Competition Brief

Engineering Biology SPARK Awards

This activity is being delivered by Innovate UK Business Connect.

Please contact engbio@iukbc.org.uk with any questions.

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Contents

Engineering Biology SPARK Awards

In this competition, up to £225,000 of total funding (up to £15,000 per project) is available to fund Engineering Biology SPARK Awards.

This funding is part of the Engineering Biology Innovation Network, led by Innovate UK Business Connect in collaboration with Innovate UK and UKRI's Technology Mission Fund, which aims to drive the development of a joined-up UK innovation ecosystem to ensure synthetic biology tools, technologies and processes can be more easily developed and adopted by a variety of industries. The network's goal is to progress innovations, create a commercially focused community and foster new consortia to advance innovations towards commercial applications.

Summary

The Engineering Biology SPARK awards will fund UK-registered Academic Institutions or Research and Technology Organisations (RTOs) to deliver an Engineering Biology project to address a challenge held by a UK-registered Small and Medium-sized Enterprise (SME) or to enhance the SME's progress towards developing new products, processes, or services.

In applying to this competition, you are entering into a competitive process.

This competition closes on the 9 July 2025, 11am BST

Projects will start from the 1st September 2025. Projects must finish by the 28th February 2026.

Project Details and Eligibility

Project Size
Your total grant funding request can be up to £15,000.

Eligibility
Your project must:

- start from the 1st September 2025
- finish by the 28th February 2026.

You must only include eligible project costs in your application.

Under current restrictions, this competition will not fund any procurement, commercial, business development or supply chain activity with any Russian and Belarusian entity as lead, partner or subcontractor. This includes any goods or services originating from a Russian and Belarusian source.

All business partners on projects will be required to complete a due diligence check based on the information supplied in your application ahead of receiving funding to make sure you are an established organisation.

Lead organisation
The lead applicant must be a UK-based academic institution or Research and Technology Organisation (RTO) (see here for eligible RTOs). The UK academic institute or RTO partner will be the Lead for the project and should submit the application form.

To be the UK Lead for a project your organisation must:

- be a UK academic institution or research and technology organisation (RTO)
- collaborate with one SME organisation in this project

Project team
Applications must include a registered UK academic institution or research and technology organisation (RTO) and a UK-registered SME.

Applications must include 2 partners.

- a UK-registered academic institution or research and technology organisation (RTO) organisation (who is also the Lead and will submit the application)
- a UK-registered SME (see here for definition of an SME).

Both partners should be instrumental in determining the need for the project and its design.

The project activities will be delivered by the UK-registered Academic Institutions or Research and Technology Organisation (RTO).

The SME can support the delivery of the project goals by carrying out related and/or parallel activities, but they are not required to deliver any defined activities under the remit of the project.

The SME will not be able to claim funding for any work undertaken to support the project goals.

There should be a defined plan for how the SME will be involved in the exploitation of the project outcomes.

Non-funded partners
The project will have one non-funded partner, the UK-registered SME.

Subcontractors
Subcontractors are not allowed in this competition.

Number of applications
UK academic institution or research and technology organisation (RTO) organisations can be the Lead on two applications. UK-registered SMEs can be a partner on two applications.

Previous Applications
You cannot use a previously submitted application to apply for this competition.

We will not award you funding if you have:

- failed to exploit a previously funded project

- an overdue independent accountant's report
- failed to comply with grant terms and conditions

Portfolio approach
We want to fund a variety of projects across different focus areas, organisations, sectors, locations, and across a range of company sizes. We call this a portfolio approach.

Subsidy control (and State aid where applicable)

This competition provides funding in line with the Subsidy Control Act 2022. Further information about the Subsidy requirements can be found within the Subsidy Control Act 2022 (legislation.gov.uk)

Innovate UK/Innovate UK Business Connect is unable to award organisations that are considered to be in financial difficulty. We will conduct financial viability and eligibility tests to confirm this is not the case following the application stage.

EU State aid rules now only apply in limited circumstances. Please see our general guidance to check if these rules apply to your organisation.

The business partner will be required to complete a Minimal Financial Assistance Declaration form to ensure the funding can be lawfully granted under Minimal Financial Assistance in accordance with part 3, chapter 2 of the Subsidy Control Act 2022. The funding made available through these Awards will be calculated on a gross cash equivalent basis, as determined by the monetary value of support made available under the grant.

