

2014 to 2020 European Structural and Investment
Funds Growth Programme

Call for Proposals
European Regional Development Fund

Priority Axis 3: Enhancing the
Competitiveness of Small and Medium
Sized Enterprises

Managing Authority:	Department for Communities and Local Government
Fund:	European Regional Development Fund
Priority Axis:	Priority Axis 3: Enhancing the Competitiveness of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises
Call Reference:	OC34R15P 0151
Local Enterprise Partnership Area:	Tees Valley
Call Open:	27 July 2015
Call Closes:	23:59 25 September 2015

Contents

1.	Introduction.....	3
2.	Call Context.....	4
3.	Scope of the Call	6
3.1.	Scope.....	6
3.2.	Local Development Need.....	8
3.3.	Operational Programme Investment Priorities.....	13
4.	Required Outputs under this Call	16
5.	Application Process & Prioritisation Methodology	17
6.	General Information.....	18
6.1.	National Eligibility Rules.....	18
6.2.	Eligible Applicants.....	18
6.3.	Contribution Rate & Match Funding	19
6.4.	Project Timescales.....	19
6.5.	Capital Projects.....	20
6.6.	Cross Cutting Themes/Horizontal Principles.....	20
6.7.	Additionality, Duplication and Displacement	21
6.8.	State Aid & Revenue Generation	21
6.9.	Funding Agreement.....	22
6.10.	Procurement.....	22
7.	Support.....	23
8.	Key Documents	23
9.	Document Checklist.....	23
10.	Document Submission.....	24

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 Funds are managed by the Department for Communities and Local Government for European Regional Development Fund, Department for Work and Pensions for European Social Fund and the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs for 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. Unless stated otherwise, the term “Managing Authority” will apply to all these organisations. The Managing Authorities work closely with local partners who 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 in the development of project calls (decided by the Managing Authorities) 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 Investment Fund Strategy to aid the Managing Authority’s assessments at outline and full application stage.

This call is issued by the Department for 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 Department for Communities and Local Government (the Managing Authority) invites applications seeking European Regional Development Fund support under:

Priority Axis 3 Enhancing the Competitiveness of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises

Investment Priorities:

- 3c** Supporting the creation and the extension of advanced capacities for products, services and development.

- 3d** Supporting the capacity of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises to grow in regional, national and international markets and to engage in innovation processes

The **European Regional Development Fund Operational Programme for England 2014 to 2020** sets out how the European Regional Development Fund will focus on investment to support economic growth and job creation. **Priority Axis 3** of the Operational Programme aims to improve the competitiveness of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises by increasing capacity and capability and promoting entrepreneurship.

Any application for funding will be required to clearly demonstrate that it meets the requirement of, and makes a meaningful contribution to, the delivery of the relevant Priority Axis of the [European Regional Development Fund Operational Programme](#).

In addition, applications will be expected to meet identified local development need, as expressed in the scope of this call and as set out in the [Tees Valley](#) European Structural and Investment Funds Strategy.

Applicants are advised to familiarise themselves with the detail of the Operational Programme, local European Structural and Investment Funds Strategy and the relevant documentation listed in sections 5 through to 8 **prior to** submitting an Outline Application.

In responding to this call, applicants should also note the following.

The Business Growth Service provides specialist advice to businesses with the right level of ambition, capability and capacity to improve and grow. The service brings together the help available through Growth Accelerator, Manufacturing Advisory Service, Designing Demand and IP Audits. The Service forms part of an integrated package of support that seamlessly connects businesses to Export advice which is provided by UK Trade & Investment through contracts for International Trade Services and UK Export Finance.

Government is working with partners across England to establish a series of business-led Growth Hubs which will include access to trade, investment and business growth services. The Hubs will provide good links and referral arrangements for national growth programmes, especially those in the Business Growth Service

Applicants under this call will need to:

1. demonstrate that the proposed project does not duplicate the Business Growth Service, demonstrating in particular how operations will complement and align with the Business Growth Service to deliver additional outcomes. This will be particularly important in cases where projects seek to provide related services e.g. business advice, consultancy, mentoring and peer-to-peer support and leadership and management coaching/advice to growth potential Small and Medium sized Enterprises or supply chain development;
2. demonstrate how activity and delivery will be integrated with the business-led, single point of access Growth Hub in the area covered by this call and work locally with all business support provision provided by local public and private sector partners. Where relevant, further detail on Growth Hubs is set out below and in the Annex at the end.

