



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Pathways to Work Innovation Fund

Frequently Asked Questions

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1. Eligible Applicant Questions

Can I apply as an individual?

No. Individuals cannot apply on their own.

If you have an idea, you can work with an organisation and apply together.

If you would like help finding an organisation to work with, fill in this form at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pathways-to-work-innovation-fund>

Can public sector organisations apply?

Yes.

Public sector organisations, including local authorities and strategic authorities, can apply.

Central UK Government departments cannot apply.

Can organisations form partnerships or consortia?

Yes. Partnerships and consortia are eligible for this scheme.

One organisation must act as the application lead and handle correspondence through the funding portal.

If you would like help finding an organisation to work with, fill in this form.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pathways-to-work-innovation-fund>

Does every partner need to meet the eligibility requirements?

Yes, all partners must meet the eligibility rules in the Applicant Bid Pack. The only exception is individuals, who can only apply as part of a partnership and not by themselves.

What due diligence checks will take place on organisations?

Grant administrators will run due diligence checks on your organisation once you have applied.

This will include a Spotlight check.

We may contact you and ask you to provide further information through the funding portal so that we can complete these checks.

2. Eligible Project Questions

Can I apply if I have received other DWP funding already?

Yes, you can apply even if you have already received funding from another DWP scheme.

Does my organisation need previous experience in employment support?

No. Your organisation does not need previous experience in employment support to apply.

The Pathways to Work Innovation Fund is open to organisations with innovative ideas that could support people to move towards, enter, stay and progress in work. We welcome applications from a wide range of organisations, regardless of their level of experience in this area.

What matters most is that you can clearly explain your idea, the problem it aims to solve, and how it could make a positive difference.

Can I apply with a project already being delivered within Pathways to Work?

If part of your project involves testing a new or improved approach that could lead to better outcomes or generate useful learning, it may still be suitable for the fund. You should clearly explain which parts of your project are innovative and what you hope to learn from them.

My organisation only has an idea at this stage. Can I still apply?

Yes.

You do not need to have a fully developed project before you apply.

If you have a good idea, we encourage you to apply.

We will provide support during the application process to help you develop and improve your idea.

Do I need evidence to prove that my idea is already working?

No.

You do not need to prove that your idea is already working before you apply.

This is an innovation fund, which means it is designed to test new ideas and find out what works. We know that some ideas will still be at an early stage, and that is okay.

We are looking for projects that have a clear idea, understand the problem they are trying to solve, and can explain how they could make a positive difference. We believe that testing new and innovative approaches can help us learn what works best and create better outcomes for people.

I will need an upfront payment to complete my project. Can I still apply?

Yes.

If you need money to help get your project started, you can ask for a mobilisation payment in your application.

Requests for mobilisation payments will be looked at individually and will be by exception. Most payments through this fund will be made after project costs have been incurred and claimed.

Does requesting a mobilisation payment affect my chances of funding?

No.

The Pathways to Work Innovation Fund is designed to support innovative ideas, and asking for a mobilisation payment will not put you at a disadvantage during the assessment process.

Mobilisation payments are available to help organisations start and deliver their projects. We understand that some organisations may need funding at the beginning of a project to put their plans into action.

Can I apply with a project with funding already committed from another source?

Yes, your project can receive funding from more than one source. However, you cannot use funding from this scheme to replace funding that has already been promised to your project.

3. Innovation Questions

What is the definition of ‘innovation’ in this scheme?

For this scheme, innovation means doing something new, different, or significantly improved that could lead to better employment outcomes for disabled people and people with long-term health conditions.

Innovation may include:

- A new service, intervention or delivery model
- A new partnership or way of working
- A new use of technology
- Applying an existing approach in a new setting, place or target group
- Expanding or adapting a successful idea in a way that generates significant new learning
- Generating learning that could support wider adoption in future

Innovation is unlikely to include:

- Delivering an existing service without a meaningful change
- Routine activity that would happen anyway
- Duplicating existing support without a clear benefit or learning opportunity

This could be a new service, a new way of working, a new partnership, or a new way of using an existing approach.