Further Information
If you are unsure about your obligations under the Subsidy Control Act 2022 or the State aid rules, you should take independent legal advice. We are unable to advise on individual eligibility or legal obligations.

You must always make sure that the funding awarded to you is compliant with all current Subsidy Control legislation applicable in the United Kingdom.

This aims to regulate any advantage granted by a public sector body which threatens to, or actually distorts competition in the United Kingdom or any other country or countries.

Funding
Up to £225,000 has been allocated to fund projects in this competition. Funding will be in the form of a grant.

UK research organisations undertaking non-economic activity as part of the project can get funding for eligible project costs of up to:

- 80% of full economic costs (FEC) if you are a Je-S registered institution such as an academic
- 100% of your project costs if you are an RTO, charity, not for profit organisation, public sector organisation or research organisation

Funding will be paid to the UK Lead organisation only on completion of the project. To receive funding for your activities you will be required to submit evidence of your costs.

Scope

The Engineering Biology SPARK awards will fund UK-registered Academic Institutions or Research and Technology Organisations (RTOs) to deliver an Engineering Biology project to address a challenge held by a UK-registered Small and Medium-sized Enterprise (SME) or to enhance the SME's progress towards developing new products, processes, or services.

In this competition, up to £225,000 of total funding (up to £15,000 per project) is available to fund Engineering Biology SPARK Awards.

This funding is part of the Engineering Biology Innovation Network, led by Innovate UK Business Connect in collaboration with Innovate UK and UKRI's Technology Mission Fund, which aims to drive the development of a joined-up UK innovation ecosystem to ensure synthetic biology tools, technologies and processes can be more easily developed and adopted by a variety of industries.

The network's goal is to progress innovations, create a commercially focused community and foster new consortia to advance innovations towards commercial applications.

The UK Government has identified Engineering Biology as one of five critical technologies with the potential to significantly influence the UK's future prosperity, security, and global leadership.

Engineering biology is a rapidly growing field with potential for innovation and applications across industry sectors and technology areas, including agriculture and food, health, energy and low carbon fuels, materials and chemicals, and waste recycling. It encompasses the wider capabilities and ecosystem that supports the exploitation of synthetic biology – the design, engineering and re-engineering of biologically based parts, devices and systems - to address major economic and societal challenges.

Projects must have an overarching goal of 'pulling' engineering biology knowledge and expertise from lab-based discovery towards application.

Projects will use the engineering biology knowledge, expertise and facilities/tools of academic organisations to address a challenge held by an SME or to enhance their progress towards developing new products, processes or services.

Projects must be a collaboration between the academic research community and an SME.

The Engineering Biology SPARK Awards aim to initiate longer-term partnerships.

Both partners should be instrumental in determining the need for the project and its design.

The SME can support the delivery of the project goals by carrying out related and/or parallel activities, but they are not required to deliver any defined activities under the remit of the project.

The SME will not be able to claim funding for any work undertaken to support the project goals.

There should be a defined plan for how the SME will be involved in the exploitation of the project outcomes.

Projects must:

- address a challenge held by an SME or collaboratively enhance their progress towards developing new products, processes or services
- be collaborative, led by one UK-registered academic institution or Research and Technology Organisation (RTO) (see here for eligible RTOs), and one UK-registered SME (see here for definition of an SME).
- focus on an engineering biology solution and fall within at least one of the following thematic areas:
    - agriculture and food production
    - health
    - materials and chemicals
    - energy and low carbon fuels
    - waste recycling
    - the development of novel synthetic biology tools and technologies

Your project can include:

- product or service development
- prototyping
- experimental evaluation of products, tools or technologies

Your application must:

- demonstrate how the work of the UK-registered Academic Institution or Research and Technology Organisation (RTO) supports the needs of the SME
- define how it will support progress towards developing new products/services or addressing a challenge held by the SME.
- demonstrate how your innovation relates to engineering biology/draws on the tools of synthetic biology
- explain how your innovation falls in at least one of the application areas of the competition.