3. Scope of the Call

3.1 Scope

This call invites Outline Applications which support the delivery of **Priority Axis 3** of the European Regional Development Fund Operational Programme and responds to the local development need set out in the [Tees Valley 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 £9,533,428 comprised of the following elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £2,220,000 Tees Valley Business Compass Growth (Growth Hub); and, • £7,313,428 Flexible Fund within the Tees Valley Business Fund. <p>It is important to note that the ERDF resource identified under this call will support activity that will form part of the wider Tees Valley Business Fund, operating alongside:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £2.1m ERDF drawn from Priority Axis 1 • £0.75m ERDF drawn from Priority Axis 2 • £0.60m ERDF drawn from Priority Axis 4 <p>The Managing Authority reserves the right to increase or decrease the indicative allocation, or support more or fewer projects 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>
<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. The Managing Authority does not intend to allocate less than £500,000 European Regional Development Fund to any single project.</p>
<p>Duration of project approvals</p>	<p>Projects should be for a maximum of three years, however the Managing Authority reserves the right to vary the maximum duration in exceptional circumstances.</p>

<p>Geographical Scope</p>	<p>All interventions are confined to activity and beneficiaries within England. Projects should predominantly support businesses based within Tees Valley Local Enterprise Partnership area.</p>
<p>Specific call requirements</p>	<p>This open call is seeking applications for activity to support business growth via the following two complementary elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tees Valley Business Compass Growth Hub; • Tees Valley Business Fund. <p>The wider Tees Valley Business Compass Model incorporates both elements identified above. The model is intended to make it simpler for SMEs in the Tees Valley to identify and then access the relevant support needed to overcome barriers and address constraints to growth.</p> <p>It is intended that the Tees Valley Business Fund as a whole will also draw resources from calls currently open under Priority Axes 1, 2 and 4 to achieve the integrated and complementary support needed to deliver greater synergy, hide the wiring and provide better value for money in the provision of support for growth to SMEs in the Tees Valley. This call focuses upon the Priority Axis 3 activity that will form part of the wider Tees Valley Business Fund.</p> <p>In order to deliver the synergies and value for money sought the Tees Valley ESIF partnership is seeking a single award for an operation to deliver the Tees Valley Business Fund. It is intended that the Operation as a whole will incorporate elements funded via individual projects drawn from Priority Axes 1, 2, 3 and 4.</p> <p>Specifically, this Priority 3 call includes the following two elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The award for the £2.2m Business Compass Growth Hub; • The award for the £7.3m Priority Axis 3 element of the Tees Valley Business Fund to be delivered via the lead organisation/ manager of the overarching Tees Valley Business Fund i.e. the flexible fund for business.
<p>Call Deadlines</p>	<p>For this specific call, applications will be assessed following closure of the call</p>

3.2 Local Development Need

Projects must deliver activity which directly contributes to the objectives of Priority Axis 3 of the Operational Programme, one or more of the relevant Investment Priorities and meet the **local development need** expressed in the table below.

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT NEED

Local Economic Context :

The Tees Valley has a population of 666,000 and contributes over £11 billion annually to the national economy through its major hub status for the process and chemical industries and its growing reputation for advanced manufacturing (particular specialisms include oil and gas, subsea, biologics and automotive), low carbon (offshore wind and energy from waste) and the digital/creative economy. The Tees Valley boasts many competitive advantages; it is home to major industries that export products across the globe; a 14,500 strong SME base; a skilled workforce supported by leading colleges, universities and innovation centres; and a major port, airport and direct rail routes to key locations.

