

2014 to 2020 European Structural and Investment
Funds Growth Programme

Call for Proposals
European Regional Development Fund

Priority Axis 1: Promoting Research and
Innovation

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:	OC38R19P 1032
Local Enterprise Partnership Area:	Worcestershire
Indicative Funding Available:	£1,200,000
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:

- 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 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;

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

- 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;
- 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 [Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership](#) 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 [Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership](#) European Structural and Investment Funds strategy.

<p>Indicative fund allocation</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.</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</p>
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	the nature of activities / investment priorities set out in the call.
Minimum application level	<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 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>
Duration of project activity	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.
Geographical scope	<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>
Specific call requirements	<p>This call will support the development of new and existing facilities and support mechanisms for businesses to promote the growth of new products, services and markets</p> <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 align with domestic strategic priorities and offer good value for money.</p>

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>
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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
<p>Local growth priorities:</p> <p>Promoting Research and Development and Innovation (R&D&I) and business growth in Worcestershire is a key part of the vision for the area. Unlocking innovation and supporting enterprise development is critical to maximising the potential of Worcestershire’s identified growth sectors; the creation and expansion of enterprises; product innovation in emerging or yet to be identified growth sectors/markets; and the growth of small and medium sized enterprises across all sectors.</p> <p>The main market failures in this area relate to the positive externalities associated with R&D&I and imperfect information failures, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of awareness of what support is on offer and where to go for assistance (both locally and nationally, for example through Innovate UK, the catalysts, and associated networks); • intelligence related to market opportunities; • difficulty in accessing finance to bring concepts to reality; • lack of awareness of the potential benefits of R&D&I; and • limited capacity to build relationships with universities and other research institutions. <p>This was confirmed by the survey of businesses undertaken by MEL research during the preparation of Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership’s Strategic Economic Plan and European Structural and Investment Fund Strategy in 2014 which consulted over 1200 local businesses. The survey found that less than half had undertaken any research and development or new product development in the previous twelve months, furthermore participation in research and development or new product development was particularly low for small and micro businesses. More recent business surveys have also revealed that private sector innovation and research activity is limited within Worcestershire and that there is a lack of collaboration between businesses and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). For</p>

example, the Department for Business Innovation and Skills report 'Mapping Local Comparative Advantages in Innovation' and the 'Benchmarking Local Innovation Report' published in 2015 highlighted that:

- businesses had invested £164m during 2013, which had put Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership in the bottom third of all Local Enterprise Partnerships in the Country;
- Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership ranked in the bottom half of all Local Enterprise Partnerships in terms of the level of investment attracted by Innovate UK during the period 2010-2015 based on pounds per full term equivalent; and
- 15% of enterprises had introduced a new or improved product between 2010 and 2012 (35th of the 39 Local Enterprise Partnership areas), and 14% had undertaken research and development (placing the Local Enterprise Partnership in the bottom quarter of all Local Enterprise Partnership areas); and
- unsurprisingly (given that the area only has one Higher Education Institution), Worcestershire has one of the lowest levels of income from business and community interaction activities. The Higher Education Business and Community Interaction Survey (HE-BCI) measures the volume and direction of interactions between Higher Education Institutions and business and the wider community. The three year average for the period 2010/11 – 2012/13 demonstrated an income of £3.4m – the fifth lowest of all Local Enterprise Partnership areas. More importantly however, closer analysis of the figures revealed the importance of facilities and equipment related services for small and medium sized enterprises. Just under half (49%) of this income came from small and medium sized enterprises.

The potential for greater innovation and research and development investment in Worcestershire is particularly strong within the identified key growth sectors – cyber security/defence/information technology, advanced manufacturing and agri-tech. These sectors are well aligned to those identified in the UK Industrial Strategy and the priorities being promoted by Innovate UK, in addition to aligning with the Midlands Engine for Growth and the targeted approach to smart specialisation more generally.

Notwithstanding the growth and diversification of the University of Worcester in recent years and emerging centres of excellence, there is still significant scope for strengthening collaboration with the business community. There is an opportunity to develop and exploit Worcestershire's knowledge base, particularly in terms of technology and engineering, cyber security/defence/information technology and agri-tech.

To support further innovation growth within the county and develop an environment where innovation can flourish, the local enterprise partnership has established an 'Innovation Programme Office' to undertake a programme of business development activities, developed an Innovation Network (WiNN), funded an incubation feasibility study and established a proof of concept fund. The local enterprise partnership is also seeking to increase the quality and

quantity of commercial floor-space within the county, with a focus on technology and innovation led activity.

Activities under this call should therefore include measures to promote open and collaborative innovation, creation of new incubation/innovation centres linking academic expertise to industry, encouraging entrepreneurship and addressing other market failures highlighted above. Worcestershire's Innovation and Research and Development programme will contribute towards achieving the local enterprise partnership's objective to 'develop world class competitive and innovative businesses' and will specifically support the following key European Union priorities:

- building collaborative research between enterprises, research institutions and public institutions; and
- supporting small and medium sized enterprises including social enterprises to commercialise research and development.

Local priorities:

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

- investment in the development of innovation/incubation space and facilities and the provision of supporting business services – ensuring that facilities are aligned with the recommendations arising from the incubation/innovation centre feasibility study.
- provision of facilities and support that will enable businesses to develop new products and services within the identified growth sectors in the county including – advanced manufacturing and engineering, cyber security/defence/information technology, medical technology and agri-tech;
- support for the commercialisation and development of new products, services, and business processes, including initiatives that stimulate demand;
- the ability to promote collaboration between business, higher education/research institutions, innovation agencies and public institutions;
- strategic fit with the aims and objectives of the WiNN innovation delivery plan - aimed at consolidating innovation support activities within Worcestershire and the 'Proof of Concept' project which is breaking down barriers associated with lack of funding to test new ideas;
- the ability to augment support provided by Worcestershire Business Central and the Growth Hub's activities, and other business support initiatives being delivered within the county;
- complement other programmes/interventions being developed to enhance the growth sectors within the area – for example Malvern Hills Science Park and Agri-tech West Alliance; and

- complementarity and alignment with national support to promote innovation and new product/market opportunities – for example through Innovate UK, the catapult centres and associated networks.

Support for incubator space will be provided only where it is combined with an effective programme of business support tailored to the growth needs of the target occupants.

All capital projects successful at outline application stage will be expected to submit a detailed design and cost plan equivalent of RIBA Plan of Work Stage ‘3’, prepared by a suitably qualified quantity surveyor at full application stage

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:

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;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. <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,

	<p>clusters and open innovation through smart specialisation; and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 research institutions, public institutions or large enterprises in order to help them bring new products and processes to market.
<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;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
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	<p>including the promotion of networks and industry groups in key sectors;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 to promote the use of social innovation to bring new products and processes to the market. <p>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.</p> <p>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.</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 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	
Output reference	Name
C25	Number of researchers working in improved research facilities
P2	Public or commercial buildings built or renovated

Investment Priority 1b	
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
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:

- 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).

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

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:

- Do not involve the direct development of premises or infrastructure; and
- 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:

- 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’.

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: WM.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.