



Innovate
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FOAK Builder: Programme Entry Expression of Interest – Applicant Questions

FOAK Builder: working towards climate tech first-of-a-kind deployment

Document information and relevant links

This document summarises the FOAK Builder competition and applicant briefing webinar and first drop-in session questions. Applicants should refer to the competition page on the Innovation Funding Service (IFS) for the full guidance and competition details.

To review the webinar recording, please visit the link below. Project-specific scope enquiries should be submitted to Innovate UK Customer Support (contact details below)

- [IFS competition information](#)
- [Competition webinar briefing recording](#)

About the FOAK Builder

What is the FOAK Builder?

The FOAK Builder is an Innovate UK initiative supporting climate technology companies approaching their first commercial-scale deployment. It provides expert advice, technical assistance, mentoring and potential access to grant funding (Phase 2).

What does FOAK mean?

FOAK means First-of-a-kind. For this programme, it refers to an innovative technology, process or configuration that has not previously operated successfully at commercial scale.

What is the aim of the programme?

The programme aims to help companies progress their FOAK projects towards Final Investment Decision (FID) by addressing technical, commercial, financial, project development, team and governance barriers.

Is the programme for early-stage technologies?

No. It is intended for late-stage climate technologies at TRL 7 or above. It is not designed for early-stage R&D, initial pilots or small-scale technology demonstrations.

What themes are covered?

Projects must focus on:

- sustainable fuels
- grid technologies
- engineered carbon removals

- or low-carbon material production and recycling.

What support will successful competition applicants receive?

Successful applicants will receive a dedicated FOAK mentor, a project diagnostic and development plan, funded expert technical assistance, investor and insurer input, and access to the wider FOAK support network. They may also be invited to apply for Phase 2 grant funding.

What are the two phases of the programme?

Phase 1 provides mentoring, planning and tailored technical assistance. Eligible companies with an agreed FOAK Development Plan and FOAK Support Plan may then be invited to apply for a Phase 2 development expenditure grant (DevEx). An invitation does not guarantee funding.

Will there be a Phase 3?

There is currently no confirmed Phase 3. The FOAK Builder pilot has two phases. Any future rounds or expansion of the programme would be subject to business case approval, so applicants should rely on the guidance published for any future competition.

Eligibility and applications

Who can apply?

The lead applicant must be a UK-registered micro, small or medium-sized enterprise (SME).

Can organisations collaborate or use subcontractors in Phase 1?

No. Phase 1 is for a single applicant only and subcontractors are not allowed.

When does the competition close?

Applications must be submitted by 11:00am on 5 November 2026.

Can a company apply again if it is unsuccessful in phase 1?

Further rounds are subject to business case approval, so applicants should rely on the guidance published for any future competition.

Does a company need to have funding in place before applying?

Phase 1 does not provide cash funding to the applicant. It provides in-kind technical assistance to help develop the FOAK project and progress it towards Final Investment Decision. Applicants should therefore have sufficient resources to participate fully in the programme and a credible route to financing and delivering

the wider FOAK project. Applicants do not need to have secured the full cost of the FOAK deployment when applying.

Can companies with existing customers or revenue apply?

Yes. The competition is not limited to pre-revenue companies. Applicants must demonstrate that they meet the competition scope, eligibility requirements and project maturity criteria.

Is creating new jobs required?

No. There is no specific requirement to create new jobs, although applicants should explain the wider economic benefits and potential impact of their project.

Can an SME substantially owned by a large company apply?

Applicants must meet the competition's SME eligibility requirements. Ownership structures may affect SME status, so applicants should review the guidance and seek clarification where necessary.

How are linked or partner enterprises treated for SME status?

SME eligibility is assessed in line with the standard SME definition, including consideration of linked and partner enterprises where applicable.

How are partner or linked organisations considered when assessing SME eligibility?

Applicants must meet the competition's SME eligibility requirements. Where an organisation has partner or linked enterprises, employee numbers and financial information may need to be considered when assessing SME status. Ownership, voting rights, board appointments and shareholder agreements may also be considered when determining control. Organisations that do not meet the SME eligibility requirements would not be eligible for Phase 1 support. If you are unsure how the SME definition applies to your organisation's ownership structure, please contact Innovate UK Customer Support for guidance before submitting your application. Please also review the European Commission's definition on SMEs [here](#).

Can applications be amended after submission?

Applications can only be amended if they are reopened before the competition deadline. Any reopened application must be reviewed and resubmitted before the deadline to be considered.

Will unsuccessful applicants receive feedback?

Applicants will receive assessor feedback in line with Innovate UK's standard competition process.

Technology readiness and project maturity

Does the company need to have completed a pilot before applying?

Applicants must provide evidence that the underlying technology is at TRL 7 or above, including real-world demonstration of a prototype at or near full scale. The competition is not intended for early R&D, initial pilots or small-scale demonstrations.

What if the FOAK uses a different engineering configuration from the TRL 7 demonstration?