The [Tees Valley Strategic Economic Plan 2014 \(SEP\)](#) sets out its ambition for Tees Valley to become a high-value, low-carbon, diverse and inclusive economy creating 25,000 new private sector jobs by 2022. This growth will be heavily driven by existing businesses. Barriers identified in the Tees Valley [European Structural and Investment Funds Strategy 2014](#), [Strategic Economic Plan 2014](#) and [Tees Valley Economic Assessment 2013](#) include the difficulties experienced by growing SMEs in securing finance, accessing supply chain opportunities and a lack of visibility of available business support.

The SEP explains that, *“our innovative SMEs supply products and services to major manufacturers and key supply chains around the globe, but rates of exporting and enterprise are low and access to finance, business support, appropriate accommodation and contracts remain barriers to growth. While the retention and development of our Key Sectors remains vital to the competitiveness of Tees Valley, our future economic growth will be driven in large part by our existing and future business base and its ability to expand, innovate, diversify and access supply chain opportunities.”*

The local ESIF Strategy sets out how “by targeting ESIFS funds, we will provide relevant support to grow existing businesses and develop new start-up and spin out businesses, including social enterprises, develop sustainable supply chains, increase exports and overcome access to finance issues.” It also recognises that access to finance is a major obstacle to business growth – *“Funds are needed to overcome market failure in the availability of funding for SMEs in Tees Valley, a constraint to economic growth”* and outlines the intention to ensure a flexible mix of finance - available for SMEs from different sectors and at stages of readiness, which could include a Tees Valley grant fund.

Progress is being made, with increases in business confidence, job creation and export success achieved over the past 3 years. Although we continue to lag behind the national average on business stock, commercialisation and, crucially, employment levels (there are only 285,000 jobs for our 419,000 working age population), the signs of progress are clearly there. For example:

- The growth in the number of jobs since 2011 has now reached 12,500, and the employment rise has been above the national average, demonstrating increasing private sector confidence and strengthened economic resilience.
- GVA continues to grow with Tees Valley contributing almost £11.5bn to annual UK growth. In fact, GVA per employee in manufacturing in Tees Valley is above the national average and many English regions.
- Tees Valley's business birth rate, at 15.6% in 2013, is now significantly higher than the UK rate, above any UK region outside London and the highest since 2007. This rise, demonstrates continued economic recovery and a rise in entrepreneurialism.
- This rise has also seen Tees Valley's focus upon innovation reflected in a recent report which labelled Tees Valley as the most innovative area in the north of England and the seventh most innovative in England, above London, Birmingham, Leeds and Manchester.
- Continued growth in exports with North East exports totalling almost £12.5bn for 2014, up from £11.6bn in 2013. This increase of 7.2% was the highest of any country or region of the UK and demonstrates the importance of assets such as Teesport and the vibrancy of Tees Valley companies in winning contracts across the globe.

To build on this progress, the [Tees Valley Business Compass](#) has been created to help ambitious businesses achieve their growth potential by offering access to a range of practical services, from local business information and assessing growth options through to the unlocking of funding streams.

Local Priorities:

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

- This Priority Axis 3 call will focus on Investment Priorities 3c and 3d. The expectation is that the outcome of this call will result in the award of up to two contracts – one for the Tees Valley Business Compass Growth (the Growth Hub) and one for Priority Axis 3 activity in support of the Tees Valley Business Fund. These two elements form part of the wider Tees Valley Business Compass service (the growth hub for Tees Valley), and applicants may wish to propose projects which address either one or both areas of operation. The third element of Tees Valley Business Compass – Business Compass Start-Up – has already been the subject of an ERDF Open Call, which is now closed. No further activity is sought for this latter area of operation at the present time.

- It is important to note that in addition to the £7.3m Priority Axis 3 resource identified in this call to support the Tees valley Business Fund, the wider Tees valley Business Fund itself will involve a further £3.5m drawn from calls currently open under Priority Axes 1, 2 and 4.
- The main objective of Tees Valley Business Compass is to provide simplified access to, and to remove duplication of, business support. In so doing, Tees Valley Business Compass will remain the recognised umbrella brand for all publicly funded business support activity in Tees Valley, which will be provided to existing businesses which have to grow and add to Tees Valley GDP and jobs. Business Compass adopts a needs driven business support model, geared to delivering support which responds to the specific needs and state of readiness of a business. This is represented diagrammatically through the following [link](#).
- **The Tees Valley Business Compass Growth (part of the national network of Growth Hubs) – allocation of £2,220,000 ERDF over 3 years (2016-2018)**

