

## GUIDELINES FOR PROOF OF CONCEPT PROJECTS

**All applications must be submitted by 10:00 on Tuesday, 23 November 2021**

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### *Open Call for Projects*

This is an open call – please read the notes to understand the scope of HVB.

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### Table of Contents

1. Context.....	1
Description of the HVB Flexible Fund .....	2
Scope:.....	2
2. Eligibility Criteria for PoC Awards .....	3
Applicants: .....	3
Finances and duration: .....	3
3. PoC Application Process:.....	3
Application form: .....	3
Curriculum Vitae: .....	6
Letter of support:.....	6
Submission of applications and further information:.....	6
4. Evaluation process for applications .....	6
5. Notification of review results.....	7
6. Post-award administration .....	7
HVB Contracts and agreements.....	7
HVB Reporting.....	8
7. Data protection and usage.....	8
8. Conflict of interest guidance .....	8

### 1. Context

The High Value Biorenewables Network (HVB) is one of six Phase II BBSRC Networks in Industrial Biotechnology and Bioenergy (NIBB) funded for five years from January 2019.

HVB aims to:

- Promote discovery, development and application of bio-based chemicals, tools and platform technologies
- Facilitate partnership and knowledge transfer between UK academia and industry
- Provide inspirational leadership to the industrial biotechnology community in the UK and internationally

## Description of the HVB Flexible Fund

HVB's Flexible Fund provides a range of awards that support progression of research within the scope of the Network. The total fund value is £1.41M and we anticipate all funds will have been awarded by 2022. There are five types of award:

- **Proof of Concept (PoC)** – for research at TRL 1-4: industry support in terms of cash or in-kind contribution is important, and collaborative, cross-disciplinary projects are preferred. PoC projects should aim to do excellent research with impact.
- **Business Interaction Voucher (BIV)** – these are smaller awards for a defined piece of work undertaken by an academic with an industrial partner who should co-fund the project with cash or in-kind contributions. Awards should encourage further collaboration and develop partnerships.
- **Progression Fund (PF)** – for successful HVB projects close to impact we may invite applications to the Flexible Funds for a funded project extension to enable feasibility studies, for example, demonstration of scale-up or market analysis.
- **Enterprise Fellowships (EF)** – for an individual to pursue a concept to enable rapid progress towards commercialisation.

HVB assists its members in developing applications to the Flexible Fund. Specifically, funding calls are supported by research-driven workshops, consortium building meetings and networking and annual meetings. In addition, the Network Managers are available to discuss ideas and provide guidance on applications. However, we cannot provide advice on which partners you should use to build your consortium.

### Scope:

All projects must be in scope of the HVB Network:

*HVB focuses on the discovery, development and utilisation of high value (>\$10/kg), low volume (<1000 metric tonne per annum) bio-based chemicals, tools and platform technologies. HVB embraces a broad scope of biorenewable feedstocks to support innovation in new and existing products across a range of industry sectors.*

Applications which have algae as the biological feedstock for a high value biorenewable can be considered by HVB; if such applications are recommended for funding, Algae-UK would be notified of the funding intention. It is unlikely that HVB will fund *research* on algae – such as development of algae production platforms or pathway engineering in algae.

HVB promotes excellent industrial biotechnology research with a strong influence of translational research bridging the gap to application, enabling work to progress to Technology Readiness Levels three to four where it connects with the capabilities of BioPilotsUK or another translational or business development activity.

In addition, all projects must be relevant to industrial biotechnology (IB) as defined by the BBSRC:

*IB is a set of cross-disciplinary technologies that use biological resources for producing and processing materials and chemicals for non-food applications. The resources include plants, algae, marine life, fungi and micro-organisms. The feedstocks include renewable materials such as crop residue, animal wastes, food and municipal wastes and perennial biomass.*

BBSRC has included the production of anti-microbial compounds and biopharmaceuticals in IB too (see <http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/funding/priorities/ibb-industrial-biotechnology/>).

**Outside of Scope:** Projects that are focused on producing or testing animal feed are not within scope, nor are projects focussing on a single human disease or projects that simply use plant or

biological extracts. We do not fund screening projects – we are looking for projects that further develop research outputs along the technology readiness levels.

**If you want to check the scope of your project** – please submit your project abstract to the Network Manager at least two weeks before the advertised closing date.