Projects we will not fund

We are not funding projects that are:

- fundamental research
- literature review/market research without a practical element
- focused on a product that is already on the market
- conducted to anything less than the highest standards of animal welfare
- clinical trials or preclinical evaluation of therapeutics
- not focussed on the competition focus areas

Projects would be out of scope if they:

- do not apply synthetic biology principles, e.g. the design, engineering and re-engineering

of biologically based parts, devices, and systems

We cannot fund projects that are:

- dependent on export performance, for example giving a subsidy to a baker on the condition that it exports a certain quantity of bread to another country
- dependent on domestic inputs usage, for example giving a subsidy to a baker on the condition that it uses 50% UK flour in their product

Dates

Open date	2 June 2025
Close date	9 July 2025, 11am BST
Projects start	1 September 2025
Projects finish	28 February 2026 (no extensions will be granted)

Unsuccessful projects will not receive specific feedback on their application.

How to apply

Applications are only being received through the Good Grants platform. You will need to set up an account on Good Grants to submit your application.

The UK Lead should complete and submit the final application.

Before submitting, it is the Leads' responsibility to make sure:

- that all the information provided in the application is correct
- your proposal meets the eligibility and scope criteria

You can edit your application once submitted, up until the competition deadline.

What we ask you to submit:

1. **Public description (not scored)**
   Describe your project in detail and in a way that you are happy to see published. Do not include any commercially sensitive information. If we award your project funding, we will make this description publicly available. This could happen before you start your project.

2. **Have the partners worked together before? (Not scored)**
   This question is not scored. Your answer will help us to understand the type of consortia submitting applications to the competition.

3. **What is the business need, technological challenge, or market opportunity behind your project?**

Explain:

- the business need, technological challenge or market opportunity
- any work you have already done to respond to this need, for example, if the project focuses on developing an existing capability or building a new one

4. **What approach will you take and where will the focus of the project be?**
   Describe or explain:
   - what your proposed approach is
   - the objectives of each work package
   - what the deliverables/outcomes of your project and each work package will be
   - how your project responds to the need, challenge or market opportunity identified
   - how your project focuses on an engineering biology solution and falls within at least one of the following thematic areas: agriculture and food, health, energy and low carbon fuels, materials and chemicals, waste recycling

5. **What is the expected impact of the project/its deliverables?**
   Describe:
   - how the project outcomes will be exploited
   - the impact / change you hope to achieve through this collaboration, including wider potential social, economic or environmental impacts
   - the expected impacts on the organisations involved in the project (e.g. on future business growth, research goals, research and innovation capacity)

6. **Who is in the project team and what are their roles?**
   Describe and explain:
   - the roles, skills and experience of all members of the project team (including both the lead and partner) that are relevant to the approach you will be taking and the exploitation plan for the project
   - the resources, equipment and facilities needed for the project and how you will access them
   - evidence/justification as to how/why these partners will be impactful and work well together

7. **What are the primary risks associated with this project?**
   Explain:
   - the main risks and uncertainties of the project, including the technical, commercial, managerial, and environmental risks
   - how these risks will be mitigated

8. **How much will the project cost and how does it represent value for money?**
   In terms of your project goals, explain:
   - your total project costs (your grant claim can be up to £15,000)
   - cost of each work package

- the grant you are requesting
- how this represents value for money

Accessibility and inclusion

We welcome and encourage applications from people of all backgrounds and are committed to making our application process accessible to everyone. This includes providing support, in the form of reasonable adjustments, for people who have a disability or a long-term condition and face barriers applying to us.

You must contact us as early as possible in the application process. We recommend contacting us at least 15 working days before the competition closing date to ensure we can provide you with the most suitable support possible.

You can contact us by emailing engbio@iukbc.org.uk

Data Sharing Privacy Notice
Before starting an application to this competition please read Innovate UK Business Connects Privacy Notice to understand how we will use your data: https://iuk-business-connect.org.uk/privacy-policy/

Next steps

After your application is received via Good Grants it will be assessed. You will be contacted if your application is either successful or unsuccessful. Unsuccessful projects will not receive specific feedback on their application.

Should your application be successful we will complete due diligence checks on the project partners using the information submitted in your application.

To start your project, you will have to sign a Grant Offer Letter via Good Grants. You will also be required to submit a 'New supplier form' to ultimately enable payments to be processed and a redacted copy of your bank details. Your Grant Offer Letter will show the start date for your project, do not start your project before this date. Any costs incurred before your start date cannot be claimed as part of your grant. During project set up the lead and business will be required to complete a short impact-focused baseline questionnaire.

You will be invited to a mid-term online meeting to support you during your project and to discuss your progress.

At the end of your project, you will be invited to an online meeting to support you with your next steps. You will be required to complete a final report and a short impact survey.