Local growth priorities:</p> <p>With a population of nearly 1.25 million, 42,000 businesses and £31 billion GVA, the Solent is a well-recognised and long-established functional economic area, anchored around the Isle of Wight, the two cities of Portsmouth and Southampton, the M27 corridor and the Solent waterway, and includes the outstanding New Forest National Park.</p> <p>The Solent economy is inextricably linked and influenced by its coastal geography. A longstanding clustering of businesses, innovation, research and educational strengths has cemented the Solent as an internationally recognised area for marine and maritime, accounting for 20% of the Solent's GVA. The Solent is home to a number of nationally significant economic assets such as the Port of Southampton, the ExxonMobil Petro-chemical site at Fawley, and Her Majesty's Naval Base in Portsmouth.</p> <p>The two cities of Portsmouth and Southampton lie at the heart of the Solent economy and are home to three world class universities. Their research and development are at the forefront of collaborations to create new technologies and innovations to stimulate economic growth and improve quality of life and the environment. Recent analysis shows the three universities as contributing £2.2bn to the Solent economy and sustaining 33,000 jobs. Nationally, the Solent's universities combined, inject more than £4.2 billion into the UK economy every year.</p> <p>Solent is home to a number of renowned world-class research driven assets, including the University of Southampton's Marine and Maritime Institute (SMMI), the National Oceanography Centre and Wolfson Unit. Southampton Solent</p> |

University's Warsash Maritime Academy provides first class education, training, research and commercial services to all maritime sectors worldwide. The University of Portsmouth's Institute of Cosmology and Gravitation is a leading international centre of research excellence in cosmology, gravitation and astrophysics. But there is still more to do to improve the synergy between research establishments and businesses ensuring the diffusion and adoption of these discoveries.

Innovation led growth is a central strategic priority for the Solent LEP which seeks to harness the research capabilities of local institutions to facilitate the commercialisation and spin-out of knowledge and intelligence into businesses within the Solent, capitalise on the highly specialised independent expertise and consultancy available and pioneer the fourth industrial revolution.

There is a desire to deliver a step change in productivity in coastal communities which are well-placed to drive growth and benefit from their proximity to the ports and the Solent seaway. It makes them uniquely attractive for advanced manufacturing, distribution and as key hubs for the visitor economy as well as centres for maritime innovation and collaboration and creative and cultural activity.

The Solent is a gateway for the UK economy, connected to the world's key trading routes, and it is important we continue to build on this competitive advantage, securing the future of this dynamic, modern and ambitious maritime coastal economy, anchored by the growth of the Port of Southampton, the defence sector based in Portsmouth and Southampton airport.

The [Industrial Strategy White Paper](#), set out the Government's ambition to increase productivity and earning power across the country and through [Strengthened Local Enterprise Partnerships](#), Government sets LEPs a single mission to deliver Local Industrial Strategies. Both focus on the identification of priorities across the foundations of productivity (Ideas, People, Infrastructure, Business Environment and Places).

The [Solent Strategic Economic Plan](#) was published in 2014, and, since that time, there have been significant changes that render the SEP out-dated, including:

- The pace of technological change continues and is having significant impacts including market disruption, increasing automation, and labour market implications;
- The decision of the UK to leave the European Union;
- The LEP has substantially delivered its £182m Local Growth Deal investment programme; and
- Policy changes in relation to LEPs, which have, in some instances, changed the geography of LEPs.

At the same time, the evidence base has strengthened significantly, providing a richer and more granular understanding of how the Solent economy works. All the Solent LEP economic evidence and strategy publications are available on the [Solent LEP website](#), with the key publications listed below.