## 2. Eligibility Criteria for PoC Awards

### Applicants:

**Principal Investigator:** funding is available for HVB members who are eligible to receive BBSRC funding: this is defined in the BBSRC's grants guide: <https://bbsrc.ukri.org/documents/grants-guide/>. All applicants must be HVB members **at the time of application**. There is no limit to the number of PoC awards an individual may hold.

**Co-investigators** may be named. If they are from a different institute to the PI, please discuss how you will manage the finances before applying for funds.

**Research Co-investigators** may be named on the application, but they need to be based at the same institution as the PI or Co-I. A Research Co-investigator is a postdoctoral research assistant or equivalent (being ineligible to be either principal or co-investigator in their own right) who has made a substantial intellectual contribution to the formulation and development of the project, and will be engaged with the ensuing research. This status can be used by the postdoctoral research assistant as evidence of their involvement in acquiring research funding.

**Industry Partner:** preference is given to projects with some financial support from industry; this can be a cash contribution or in-kind funding. Industry partners and support should be from a company with a research or manufacturing base.

**Please note:** principal applicants who receive HVB Flexible funds to support staff costs would not be eligible to receive support under the BBSRC *New Investigator* scheme.

### Finances and duration:

Applications are invited for awards of up to £50,000 at 100% Full Economic Cost (FEC) (i.e. £40,000 at 80% FEC). We may consider projects that do not have industrial support but these will be exceptional.

No more than 20% of costs may be subcontracted; however, facility access charges may be included. Equipment is not an eligible cost.

PoC projects can be any duration up to 12 months.

## 3. PoC Application Process:

There are three documents required for an application:

- Application form which includes the case for support – please submit this as a Word document (not pdf)
- CV – pdf format is acceptable
- Letter of support – pdf format

### Application form:

Applicants should download and complete the Word document application form: this is designed to capture specific details of the project and for successful projects will form the basis of the final report. The application form requests the following information:

### 1. Project title

*A title for all projects is required.*

### 2. Applicant details and Co Applicant(s):

*Name, position, university, e-mail and telephone. A contact person in your Finance / Research Office is also required. When the offer letter is issued, this contact will be copied into the email.*

*Additional co-applicants may be added as required as well as research co-applicants.*

#### Industrial partner(s) details

*Name, position, e-mail, telephone and company. In addition, please supply information on the geographical base, company registration number, the URL for the company website, employee numbers and annual turnover for the last financial year.*

### 3. Public summary of project

*You should describe your project in a manner that can be readily understood by a lay audience. Do not include any confidential information as this information will be used by HVB and may be used by the BBSRC for public dissemination if the award is funded.*

*This section should clearly state **how the project fits within an industrial biotechnology context** because BBSRC will use this information to check that the proposal matches their criteria for NIBB funding. The summary is also used to check with reviewers that they are able to review the proposal.*

### 4. Project dates

*Please give reasonable estimates of start dates, allowing time for awards to be made and any necessary paperwork to be completed. You will have up to three months to start the project from the award of the grant. It is anticipated that the offer letters will be sent by the middle of February 2022. **If you are unable to meet this timescale please do not apply for funds.***

### 5. Project finances

*Complete the table on the form – detailing costs at 100% FEC and 80% FEC. All awards will be made at 80% FEC with the host University responsible for providing the 20% contribution. If there are co-applicants from a different institution, please discuss how the 20% shortfall will be funded before you submit the application.*

*Write a brief justification of costs in the box below. PoC funds are not available to support PhD students unless it is for a short period (depending on their stipend conditions) and they must be under an employment contract for this work. PoC projects cannot be used as part of a PhD, incorporated into results used in a PhD or used to top-up or extend a PhD. You may not fund researchers currently working full-time on BBSRC projects. Equipment purchases are not eligible costs.*

*Please describe the contribution from the industrial partner – explain how the figure for the total contribution was calculated. For example, include cash contributions or outline how in-kind figures are calculated (daily rates for staff involved, travel costs etc).*

*Applicants are asked to declare whether they have any association or financial interests with the company named in the application. The Conflict of Interest section of this document (page 9) will help you to identify any associations that should be declared.*

### 6. Other NIBB2 Funding

Please detail any other applications that you have pending or if you have any funded projects. You are also required to declare if you have previously had PoC funding from any BBSRC NIBB (including Phase I) for any research related to the current application. Please explain why further PoC funding is required.