A light touch signposting and information service is available to all Tees Valley businesses, through the Business Compass website -

<http://www.teesbusinesscompass.co.uk/>. However, within Business Compass Growth, priority will be given to sectors which have been identified in the Tees Valley Strategic Economic Plan April 2014, which have the aspiration to grow and create jobs, and which are eligible to receive support funded through the ERDF funds. In particular priority will be given to SMEs in the following sectors:

- **Process sector** – petrochemicals, polymers, steel primary production and secondary processing, energy and pharmaceutical and industrial biotechnology;
- **Advanced manufacturing** – process engineering and materials processing, offshore / subsea engineering, and automotive and rail;
- **Low Carbon** – waste processing, renewable energy, and hydrogen;
- **Digital and creative** – digital, engineering design and technical services, culture and the arts.

Business Compass Growth is geared to activating the growth potential of these existing Tees Valley businesses. It may do so by deploying a team of Business Growth Activators who will engage proactively with Tees Valley businesses with growth aspirations, to qualify their barriers to growth and identify growth opportunities, and then enable businesses to access whatever support, introductions and resources they need to activate growth as quickly as possible. Once the barriers and opportunities have been identified, Business Compass Growth Activators will support the businesses to access the support and resources they need to remove those barriers and take

advantage of opportunities. This will involve signposting and introductions to sources of support, including the Tees Valley Business Fund.

Applications should consider how Growth Activators will:

- Actively engage with businesses across Tees Valley;
- Have credibility within the business community at large;
- Demonstrate business knowledge across a broad mix of business sectors and processes;
- Undertake a detailed diagnostic that qualifies barriers to growth and identifies growth opportunities;
- Put in place a Business Growth road map and assist businesses to follow this through signposting, making introductions and acting in the role of “resourceful business friend”;
- Network local businesses to encourage and enable peer support.

Respondents will be expected to demonstrate the availability of match funding that will be required to enable Business Compass Growth to be delivered, as ERDF funding will meet a maximum of 60% of the costs of so doing.

- **The Tees Valley Business Fund (£7313,428 ERDF allocated over 3 years 2016-18, within P3 with a further £3,454,000 ERDF allocated within P1, 2 and 4 combined)**

Tees Valley Business Fund is an amalgam of capital grants, job grants (including post-graduate and doctoral jobs grants), vouchers (e.g. innovation and broadband vouchers) and revenue based funding for services to businesses which can be accessed by them to contribute towards the cost of removing their barriers to growth and taking advantage of their opportunities.

This call is primarily seeking applications for the delivery of Priority Axis 3 related activity as part of the Tees Valley Business Fund. It is important to note that support for Tees Valley Business Fund activities related to Priority Axes 1, 2 and 4 are currently the subject of separate but complementary calls under their respective Priority Axes.

Given the scale of resources allocated under Priority Axis 3, local ESIF partners intend that the call will result in the identification of a lead manager for both the Priority Axis 3 and wider Tees Valley Business Fund Operation. Applicants wishing to manage the Priority Axis 3 elements of the Tees Valley Business Fund should also therefore consider applying for the management of the Tees Valley Business Fund elements sought under the open calls for Priority Axis 1, 2 and 4.

The total ERDF funding that will form the overarching Tees Valley Business Fund will be £10,767,428 over the three years 2016-18 to be drawn from

Priorities Axes 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Specifically, within this Priority Axis 3 call, £7,313,428 will be awarded to the lead manager to support specialist business support, further in depth diagnosis, jobs grants and other measures to remove barriers to growth.

Although the Tees Valley Business Fund is comprised of various sources of funding, it is intended that as far as possible the detail of the mix will not be made known to the business community. It is proposed that the fund will operate with what could be termed as “hidden wiring”, and accessed determined on a needs driven basis.

The Tees Valley Business Fund will be managed entirely separately from the Business Compass (Growth Hub), albeit the same organisation could deliver both elements with “Chinese Walls” in place to protect all parties against conflicts of interest. Although the Business Compass Growth Activator will signpost businesses to the Fund, they will not be in a position to influence the evaluation and decision making process.