- [The Solent Strategic Economic Plan;](#)
- [The Solent EUSIF Strategy;](#)
- [Innovation Evidence Base](#)
- [Innovation South Science and Innovation Audit](#)
- [The Solent Skills Strategy](#) and [Supplement](#)
- [The Solent Strategic Transport Investment Plan](#)
- [The Solent LEP Productivity and Growth Supplement](#)
- [Solent LEP Baseline Forecasts and the Implications of BREXIT](#)
- [Economic Impact of the Solent are Universities](#)
- [The economic role and contribution of the maritime sector in the Solent LEP area](#)
- [Isle of Wight infrastructure investment plan](#)
- [The Solent Heat and Power Strategy](#)
- [Solent Heat and Power Strategy and Action Plan to 2050](#)

Innovation is a major driver to raising productivity and transforming the economy. The creation and application of new ideas is critical for the long-term productivity growth. Solent LEP is part of the Innovation South Consortium, which is specifically looking at the following enabling technologies (within the context of the Marine and Maritime; Connected Digital; Advanced Engineering; and Biosciences sectors):

- Big Data Analytics;
- Digital;
- Cyber Security;
- Photonics; and
- Quantum.

Research commissioned by the Solent LEP has identified the following innovation areas as smart specialisms that have the greatest potential for commercialisation and generating economic value in the Solent:

- marine and maritime,
- photonics,
- advanced materials
- composites,
- digital and computer science,
- aerospace and defence, including autonomous systems,
- life sciences, clean tech and
- creative industries.

Within the wider research base specialisms with commercial potential include forensics cyber security, advanced sciences, life sciences, immunology and intelligent infrastructure are also identified.

Local economic, sector and investment context

Solent is a major contributor to the South East economy. However, Solent averaged an annual GVA growth rate of 1% between 2009 and 2017. This is slower than the wider region and the rest of the UK (2%), and is mirrored by Solent's mid-ranking in terms of workforce productivity. Productivity gains will remain a priority for the LEP.

Agglomeration analysis which acts as an index of connectivity across the UK reveals that Solent has above average levels of connectivity. This is particularly true in Southampton and Portsmouth, which are important hubs for attracting economic activity and promoting strong agglomeration effects.

The Solent punches above its weight in terms of innovation activity. It ranks 10th out of all LEPs for the percentage of its workforce in R&D related professions. Furthermore, businesses in Solent spent £713m on R&D activities in 2013, almost double the UK average. The Solent is ranked 9th against all thirty nine LEPs for attracting Innovate UK funds per full time employee (with strong areas in marine and digital) and the expenditure on Research and Development per head is some 50% higher than the national average.

Around 20% of Solent businesses collaborate in innovation activity and the area has a high level of SME-university engagement relative to other LEP areas near London or in the South East, particularly for research contracts with industry. Within Solent, the Southampton and Portsmouth areas have a relatively high level of patent applications compared to similar urban areas, but lag behind neighbouring areas in the south east.

The Solent had marginally higher levels of economic activity (84.6%) than the rest of the UK (83.2%). High levels of economic activity give a regional economy, such as the Solent, much greater production capacity. However, Solent has fewer employees in knowledge intensive businesses (KIBs), which is in part explained by its industrial mix, which relies heavily on manufacturing, retail and health sectors for its economic output and which may be a constraint on growth. It is possible that skills shortages will also slow the rate of growth. Some 38% of employers in Solent have highlighted skills shortages, which places Solent in the top ten LEP regions for skill shortages. In addition the workforce for the Solent is highly contained within its geography.

More positively, the region is much more export intensive in goods than it is for services, a large proportion of which is destined for non-EU shores.

Recent analysis indicates the Solent is well placed to play a leading role in manufacturing of new technologies and therefore action to drive innovation-led investment is a priority. The Solent Local Industrial Strategy will consider all the Grand challenges, however emerging evidence suggests significant opportunities exist as part of the Clean Growth and Ageing Society Grand Challenges.