### 7. Technology Readiness Levels

You need to assess your application's current level and what level you hope the funding will enable. If your project is funded, you will be asked to determine the level after the research has been completed. For the BBSRC's definition of TRL 1-5, please see our website:

<https://www.highvaluebiorenewables.net/funding/>

### 8. Case for Support (up to 5 pages)

Text should be at least single-spaced, 11 point Arial (or equivalent) with a 2 cm margin. Please use the specified headings so that your proposal can be reviewed against the evaluation criteria. Please ensure you cover all aspects, as marks cannot be given if information is missing. References cited and figures should be contained within the five page limit.

Specified headings for case for support:

- **Context and details of the work proposed**

*(quality of science = 40% of the total marks)*

Describe background context for the work and any data you have to support your project. Explain what you aim to do and achieve in the project. You need to list any references cited. If you are relying on unpublished work to make your case, you need to provide enough evidence for reviewers to assess your claims. If you are unable to provide data because it is too confidential, your project is unlikely to be funded as we have to be able to assess the scientific quality. If this is the case, please contact us before submitting your application and we will see what we can do to assist you.

- **Relevance to HVB scope**

*(relevance to scope = 10% of total marks)*

Explain what makes the project relevant to HVB and identify the IB elements.

- **Ethical, economic, environmental and social impact considerations**

*(economic, environmental and social impact consideration = 10% of total marks)*

Does the proposed work have any ethical implications? If so, please describe how these will be dealt with. What are the economic, environmental and social impacts of the proposed research, explain how you will identify and deal with these aspects. It is highly unlikely that there will be no considerations in this section.

- **Project management**

*(project management = 10% of total marks)*

Please indicate how the project will be managed: describe the roles of all partners on the project; list and describe milestones and deliverables, within a timescale. Please identify critical milestones and explain risk mitigation strategies.

- **Impact**

*(industrial relevance and pathway to impact = 25% of total marks)*

Please describe the impact of your project, paying particular attention to the industrial partner(s) or industries you will or hope to engage with. There is no need to attach letters of

*support from industry – evidence of support should be indicated through financial (cash or in-kind) contributions.*

*Describe your pathway to impact – how you will achieve the impact you describe.*

### **Curriculum Vitae:**

A two-page CV of the principal applicant should be submitted. This CV should include details of relevant publications.

### **Letter of support:**

A letter of support from the applicant's University is required confirming both acceptance of the 80% FEC rate and that the applicant is eligible to receive BBSRC funding. Please do ensure your letter of support covers both these aspects, failure to do so will prevent your application from being reviewed.

Please do not send any additional documents, support from industry should be covered in the application and demonstrated by in-kind funding or cash contributions.

### **Submission of applications and further information:**

Applications should be submitted by e-mail to: [hvb-network@york.ac.uk](mailto:hvb-network@york.ac.uk); all applications will be acknowledged within three working days.

**Deadline: All applications must be submitted by 10:00 on Tuesday, 23 November 2021**

For further information about the PoC funds, please email the Network [hvb-network@york.ac.uk](mailto:hvb-network@york.ac.uk)

## **4. Evaluation process for applications**

### **i. Initial checks**

The Network Manager will check all applications to ensure they are complete. If there are any minor problems, the Network Manager will contact the applicant to request further information or changes, however if this cannot be easily remedied (within three working days) the application will not be reviewed – please ensure you are contactable (or nominate a colleague) during this time.

### **ii. Scope checks – industrial biotechnology context and relevance to HVB**

Applications will be checked for scope; if a proposal is out of scope, a reviewer may be asked to consider the proposal and see if there are any features that would bring the proposal into scope. The BBSRC will have the final decision on scope.

### **iii. Conflict of interest checks**

Details of applicants together with the public summary will be circulated to the reviewers to check for any conflicts of interest.

### **iv. Review process**

For each application, two reviewers will be selected from the HVB Management Board (MB) and Executive Group (EG). Details of the current Board membership can be found on our website: <https://www.highvaluebiorenewables.net/about-us/>. Review scores and notes are submitted to the Network Manager before the review meeting. If there are large discrepancies in the scores, a third reviewer may be sought. If the third reviewer agrees with one of the original reviewers, the review panel may decide to adjust scores or may disregard scores that do not follow the scoring guidance. Quorum for the review meeting is the Chair plus 5. If a reviewer cannot attend the meeting, the Chair will accept written reviews.

During the review meeting, all applications are discussed (anyone who has a conflict of interest will recuse themselves from the room for discussion of that particular application) and final scores are awarded.

Following review of all applications, a ranked list is used to select applications for funding. Those applications recommended for funding will be submitted to the BBSRC for their final approval.