We recognise that not every idea will succeed, but all projects should help us learn more about what works.

Is innovation required to be technology-based?

No. Innovation does not need to involve technology.

We welcome a wide range of innovative ideas, including new services, new ways of delivering support, new partnerships, or improvements to existing approaches.

What matters is how the idea could make a positive difference.

Can innovation be focused on a specific place or community?

Yes. Innovation can be focused on a specific place, community, or group of people.

We are interested in ideas that help us improve outcomes for people with disabilities or long-term health conditions.

Your project does not need to be delivered across the whole UK to be considered innovative.

Does innovation need to be completely new to the UK?

No.

An idea does not need to be completely new to the UK.

Innovation could involve applying an existing approach in a new setting or using it with a different group of people. The important thing is to show how your approach is new or improved in your context.

Can I apply if only part of my project is innovative?

Yes. Your project does not need to be entirely new.

If part of your project involves testing a new or improved approach that could lead to better outcomes or generate useful learning, it may still be suitable for the fund. You should clearly explain which parts of your project are innovative and what you hope to learn from them.

How will this Fund look to address the Disability Employment Gap?

The Government is committed to reducing the disability employment gap and improving employment outcomes for disabled people. Through the Pathways to Work Innovation Fund, we are seeking innovative ideas that could contribute to this ambition by supporting disabled people and people with long-term health conditions to move closer to, enter, remain in or progress in work.

4. Application Submission Questions

When can I submit my application?

You can submit your application between 28 September 2026 and 26 October 2026.

We encourage you to start preparing your application before the funding portal opens. You can use the questions in this guide to draft your answers.

How long should my application take me?

The time it takes to complete your application will depend on the size and complexity of your project.

The application questions are included in the Applicant Bid Pack, so you can start drafting your answers and gathering information before the funding portal opens. We encourage you to begin preparing early and leave enough time to review your application before submitting it.

Can I discuss my idea with DWP before submission?

No. To make sure the application process is fair for everyone, DWP cannot discuss individual project ideas with applicants before an application is submitted.

All applications will be assessed using the same criteria, and applicants will receive the same information through the guidance documents, FAQs, and other Fund communications.

After applications have been submitted, applicants may be invited to take part in Application Refinement Sessions. These workshops provide an opportunity to explore and develop project ideas further as part of the innovation process.

Can I save my application and return to it later in the funding portal?

Yes. You can save your application and come back to it later before you submit it.

To access your saved application, simply log back into the funding portal using the same account details you used when you started your application. Your saved information will still be there for you to continue working on.

We encourage you to save your work regularly and leave enough time to review your application before the submission deadline.

Can I make changes to my application after I submit it?

No.

Once you have submitted your application, you cannot make any changes to it in the funding portal, even if the application window is still open.

If your application is shortlisted for the application refinement stage, you will have the chance to improve and update it using the support provided at that stage.

What happens if I miss the application deadline?

If you miss the application deadline, you will not be able to submit your application. Once the application window closes, the funding portal will stop accepting applications.

We encourage you to prepare your application early and submit it before the deadline to avoid any last-minute issues.

If you need an accessible version of the application or have asked for reasonable adjustments, we will work with you to make sure you can take part in the application process.

Can an organisation submit multiple ideas in this funding window?

Yes, you can apply with several ideas. You will need to complete a full application for each one. Applying with one idea does not mean your other ideas will also receive funding.

Are supporting documents mandatory?

Yes. There are two supporting documents that must be completed and submitted with your application:

- The Budget Template
- The Delivery Plan and Milestones Template

These documents help us understand your project, how you plan to deliver it, and how the funding will be used.

You can also upload up to three additional attachments if you think they will help explain your application. For example, you may want to provide research, evidence, letters of support, or other relevant information.

