1. Purpose

The Flexible Innovation Starter Fund aims to kick start and enhance the impact of EPSRC-funded research discoveries by supporting knowledge exchange activity.

Funding is offered to provide opportunities to establish partnerships with non-academic organisations and move research outputs into a position where it is suitable for further funding from other sources (e.g. Innovate UK funding) or our Innovation Accelerator Fund.

Maximum funding available under this scheme is for £5,000. See Point 4 for further information on how to apply.

If you would like support to identify potential partners/opportunities or would like further guidance on how to prepare an application please contact the IAA partnerships officer.

2. Eligibility

Applications are only permitted for projects focused on the exploitation of knowledge or technology generated through EPSRC-funded research. Projects should normally be completed within 3 months and must be completed by 31st March 2020. No extensions are possible.

We are particularly keen to encourage EPSRC-funded Early Career Researchers (this includes doctoral students and post-doctoral researchers) to apply, in addition to Principle Investigators (PI).

Activities that may be supported, but are not limited to:

- Business/ user engagement
  - Activities and events (e.g. workshops, seminars, symposia or meetings) to establish/build partnerships from which opportunities to generate impact can be realised.
  - Production of media/materials to increase awareness of research outputs and attract interest from non-academic partners.
  - Meetings with prospective partners (e.g. visit partner organisation, attend tradeshows, conferences and events).

- Short secondments (full-time or part-time)
  - Outward secondments to partner organisation where a minimum of 50% of the overall time should be spent at the partner organisation. Funds can be requested for:
    1. Knowledge transfer secondments: Outward secondment of a PDRA / PhD student funded by EPSRC to either ‘hand-over’ project results (e.g. tool or technique) to collaborating partner or work on focussed project addressing a commercial problem or opportunity.
    2. Pre-application secondments: Enable PIs to work with users to inform the design of a translational research grant proposal – thereby ensuring research questions and/or the format of research outputs are more relevant to users.
    3. Pre-proof of concept secondments: Enable PIs/researchers to work with users to identify key challenges that need to be addressed to further exploit EPSRC funded outputs and draw up a plan to tackle them.
  - Inward secondment of senior industry / user scientists
Small scale early stage commercialisation activities that can be achieved for 5k are also eligible. Examples of activities include, but not limited to: market stage assessments; prototyping, demonstrators and software development and completion/development of licence data pack.

Eligible organisations to partner with include UK businesses (and international businesses with a UK presence/influence), third sector and public sector organisations. This scheme will not support collaboration between other universities or research institutes.

Eligible costs include:
- PDRA/researcher salary
- Travel and accommodation
- Project support costs
- Professional fees
- Outsourcing and prototyping
- Bench fees and consumables (inward secondments only).

Costs cannot be requested to support additional research work, PI salary replacement or cover (e.g. teaching buy out), ‘bridging’ between research grants, estates and indirect costs.

Further details of eligible costs can be found in the Eligible Cost Table.

3. Assessment

Funding decisions are made by the Dean for Research and Faculty Research Manager. Where the request is for a sum of more than £1000, applications may also be referred to internal impact experts. The IAA partnerships officer will make decisions on applications under £1000.

Requests under £1000 will be assessed against this criteria:
- Potential for proposed activities to promote knowledge-exchange to establish/build beneficial partnerships that could lead to impact generation.
- Strength of links to previous/ current EPSRC research.
- Ability to spend the funds requested within the timeframe of the project.

Requests over £1000 will be assessed against this criteria:
- Clarity and strength of impact-related aims and deliverables.
- Strength of links to previous/ current EPSRC research.
- Significance/ likelihood of impact generation.
- Strength of involvement of external partners. Partnerships that link to the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund are very much encouraged.
- Ability to spend the funds as requested within the timeframe of the project.

Projects will be prioritised where a matching funding contribution (e.g. cash or in kind) is provided by the partner, however this is not essential.

4. How to apply

Please complete and submit the Flexible Innovation Starter Fund application form.

Once requests are submitted, applicants should normally receive a decision within two weeks. Where applications are for more than £1000, this may be slightly longer due to the need to seek the opinion of other impact experts. Applicants that are not successful will be provided with feedback.

For request of funds for outwards secondments, please also include this information along with the application form:
- a letter of support from the external partner
- (if the secondee is a PhD student) a letter from the main academic supervisor confirming their support and that the student’s studies will not be affected by undertaking the secondment and no extension will be required in finishing their PhD.
5. **Deadlines**

The scheme is now open and applications can be submitted at any time.

6. **Accessing Funds**

Information on how to access funds will be provided to successful applicants with their award letter. Any unaccounted costs or underspends will be clawed back for re-use within further calls. Overspends are the responsibility of the School/Institute.

7. **Reporting**

To be eligible under IAA rules, applicants that are successful in receiving an award for over £1000 will be required to produce a short final report one month after the end date of the project. The award letter will recommend what outputs, outcomes and impacts to report (see EPSRC Outputs, Outcomes and Impacts Capture Table).