Projects should consider:

- How they will develop clear parameters against which applications for support will be assessed, having regard to the purpose of the Fund, which is to create sustainable, private sector jobs.
- How they will ensure that funds are only given to an end beneficiary where the provision of such funds is compatible with State Aid law.
- How they will carry out a robust appraisal of each project application and the degree to which, if at all, they will subcontract due diligence.
- The extent to which, if at all, they intend to use an Investment Panel to guide funding decisions
- How they will proactively ensure complementarity between the Funds under their management and other sources of public funding which may be available to individual businesses, including, but not restricted to, those which are the subject of Open Calls under Priority Axes 1, 2 and 4.
- In utilising the Tees Valley Business Fund to make grants to individual businesses, the overall principle should be that individual grant is at the minimum level necessary to allow the project to proceed. The cash match will be in the form of expenditure by the end beneficiary in a ratio, at overall Fund level, of a minimum of 2:1, with 2 being the cash expenditure by the end beneficiaries. Where it is proposed that this catch match also forms part of the matched funding for the operation itself, projects will need to consider how they manage this in a way which is compliant with programme eligibility rules and therefore public procurement rules.

3.3 Operational Programme Investment Priorities

Applications must specify the activities to be delivered and are expected to directly contribute to **one or more** of the following Investment Priorities:

Investment Priority	3c –Supporting the creation and extension of advanced capacities for products, services and development.
Specific Objectives	Increase the growth capacity of small and medium sized enterprises.
Indicative Actions	<p>Under this investment priority indicative actions to be supported by European Regional Development Fund may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of advice to develop new business models or higher quality products, processes or services • Advice and support for businesses to implement productivity improvements including through the provision of resource efficiency advice, • Advice to improve business processes and workforce development • Advice and support for supply chain interventions to strengthen and grow the domestic supplier base • Attracting new foreign direct investment into England through, for example, promotion of business collaborations (Small and Medium Sized Enterprises to Prime/Original Equipment Manufacturers, Small and Medium Sized Enterprise to Small and Medium Sized Enterprise), supply chain initiatives, sectoral and research and innovation propositions linked to smart specialisation and “soft landings¹”.

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

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring Small and Medium Sized Enterprises have access to sufficient levels of finance to implement their growth plans, including appropriate capital investment for premises and equipment to help build capacity • Provision of advice, consultancy support, mentoring, peer to peer support, and support for collaborative projects • Grant finance for business to invest for product, process and service improvements <p>Activities will target domestic and foreign owned Small and Medium Sized enterprises, including social enterprises.</p>
--	---

Investment Priority	3d –Supporting the capacity of small and medium sized enterprises to grow in regional, national and international markets and to engage in innovation processes
Specific Objectives	Increase the growth capability of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises.
Indicative Actions	<p>The support provided through this specific objective will help businesses to develop their internal capability in order to improve their productivity, grow and create jobs:</p> <p>Under this investment priority indicative actions to be supported by European Regional Development Fund may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of efficient local referral routes to ensure that Small and Medium Sized Enterprises are able to identify and access the most appropriate and tailored support for their specific growth needs • Support Small and Medium Sized Enterprises to develop focused growth strategies and update or introduce new business models which will drive business performance

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attracting new business investments to England, including through, for example, cluster and sector initiatives, collaborations with trade associations and inward missions. • Advice and support for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises to enter, establish and expand in new domestic and international markets. • Advice and support for businesses to become investment ready • Provision of advice, consultancy, mentoring and peer-to-peer support to indigenous businesses and inward investors (Small and Medium Sized Enterprises from outside the European Union who will move to England) • Leadership and management coaching where connected to the development and implementation of a business growth plan • Support events, trade fairs and missions to enable Small and Medium Sized Enterprises to enter, establish and expand in new domestic and international markets • Targeted grant schemes to support productive investment • Provision of advice and consultancy on access to finance <p>Activities will target domestic and foreign-owned Small and Medium Sized Enterprises, including Social Enterprises.</p> <p>Activity under this investment priority will focus primarily on addressing the barriers that business face in identifying, accessing and understanding the different types of finance that is available.</p>
--	--