These additional attachments are optional and are not required for your application to be considered.

Are Application Refinement Sessions mandatory?

No. Taking part in Application Refinement Sessions is not mandatory. However, we encourage applicants to take part, as the workshops can help strengthen and refine project proposals.

These workshops will take place after applications have been submitted. They are designed to help us explore and develop ideas further with applicants as part of the innovation process using our expert panel and their experience.

The key themes and learning from the workshops will be shared with all applicants so that everyone has access to the same information.

There will be options to attend in person or online, allowing you to choose the format that works best for you.

5. Eligible Costs Questions

How much can I apply for through this Fund?

There is no maximum amount that you can apply for.

We welcome applications for projects of different sizes.

We want to fund a range of projects, so we encourage you to apply for the amount you need to deliver your idea.

What types of activities and costs can be funded?

Funding can be used for activities that help you develop, test and deliver your idea.

This could include staff costs, project delivery costs, research, testing, evaluation, technology, equipment, specialist support, and working with partners.

All costs must be linked to your project, offer good value for money, and take place during the funded project period. You should clearly explain all costs in your application.

Can I include staff costs?

Yes.

You can include staff costs if they are directly related to delivering your project. You should clearly explain the role of the staff and how their work will support the project.

Can funding be used for existing activities?

Funding should be used for new or additional activities that help develop, test, or deliver your innovative idea. You should explain how the funding will add value beyond your organisation's normal work.

Can I fund equipment?

Yes.

Funding can be used for equipment, technology, or specialist support if it is needed to deliver your project. All costs must be clearly explained and represent good value for money.

Can I use funding for evaluation activities?

Yes.

Funding can be used for monitoring, evaluation, and learning activities. We encourage applicants to build evaluation into their projects so they can understand what worked, what did not, and why.

6. Assessment Questions

What categories will my application be assessed on?

Your application will be assessed against six main areas:

1. Challenge and Need – the problem you want to solve.
2. Innovation and Learning – what is new or different about your idea and what can be learned from it.
3. Outcomes and Impact – the difference your project could make.
4. Accessibility, Inclusion and User Needs – how your project meets the needs of the people it is designed to help.
5. Delivery, Partnerships and Future Potential – how you will deliver your project and work with others.
6. Value for Money – how the costs compare to the benefits and learning your project could provide.

We encourage you to read all application questions carefully and explain how your project meets each of these areas.

How are applications scored?

Applications are assessed against the six assessment areas set out in the guidance and above. Each area is scored on a scale of 1 to 5, with higher scores awarded to applications that provide stronger evidence and more clearly meet the assessment criteria.

The scores from all six assessment areas are then used to help inform funding decisions.

Will applications be reviewed by more than one assessor?

Yes, more than one person will review each application. This helps make sure the process is fair and the decisions are of good quality.

7. Award Questions

Who makes the final decision on awards?

The final decision on awards will be made by DWP following recommendations from both assessors and an expert advisory panel.

When will I find out if I have been awarded?

Successful and unsuccessful applicants will be notified of the decision on funding from January 2027.

If successful, a bespoke grant funding agreement will be available for signature to confirm funding.

Will unsuccessful applications receive feedback?

Yes.

If your application is unsuccessful, you will receive feedback explaining why it was not selected for funding.

The feedback will highlight the main reasons for the decision and may identify areas that could be strengthened in the future.

We hope this feedback will help applicants understand the outcome of their application and support the development of future ideas.

Might my award be approved with less funding than the original amount I applied for?

Yes, DWP may offer less funding than you requested. This could be because there are many projects to support, or because the costs in your application are considered higher than necessary or do not represent the expected value for money.

When can my project start?

Your project can only start after the Grant Funding Agreement has been signed.

Any activities funded through the grant must not take place before the agreement is in place. You should plan your project timeline with this in mind when completing your application.

How long do I have to spend the funding?

