

Defence and National Security Innovation Exchange (iX): Funding, Partnerships and Innovation Challenges

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. What is the Defence and National Security iX programme?

The Innovation Exchange (iX) programme connects challenge holders with innovators who can provide solutions to technical challenges within the defence and national security supply chain. Challenge holders define a problem, and Innovate UK Business Connect identifies and matches potential solution providers.

2. Who can become a challenge holder?

Challenge holders must be revenue-generating businesses operating within the national security or defence supply chain and be based in one of the three pilot regions:

- Northwest Regional Defence and Security Cluster
- South Central Region
- Eastern Region

Pre-revenue businesses are not eligible to submit challenges.

3. Who receives the funding?

Funding is awarded to the solution provider, not the challenge holder. Selected solution providers can receive between £30,000 and £60,000 to demonstrate their solution.

4. How much funding is available?

Successful solution providers can receive between £30,000 and £60,000 for a project lasting up to three months.

5. Are projects funded at 100%?

Yes. Funding can cover 100% of eligible project costs.

6. What are eligible project costs?

Eligible project costs follow Innovate UK and UKRI funding guidance. Applicants are advised to review the guidance available on the [UKRI website](#).

7. Can companies outside the defence supply chain participate?

Organisations not currently in the defence or national security supply chain cannot submit challenges, but they can apply as solution providers once challenges are published.

8. Do solution providers need to be based in the pilot regions?

While challenge holders must be based within the pilot regions, solution providers can come from anywhere in the UK.

9. What types of organisations can submit challenges?

Any organisation within the national security or defence supply chain can apply, including:

- Prime contractors
- Tier 1 suppliers
- Tier 2 suppliers
- Other supply chain companies

The programme is not restricted to large organisations.

10. What types of challenges are not eligible?

Challenges are not eligible if:

- The organisation intends to solve the challenge internally.
- The challenge is primarily a technology push rather than a market or operational need.
- The challenge holder already knows which supplier they intend to work with.

11. How does the application process work?

Challenge holders submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) outlining:

- Organisation details
- Eligibility information
- A description of the challenge
- Why the challenge is important
- The expected impact of solving it

Innovate UK Business Connect then reviews submissions and works with selected organisations to refine and publish their challenge.

12. What is the deadline to submit a challenge?

The Expression of Interest deadline is **Friday 28 August at 5:00pm**. Applicants are encouraged not to wait until the last minute.

13. How are challenges assessed?

Applications are assessed using a portfolio approach considering:

- Alignment with defence and national security priorities
- Technology area
- Market sector
- Potential impact
- Level of support the challenge holder can provide

Applicants cannot appeal decisions, and individual feedback will not be provided for unsuccessful applications.

14. What support do challenge holders receive?

Innovate UK Business Connect will:

- Help define and scope the challenge
- Publish it on the iX platform
- Review and assess incoming solutions
- Support shortlisting and pitch selection
- Facilitate the project initiation process

The only cost to challenge holders is their time.

15. How does the pitching process work?

Following assessment of submitted solutions through the iX platform, shortlisted solution providers are invited to present:

- 20-minute pitch
- Up to 20-minute Q&A session

Challenge holders then select the preferred solution provider.

16. When will funded projects be completed?

Projects are expected to run for up to three months. Depending on project start dates, completion is likely to fall between February and May.

17. Will challenges be published on the iX platform?

Yes. Defence and national security challenges will be published through the Innovate UK iX platform (formerly KTN iX) and promoted through Innovate UK Business Connect networks and social channels. These will also be circulated to all regional defence and security clusters.

18. Will challenge holder identities be made public?

Usually, yes. However, for some sensitive national security challenges, the challenge holder's identity may remain anonymous until the pitch stage if it is deemed appropriate to do so.

19. Do solution providers need security clearances?

Not necessarily. Challenges are designed to focus on the underlying problem rather than classified information, and the programme actively seeks dual-use technologies from outside the defence or national security sectors.

20. How is Intellectual Property (IP) managed?

Existing IP held by solution providers is declared during the application process. If IP is generated as part of the development of a solution, any new IP arrangements between challenge holders and solution providers are managed directly between the parties and are not governed by Innovate UK Business Connect.

21. Is this programme part of the Dual Use Technology Innovation Programme (DUTIP)?

Yes. Funding for this pilot comes from the wider £20 million Dual Use Technology Innovation Programme allocated by Innovate UK.

22. What happens after a project is completed?

Future activity, including any follow-on opportunities, will be evaluated as part of the pilot programme. This is one of the areas being assessed during the pilot phase.

23. Do challenge holders need to be members of a Regional Defence and Security Cluster?

Membership is encouraged and will form part of the application process. The programme is being delivered in partnership with the regional defence and security clusters.

24. What role do the Regional Defence and Security Cluster Chairs play?

The cluster chairs are actively involved in, and supportive of the NS&D iX opportunity.

- Promoting the programme
- Engaging their memberships
- Supporting delivery of the pilot
- Providing feedback and lessons learned for future iX opportunities.

25. Does membership of organisations such as ADS, Make UK or the Society of Maritime Industries help?

These organisations are important sector partners and will help communicate opportunities. However, eligibility for their membership remains linked to the programme requirements and regional cluster involvement.

26. Can solution providers submit partial solutions?

Yes. Partial solutions to iX challenges once these are published, are accepted and can sometimes be combined with complementary solutions. Applicants can indicate on their application form whether the submission represents a partial solution.

27. Can solution providers collaborate with other organisations?

Yes. Collaboration between organisations to create stronger solutions has been successful in previous Innovation Exchange challenges, and collaborative approaches are encouraged where appropriate.

28. Where can applicants get presentation materials and additional information?

Presentation slides and post-event materials will be circulated to everyone who registered for the webinar.

29. Who should organisations contact for more information?

Regional contacts are available for:

- Northwest Region
- Eastern Region
- South Central Region

Challenge holders and solution providers are encouraged to contact the National Security and Defence team with any questions.

30. What success has the Innovation Exchange programme achieved so far?

Since launch, the programme has:

- Delivered over 300 Innovation Exchanges
- Received over 3,700 applications
- Generated almost 400 commercial outcomes
- Created more than £19 million in contract value
- Generated an estimated £107 million in business value

Historically, approximately one in every 1.4 Innovation Exchanges progresses to a trial or commercial contract.