4. Required Outputs under this Call

Projects must deliver against the Priority Axis 3 outputs and results of the European Regional Development Fund 2014 to 2020 Operational Programme. For projects coming forward under this call the expected outputs and results are:

ID	Output Indicator
C1	Number of enterprises receiving support
C2	Number of enterprises receiving grants
C4	Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support
C5	Number of new enterprises supported
C6	Private investment matching public support to enterprises (grants)
C8	Employment increase in supported enterprises
C28	Number of enterprises supported to introduce new to the market products
C29	Number of enterprises supported to introduce new to the firm products
P11	Number of potential entrepreneurs assisted to be enterprise ready
P13	Number of enterprises receiving Information, Diagnostic and Brokerage support

Applicants will need to demonstrate how the eligible activity, funded by the European Regional Development Fund, will achieve the deliverables committed to within the proposal. The application should clearly state the methodology used to determine the levels of outputs proposed.

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 deliverables, a performance penalty may apply.

5. Application Process & 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 the national [Selection Criteria](#).

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

Gateway assessment considers:

- applicant eligibility;
- activity and expenditure eligibility; and
- fit with the National Operational Programme and the local development need set out in section 2.

Proposals that fail the Gateway assessment will be rejected. Proposals which pass the Gateway assessment will then be assessed against the Core assessment criteria:

- Strategic Fit
- Value for money
- Management and control
- Deliverability
- Compliance
 - Procurement
 - State Aid
 - Publicity requirements
- Cross cutting themes
 - Environmental sustainability
 - Equal Opportunities.

Having assessed projects against these criteria the relevant Local Economic Partnership area European Structural and Investment Fund Sub-Committee will advise the Managing Authority on the alignment to local economic growth conditions and opportunities within the context of the Operational Programme

and local European Structural and Investment Fund Strategy to aid the Managing Authority's assessments (at outline and full application stage).

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

6.1 National Eligibility Rules

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

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, Applicants will enter into a Funding Agreement and must abide by the standard terms and conditions contained therein. 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. Once a Funding Agreement has been issued it should be signed and returned within 30 days, unless otherwise agreed with the Managing Authority.

6.2 Eligible Applicants

Section 4 of the [National Eligibility Rules](#) sets out who is eligible to apply.

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 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 how and what steps have been taken to ensure that the risk of further irregularities in the future is mitigated. It is acknowledged that some organisations will be new to European Structural and Investment Funds funding and will not have a track record.

6.3 Contribution Rate & Match Funding

European Regional Development Fund is normally expected to intervene where no other funding can be obtained (i.e. the funder of last resort). The level of European Regional Development Fund awarded will be the minimum in order for the project to proceed.

The maximum Contribution Rate is 60% of the total eligible project costs subject to State Aid regulations.

The remaining 40% or more must come from other eligible sources as specified under section 6 of the National Eligibility Rules. Applicants will need to demonstrate that they have eligible match funding in place for the balance of costs. Other European Union 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 60% maximum.

European Regional Development Fund is paid quarterly in arrears and expenditure must be defrayed prior to the submission of any Grant claims. Applicants may be asked to demonstrate how they are able to cash flow the operation.

6.4 Project Timescales

European Regional Development Fund funding will normally be approved for three years, however the Managing Authority reserves the right to extend the contract term in exceptional circumstances.

Projects approved through this call are expected to:

- (i) 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,
- (ii) Commence delivery (defraying European Regional Development Fund eligible costs) within three months of formal approval. Projects which fail to meet this deadline may be deselected, and
- (iii) Be completed by June 2023.

6.5 Capital Projects

Applicants seeking European Regional Development Fund to support a capital project (i.e. land and/or property) will need to meet Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method or Civil Engineering Environmental Quality Assessment 'Excellent' for new builds and 'Very Good' for refurbishments.

Applicants will need to provide evidence of how they will achieve the rating required (unless otherwise agreed with the Managing Authority).