The timelines for your project will be set out in your Grant Funding Agreement.

In general, projects funded through the Pathways to Work Innovation Fund must be completed within 12 months.

Your application should clearly explain how you will deliver your project within this timeframe.

8. Grant Funding Agreement Questions

Are Grant Funding Agreement conditions negotiable?

No. The Grant Funding Agreement terms are not typically negotiable.

What happens if my circumstances change after I apply?

If your circumstances change after you submit your application, you should let us know as soon as possible.

If you are successful, funding agreements will be issued before the project starts. These agreements are non-negotiable, so it is important that any changes are raised before they are issued.

Early communication will help us understand whether the change could affect your application or ability to deliver the project.

In a partnership, does the lead organisation receive all funding?

Yes, the lead organisation will give its payment details through the online portal. The funding will be paid to them first. They can then share the money with the other partners who should receive it.

9. Monitoring Questions

How often will I be asked to report on my project?

Under your Grant Funding Agreement, you will be required to provide a monthly update on your project. You will also need to submit a more detailed quarterly report covering expenditure, risks and project milestones. Funding must normally be claimed in arrears, except for any agreed mobilisation payment. You will need to provide supporting evidence with each claim.

When will payments be made?

Non-mobilisation payments will be linked to the project milestones that you include in your application and paid in arrears. Questions regarding mobilisation payments can be found in section 1.

You will need to set out your proposed milestones and the amount of funding linked to each one. You can include up to one payable milestone each month during your project.

To receive a payment, you must submit a claim and provide the required evidence that the milestone has been completed. Claims received by the monthly cut-off date will be considered for that month's payment run.

If a claim is submitted after the cut-off date, or if the evidence is incomplete, the payment will move to the next monthly payment cycle.

What if my project takes longer than the agreed timeframes?

All activities are required to be completed within the agreed timeframes specified in the Funding Agreement. If there is a risk that this is not possible, you should contact dwp.pathwaystoworkinnovationfund@dwp.gov.uk immediately.

Can project plans change during delivery?

Yes.

We understand that projects can change as new learning emerges during delivery.

If you need to make changes to your project, you should discuss them with us as soon as possible. Any changes must be agreed before they are put in place.

As this is an Innovation Fund, we recognise that testing new ideas may lead to changes along the way. However, projects must continue to meet the aims set out in the Grant Funding Agreement.

Is there any support available from DWP during the active grant?

Yes.

Funded organisations can also reach out for support during their projects through the funding portal or dwp.pathwaystoworkinnovationfund@dwp.gov.uk.

Can my grant be taken back from me?

Yes. In some circumstances, funding may be reduced, suspended, or recovered.

This could happen if the project is not being delivered as agreed, if the terms of the Grant Funding Agreement are not met, or if the project is consistently failing to achieve its intended outcomes.

We will work with funded organisations to help projects succeed, but organisations must meet the requirements set out in their Grant Funding Agreement.

Who owns the learning generated during delivery?

DWP will review the projects funded through the Innovation Fund to see what worked well and what can be learned. The results of this review will belong to DWP.

Will my application be published at any stage?

No, DWP does not plan to publish any applications.

10. Accessibility Questions

I have an accessibility need. How can I contact the team for support?

We want the Pathways to Work Innovation Fund to be accessible to everyone.

If you need any support or adjustments to take part in the application process, accessible formats of the key scheme documentation are available on GOV.UK. If you require any further support, please reach out to dwp.pathwaystoworkinnovationfund@dwp.gov.uk.

Or you could write to Pathways to Work Innovation Fund, Ernst & Young, 1 More London Place, London, SE1 2AF

What accessible formats will be available?

This document and the Applicant Bid Pack are available in English and Welsh, as well as in the following formats:

- Braille
- British Sign Language (BSL)
- Audio
- Large Print
- Easy Read

Our online services, including the funding portal, are designed to be digitally accessible and compatible with most screen readers.