Some additional integration risk may be acceptable where the underlying technology has been demonstrated. Eligibility will depend on the nature and scale of the change, so applicants should submit a formal scope enquiry with evidence of the prior demonstration and proposed configuration.

What is the required FEL stage?

Applicants must demonstrate that the FOAK project is at or beyond FEL Stage 1 across its technical, commercial, financial, project management and team components. Applicants should provide evidence of maturity across these areas.

Can a modular FOAK consist of a portfolio of sites rather than one site?

Potentially, but this will depend on the proposal and whether it fits the competition themes and objectives. Applicants should explain how the portfolio functions as a coherent first commercial deployment and submit a formal scope enquiry.

Scope

Must the FOAK deployment be in the UK?

Yes. The programme is seeking FOAK projects that will be built in the UK.

Are battery chemicals, agri-tech, food side-streams or similar technologies in scope?

Projects must fit one of the four published themes: sustainable fuels; grid technologies; engineered carbon removals; or low-carbon material production and recycling. Technology-specific questions should be submitted as formal scope enquiries.

Do applicants need to have a site secured before applying?

No. Applicants should demonstrate appropriate progress towards site identification and project development. Site identification and related development activities may form part of the support provided where they represent a barrier to progressing the FOAK project towards Final Investment Decision (FID).

Is site finding in scope?

Yes. Site identification can be included where it is a barrier to progressing the FOAK project.

Can a customer or host site contribute design input to the project?

The company should explain the requirement in its application. If selected, the need can be considered through the FOAK Development and Support Plan. It may potentially be addressed through technical assistance or a future Phase 2 development grant, but the Phase 2 eligibility and requirements are to be confirmed.

Support, funding and reporting

What funding is available through Phase 1?

Phase 1 provides in-kind technical assistance rather than a cash grant. If a FOAK Support Plan is agreed, applicants can receive up to £315,000 of in-kind support to help develop their project towards Final Investment Decision (FID).

Does Phase 1 in-kind support count towards Minimal Financial Assistance (MFA)?

Yes. The in-kind support provided through Phase 1 is awarded as Minimal Financial Assistance (MFA). Applicants will be asked to declare any previous MFA or De Minimis support received during the applicable period, and applicants will be ineligible if the award would cause them to exceed the MFA limit.

Can Phase 1 in-kind support be used for FEED work?

Potentially. FEED-related work could be supported directly or through advice to help complete it. The exact route would be determined through the diagnostic and FOAK Support Plan.

Can successful Phase 1 companies automatically access Phase 2 funding?

No. Only applicants successful at Phase 1 and with an agreed FOAK Development Plan and FOAK Support Plan can be invited to apply for Phase 2. An invitation to apply does not guarantee grant funding.

Will Phase 2 fund the FOAK build or capital equipment?

No. The purpose of the Phase 2 development expenditure grant is to unlock investment in the larger FOAK project, not to fund the whole build. Eligible costs are expected to follow the normal research, development and innovation funding rules, including the usual constraints on capital expenditure.

What are the reporting and participation requirements?

Successful applicants will be expected to work collaboratively with Innovate UK and the Technical Assistance Supplier, contribute staff time and other resources, and provide information required to develop and deliver their FOAK Development Plan and FOAK Support Plan. Further details of reporting and participation requirements will be provided to successful applicants

Will unsuccessful applicants receive any support?

Carbon Limiting Technologies expects to offer a lighter-touch diagnostic and development-planning session to unsuccessful companies.

Is match funding required?

Phase 1 does not provide a cash grant and instead offers in-kind support. Applicants should review the competition guidance for any future funding requirements associated with Phase 2.

Is the £10m-£100m capital raise range mandatory or indicative?

The programme is generally targeting projects pursuing significant capital investment in the region of £10 million to £100 million. However, applicants should focus on demonstrating that their project fits the programme objectives and can make meaningful progress towards Final Investment Decision (FID).

Can projects exceeding £100m apply?

Potentially. The £10m-£100m range reflects the typical target profile discussed during the briefing, but applicants with unusual circumstances should submit a formal scope enquiry.

Is there a minimum project value?

The published guidance does not specify a minimum project value. Applicants should demonstrate that the project is of an appropriate scale and maturity for the programme

Assessment and process**How are applications scored and weighted?**

Applications are assessed against the criteria published in the Innovation Funding Service (IFS). Applicants should ensure they fully address each question and provide all mandatory evidence and appendices.

Will applicants be interviewed or asked for further evidence?

Applicants who pass the written assessment stage will be invited to an in-person interview. The interview includes a presentation and questions from technical,



commercial and financial experts. Additional supporting evidence is required through the application appendices.

When will applicants receive decisions?

Written stage outcomes and interview invitations are expected on 2 December 2026, with final decisions communicated by 5 January 2027.

Contact and next steps

- Customer Support: support@iuk.ukri.org Tel: 0300 321 4357, Monday to Friday, 9:00am–12:00pm and 2:00pm–5:00pm.
- Drop-in clinics: 16, 23 and 30 October 2026 at 12:00pm. Registration uses the applicant briefing event link.