Applicants will need to demonstrate that they have the rights and permissions to undertake the project and must provide:

1. Proof of current interest in the land and/or property, which includes evidence of the freehold ownership or any lease arrangements that may be in place; and
2. Evidence of the approval of any planning permission, or in certain circumstances a clear statement on the process for securing such consents and any risks to the project.

Royal Institute of British Architects Stage D costs must be supplied with the Full Application and be certified by an independent Quantity Surveyor and Land/Property contributions certified by a Real Estate Valuation expert who are current and chartered members of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors/ Chartered Institute of Builders or equivalent body.

Successful Applicants will be required to provide security to the Managing Authority in the form of a Legal Charge and/or Deed of Covenant over the land and/or property. Applicants will be responsible for registering the charge at their own cost.

6.6 Cross Cutting Themes/Horizontal Principles

All applications received under this call should 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 the [European Regional Development Fund Operational Programme](#).

6.7 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. Projects need to demonstrate that without the support of European Regional Development Funding the activity would not have taken place.

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

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

6.8 State Aid & 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.² 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 or is covered by the De Minimis Regulation. 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.

Where the Applicant does not perceive that there is any State Aid, it should state whether or not it considers Articles 61 and 65(8) of regulation 1303/2013 to apply. Article 61 refers to monitoring revenues generated after completion of the project, and Article 65(8) how to deal with differences in the forecast and actual revenues at

² Article 107(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union provides that: "Save as otherwise provided in the Treaties, any aid granted by a Member State or through state resources in any form whatsoever which distorts or threatens to distort competition by favouring certain undertakings or the production of certain goods shall, in so far as it affects trade between Member States, be incompatible with the internal market."

the end of the operation. This revenue should be taken into account in calculating eligible expenditure. The details of this will be tested at the full application stage.

6.9 Funding Agreement

The Funding Agreement is a standard, non-negotiable and legally binding document. Any successful Applicant will be subject to the terms and conditions contained within this agreement. Applicants are strongly advised to seek relevant advice to ensure that they would be able to enter into and abide by the terms of the Funding Agreement.

Applicants are advised that additional provisions and securities may be included within the Funding Agreement to protect the investment. Detailed advice will be given if appropriate at the Full Application stage.

Failure to meet any of the conditions of the Funding Agreement or the commitments within the application will result in claw back of the Grant (which may include interest).

6.10 Procurement

All costs claimed by the Applicant (Grant Recipient and/or Delivery Partner(s)) must be recovered on an actual cost basis. Other costs must be procured in line with National (including [Public Procurement Regulation 2015](#)) and European Union regulations. Procurement will be subject to audit and verification and any irregularity will result in 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 European Union.

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 grant.

7. Support

Please note that this is a competitive call and to preserve impartiality we are unable to enter into correspondence with applicants over their Outline Application. Details of where guidance can be found are contained throughout this calls document. In exceptional circumstances, if there are issues with accessing this guidance, please contact: ne.erdfenquiries@communities.gsi.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; and
- Funding Agreement (Revenue and/or Capital).

9. Document Checklist

Incomplete applications will be rejected. Please ensure the following information (documents) are submitted.

Outline Stage:

- Fully completed Outline Application;
- Financial Tables; and
- Outputs, Results and Indicators Tables.

10. Document Submission

Completed Outline Applications must be submitted via **email** to the address in Section 7.

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

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

Any changes related to the deadline for the submission of the Outline Application form will be notified on the [European Growth Funding](#) website pages.

ANNEX

2014-20 ERDF FUNDING FOR GROWTH HUB ACTIVITIES

Growth hubs will ensure that support for business is simpler, more joined up and easier to access. Some will also provide targeted support to businesses tailored to local needs e.g. priority sectors, groups. In the new 2014-20 European Regional Development Fund Programme period, some growth hubs will have a physical presence in the local area for businesses to seek advice, support and to network whilst others will offer a virtual service.