Local priorities:

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

- Delivering research and innovation activity to drive forward and enable further capitalisation of the Solent's SMART specialisation capabilities, underpinning enabling technologies and strengths as set out above. Linking to priorities for the emerging Local Industrial Strategy.
- Maximise opportunities to increase the incidence of research and development collaboration between the Solent's higher education institutions and Solent businesses. Improving SME access to science and technology assets, services and expertise.
- Facilitate the commercialisation and spin-out of knowledge and intelligence into businesses within the Solent, capitalising on the highly specialised independent expertise and consultancy available and seek to address key innovation challenges, including the provision of practical, financial, and material support for the innovation processes within businesses (including support for access to finance, and access to markets).
- Innovation grants and other such initiatives to progress proof of concept models/prototypes to market-ready new products, services and business processes.
- Projects should seek to maximise the use of existing innovation and research assets, although proposals for the development of further assets which directly address identifiable gaps and respond to demonstrated need will also be welcomed.
- Collaboration activities should build on existing best practice and activity taking place (including current ERDF funded projects), whilst seeking to add value and strengthen the existing knowledge and technology transfer networks and collaborations in the Solent.
- Applicants should clearly demonstrate how businesses will be directly supported to invest in research activity and innovation and become more productive and competitive.
- Proposals should demonstrate how activity aligns with/ complements the Solent Growth Hub offer of business support and to other innovation and business growth support activity in the Solent.
- Capital investment that builds on the Solent existing assets; including the upgrading of existing innovation space facilities.
- Stimulating and enabling graduate start-up and spin-out from Universities.

Local priorities should not:

Duplicate activities or interventions being undertaken elsewhere within the Solent Local Enterprise Partnership area.

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:

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| Investment priority | 1a – Enhancing research and innovation infrastructure and capacities to develop research and innovation excellence, and promoting centres of competence, in particular those of European interest. |
| Specific objectives | Enhancing research and innovation infrastructure and capacities to develop research and innovation excellence, and promoting centres of competence, in particular those of European interest. |
| Indicative actions | <p>The purpose of support under this investment priority will be to build or enhance infrastructure that in due course will contribute to the greater commercialisation of products, services and processes.</p> <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"> • Specialist infrastructure / facilities / centres linked to smart specialisation including enhancements to science parks and to improve access to these facilities through digital and physical links; • Investment in the development and upgrading of innovation space, with capability to serve as a platform or host for innovation and innovative relationships. • Improved incubation space to enable research and development and innovation; • Shared use research laboratories and facilities, particularly targeted at the eight great technologies as set out in “Smart Specialisation in England”; • Development of enterprise, innovation and technology hubs and centres of excellence, in line with the approach set out in “Smart Specialisation in England”; and • Development and upgrading of appropriate test facilities and deployment infrastructure. |

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| | <p>In all cases, actions will include provision of appropriate equipment and staff resources.</p> <p>Activity under this specific objective will also underpin activity under the other specific objectives within this priority axis, by enabling investment in infrastructure, facilities and equipment. This will contribute to the wider goal of improving the commercialisation of new products, services and processes by small and medium sized enterprises.</p> |
| <p>Investment priority</p> | <p>1b – Promoting business investment in research and innovation;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing links and synergies between enterprises, research and development centres and the higher education sector, in particular promoting investment in product and service development, technology transfer, social innovation, eco-innovation, public service applications, demand stimulation, networking, clusters and open innovation through smart specialisation; and • Supporting technological and applied research, pilot lines, early product validation actions, advance manufacturing capabilities and first production, in particular in key enabling technologies and diffusion of general purpose technologies. |
| <p>Specific objectives</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase investment in research and innovation by small and medium sized enterprises in sectors and technologies identified through smart specialisation; and • Increase the number of small and medium sized enterprises engaged in knowledge exchange, collaborative and contract research and innovation with |