Review criteria for PoC projects are as follows:

Criteria	% contribution to total score	Threshold level required:
Quality of science and technology application	40	24
Relevance of application to HVB scope	10	6
Industrial support and pathway to impact	25	15
Economic, environmental and social impact consideration	10	6
Project management	10	6
Value for money	5	3

For each individual criterion, a threshold score of 60% is required to be considered for funding.

At the review panel's discretion, an application could be part-funded, particularly if it is considered that a critical milestone needs to be achieved to fulfil the project. If this is the case, the Network Manager will contact the applicant to discuss the funding offer.

## 5. Notification of review results

Following the review process, HVB will update the BBSRC's NIBB database with details of all applications to the funding call. HVB will request BBSRC's funding approval for the projects we have shortlisted. Once funding approval has been granted, the PI applicant will be notified.

Unsuccessful applicants will be informed promptly and the Network Manager may pass on specific feedback if the review panel makes this available. We will not offer comprehensive feedback on proposals submitted. Re-submission of proposals is permitted providing the case for support clearly outlines the changes made to the application, advice should be sought from the Network Manager on how to format re-submissions.

It is anticipated that all Principal Investigators will be notified of the outcome of their application before mid-February 2022.

## 6. Post-award administration

### HVB Contracts and agreements

The University of York will issue a simple contract for the awardee, assigning all rights to the awardee's University. Projects may not start until this contract has been signed. Projects must start within 3 months of the date on the offer letter and the actual start date must be confirmed by email to the Network Manager. Funds must be spent as detailed on the application; virement of funds will not be permitted.

Before a project can start, projects with multiple applicants or industry partners must consider whether a collaboration agreement is required for the project. If required, collaboration

agreements must be in place before the project starts and this status should be confirmed by email to the Network Manager.

### **HVB Reporting**

At the end of the project, the Principal Applicant will complete a final report form which includes a case study template and ask their finance department to complete the expenditure statement form and prepare an invoice. All three items must be emailed to [hvb-network@york.ac.uk](mailto:hvb-network@york.ac.uk) within six weeks of the agreed end date. There are no alternatives to this reporting process.

Final project reports are checked by the Network Manager and approved by the HVB Executive Group; summaries of the reports are provided to the Management Board. We will produce a case study slide for each HVB Flexible Fund project – this will be checked with the PI and will be published on the HVB website and used in our communications materials.

HVB does not require receipts to be submitted but these must be kept by the host institution as they may be required for possible future audits. The grantee's host institution must follow their standard procedures for financial accounts.

It should be noted that funds are paid by the BBSRC to the University of York in quarterly arrears, therefore invoices could take up to six months to pay.

## **7. Data protection and usage**

Copies of applications to the HVB Flexible Fund are made available to the HVB evaluators (members of the HVB Management Board and Executive Group), who use information provided in the application for processing the proposal, the award of any consequential grant, and for the payment, maintenance and review of the funds. All information submitted is held in strictest confidence; the MB all sign a Management Board Agreement that requires their confidentiality.

Information on all applications is added to the BBSRC's database. BBSRC use this information for research related activities, including but not limited to, transfer of funds, statistical analysis in relation to evaluation of the BBSRC NIBB, study of trends and policy and strategy studies.

To meet the Research Councils' obligations for public accountability and the dissemination of information, details of successful Flexible Fund awards may also be made available on the Research Councils' websites and other publicly available databases, and in reports, documents and mailing lists.

## **8. Conflict of interest guidance**

i) For Reviewers:

In cases of conflict of interest for reviewers, there are specific systems in place to safeguard the review process. Any reviewer with a conflict of interest will declare it and will not participate in the review of that application and during the review panel they will leave the room. They may be present for the final discussion of the ranked list (unless they are a named applicant on the application).

In addition, reviewers may declare a conflict of interest if they consider the area of research to be too close to their own research. In this case, they may recuse themselves from review and all discussions of the project.

Examples of a conflict of interest include:

- Employed by the same institution as the applicant(s)



- Actively involved in research collaborations with the applicants(s)
- Working closely with the applicant(s), for example as a co-author or PhD Supervisor, or has worked closely in the last 4 years
- Holding a current position on the governing body of or an honorary position within the institution(s) of the applicant(s)
- In receipt of personal remuneration in excess of £5,000 per annum from the applicant's organisation
- Personal/family relationship with the applicant(s)

ii) For Applicants:

All PI or CoI need to declare any conflicts of interest with the named company. This information should be added to the application form under Section 5, Finances.