Although growth hubs are open to all businesses, regardless of size or sector, they will be able to offer European Regional Development Fund-funded support only to eligible Small and Medium Enterprises under European Regional Development Fund Priority Axis 3. Local Enterprise Partnerships and other partners in some localities have therefore sought clarification as to whether the 2014-20 European Regional Development Fund Programme for England can be used to fund the following activities:

- Signposting and diagnostic activity (e.g. salary costs associated with to face-to-face business advisers, telephone support services)
- Facilitation of peer to peer networking events
- Growth hub marketing activity
- Website development/ maintenance and/or enhancements/development of new on-line tools
- Back office, administration
- Management of the growth hub

The Department for Communities and Local Government has therefore worked with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to produce this Annex on growth hub activities and how they may be supported by European Regional Development Fund.

European Regional Development Fund objectives

Where growth hub activity is eligible for European Regional Development Fund support, it will be supported under Priority Axis 3 of the European Regional Development Fund Operational Programme which is designed to improve the competitiveness of Small and Medium Enterprises by increasing the capacity and capability of Small and Medium Enterprises and promoting entrepreneurship

Eligibility of growth hub activities for European Regional Development Fund support

Local Enterprise Partnerships and other partners are asked to note:

1. European Regional Development Fund requires minimum match funding of between 20% and 50%, depending on where in England the growth hub is located. As a result, a robust match funding package needs to be in place for a project to proceed.
2. European Regional Development Fund, the match funding and associated outputs must be accounted for and auditable, so transparent reporting systems for both funding and impacts will need to be in place.
3. As a general principle, European Regional Development Fund can support core functions (and revenue costs) of growth hubs, where they directly contribute to Operational Programme activity and outputs.
4. Any European Regional Development Fund support under Priority Axis 3 is limited to European Regional Development Fund-eligible sectors, Small and Medium Enterprises (not large companies) and potential entrepreneurs. This means that a universal offer for *all* businesses cannot be funded by European Regional Development Fund – we can only fund those parts that provide support to eligible potential entrepreneurs or enterprises.
5. Delivery of information, diagnosis, brokerage (IDB) is permitted, however, integrated delivery *with* further support, advice or grant is preferred (for reasons of practicality, deliverability and Value For Money), rather than standalone information, diagnosis, brokerage.
6. Growth hub staff directly associated with the delivery of European Regional Development Fund project activity are eligible for European Regional Development Fund support, e.g. staff costs for posts directly related to the European Regional Development Fund project in terms of project delivery, management, co-ordination and monitoring; and posts directly related to referrals, signposting and diagnosis of needs of Small and Medium Enterprises and potential entrepreneurs eligible for support from European Regional Development Fund.
7. Growth hub marketing collateral, website content and tools where developed specifically for the purpose of helping to deliver European Regional Development Fund Operational Programme activity and outputs may be supported.
8. Partnership development between Growth Hubs and organisations/institutions involved in providing business support that involves agreeing appropriate referral mechanisms that are clearly linked to signposting and information, diagnosis, brokerage, for eligible Small and Medium Enterprises and outputs

under European Regional Development Fund Priority Axis 3 may be supported.

9. 15% flat rate overheads are available (based on 15% of direct staff costs) and cover eligible overheads and back office costs – for example, indirect staff costs such as receptionists, Human Resources, legal, procurement support, governance and partnership development time (also see 7 and 8 above), Information Technology, shared premises costs and other associated costs.

European Regional Development Fund will **not** be able to support generalised local growth hub activity that does not deliver support to eligible individuals or enterprises, such as:

- a. Support for strategy development (including sector strategies).
- b. Support to simplify the business support landscape (e.g. mapping), except where this relates to the development of referrals and protocols linked to European Regional Development Fund project delivery and eligible European Regional Development Fund Small and Medium Enterprises e.g. integration of Business Growth Service (BGS).
- c. Support for research or other development activity for the growth hub and/or Local Enterprise Partnership, including annual review of growth hub performance.
- d. General growth hub website maintenance and tools development unrelated to the delivery of the European Regional Development Fund Operational Programme.
- e. Support for general growth hub partnership activity and governance.

Inevitably, this will result in some functions (or parts thereof) of each growth hub that must be funded from other sources, such as private contributions or other public funds, in line with the sustainability principle set out in Business, Innovation and Skills grant offer letters for 2015-16 funding. Your Business, Innovation and Skills Business Local Manager will engage with and support each Local Enterprise Partnership and broader partnership in this process.