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| | <p>research institutions, public institutions or large enterprises in order to help them bring new products and processes to market.</p> |
| <p>Indicative actions</p> | <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"> • Support for smart specialisation collaborative and contract research and development including initiatives stimulating and facilitating productive innovation partnerships; • Support for the commercialisation of new products and business processes and initiatives, particularly targeted to aid innovation in the eight great technologies as set out in “Smart Specialisation in England”; • Collaborative and contract research and development programmes; • Applied research programmes, particularly targeted at sectors and technologies set out in “Smart Specialisation in England”; • Innovation vouchers for small and medium sized enterprises; • Innovation support programmes for product design and development and systems integration; • Initiatives simulating the demand for new or improved services, processes and products including business-led and public procurement programmes; • Schemes providing practical, financial and material support for the innovation process within businesses; • Schemes stimulating and enabling graduate start-up and spin out from universities, colleges and research institutions; |

- Technology support programmes and demonstrator projects and programmes for current and future technologies;
- Knowledge transfer programmes, particularly linked to priority growth sectors and the technologies set out in “Smart Specialisation in England”;
- Support to engage more businesses in knowledge transfer and innovation, develop links to wider Higher Education institutions and research institutions and demonstrate the benefits of working with knowledge base partners;
- Support for innovation ecosystems including business-led networks and open innovation ecosystems that reduce the complexity of interaction within and between organisations;
- Activities promoting a smart specialisation approach and initiatives that develop the supportive environment for innovation in small and medium sized enterprises including the promotion of networks and industry groups in key sectors;
- Grants to support businesses to develop prototypes and prove concepts to assist tech start-ups with early stage development work and the exploitation of intellectual property; and
- Grants stakes to promote the use of social innovation to bring new products and processes to the market.

The focus of activity under this priority axis is improving commercialisation of new or enhanced products or services by small and medium sized enterprises, whether through increased investment or better collaborations, but this requires the involvement of a much wider group including larger firms in cooperation with their supply chains and other small and medium sized enterprises, higher education institutions, public sector institutions and research centres, Catapult Centres and other centres of excellence.

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| | Projects under this investment priority, including pilot or demonstrator activity, may include capital spend where this is integral to their delivery. This may include enhancements to premises or new build, equipment and facilities. Where new premises are to be built, then there must be clear evidence that demand is not met by existing supply. |
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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 1.

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:

| Investment Priority 1a | |
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| Output reference | Name |
| C25 | Number of researchers working in improved research facilities |
| P2 | Public or commercial buildings built or renovated |

| Investment Priority 1b | |
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| 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 |

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| C6 | Private investment matching public support to enterprises (grants) |
| C8 | Employment increase in supported enterprises |
| C26 | Number of enterprises cooperating with research entities |
| 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 |

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 and 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 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:

- (i) Applicant eligibility;
- (ii) Activity and expenditure eligibility; and
- (iii) 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 has been designated, the intermediate body will assess the application against the Local strategic fit assessment criteria.

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:

1. Value for money; and
2. 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).

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>

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 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.

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.

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.

4. Project timescales

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 within the agreed timescale as stated in the Grant Funding Agreement; and
- Have completed the delivery of project activity by the end of June 2023.

5. Project extensions

Existing grant recipients whose projects:

1. Do not involve the direct development of premises or infrastructure; and
2. Address 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.

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 that 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. Capital projects

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

1. 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;
2. Refurbishment projects will normally be expected to achieve the BREEAM rating of 'Very Good'; and
3. Infrastructure projects will normally be expected to achieve the Civil Engineering Environmental Quality Assessment rating of 'Very Good'.

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](#).

Projects seeking funding under Priority Axis 1 will be expected to demonstrate measures that promote greater female participation in associated sectors.

Physical infrastructure such as incubation space must take into account the needs of disabled people as regards access and use. Buildings must meet minimum accessibility requirements. Where possible, accessibility toolkits and undertaking pre- and post-build access audits should be used to add quality to investments.

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.

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.

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: GSE.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](#).

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:

1. Fully completed outline application;
2. Financial tables; and
3. 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.