

Proof of Concept (PoC) Funding - Guidance

1. What is Proof of Concept (PoC) funding?

Proof of Concept (PoC) funds are to encourage and support collaborations between academia and industry within the remit of the i-NutriLife Hub. The i-NutriLife Hub is one of six Hubs funded by BBSRC in 2022 as part of the Open Innovation Research Club (OIRC) on Diet and Health.

The PoC funds will help pump-prime collaborative research projects of industry relevance that could lead to:

- A longer term relationship
- A larger funding application
- Commercial translation
- New research technology transfer projects

2. How much PoC funding is available from i-NutriLife?

The maximum request for PoC funding is £100K. Funds will be awarded at 100% of the request. Funding requests can include directly incurred costs and directly allocated costs (NOTE: estates costs and indirect costs are NOT permitted). Because i-NutriLife Hub wishes to provide value for money, we encourage that directly allocated costs be limited to 20% of the total grant value. Funding is paid to the academic institution tackling a problem of industry relevance. Matching industry contribution to funding (cash or in-kind) is required (i.e. if you are awarded £80K industry must provide matched funding of £80K). Applicants must provide details of this in the application form, specifying the type of support.

3. Who is eligible to apply for PoC funding?

Funding is available to applicants who are eligible to receive BBSRC funding.

PoC funding should involve UK-based industry partners where there is benefit to the UK research base and the UK economy. In exceptional circumstances, where there is not a UK company to exploit the research, PoC funding may be awarded to work with an overseas partner company, noting that in such a circumstance the application should provide a clear justification for working with an overseas partner company as well as outline how the project will lead to building international collaborations and will be taken forward leading to inward investment and benefit the UK.

Applications from ECRs or with strong ECR involvement and involving SMEs are encouraged.

4. What activities will the PoC funding support?

Funds will support collaborative research projects of industry relevance for a duration of **up to 12 months**. PoC funds are not available to support PhD students and PoC projects cannot be used as part of a PhD thesis or used to top-up or extend a PhD studentship. Stipends and fees of MSc/PhD students cannot be covered by PoC funds. Researchers already working full-time on BBSRC-funded project(s) cannot be supported by PoC funds. Equipment purchase is not eligible under the PoC awards. The funding should be used for research to pump-prime specific (future) grant submissions in response to national and international calls. The work must be relevant to the remit of the i-NutriLife Hub and the Hub funders. BBSRC is the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council and has a remit focused upon the non-clinical biosciences. BBSRC primarily funds research that explores a biological question or which applies bioscience or biotechnology to a challenge or opportunity. Collaborative R&D proposals supported by BBSRC tend to be pre-competitive in nature and seek to offer benefits to an industry or sector, rather than being focused solely upon developing or demonstrating a product for a specific business. Projects seeking to undertake activities at higher Technology Readiness Levels may be better suited to Innovate UK.

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Project costs: The i-NutriLife Hub aims to support primarily research activities (i.e. directly incurred costs) and encourages other costs (i.e. permitted directly allocated costs) to be limited to 20% of total project costs.

5. When are the funding calls?

There were funding calls in 2023 and 2024; there will be further funding calls in 2025 and 2026. The calls for applications for PoC funds will be advertised on the i-NutriLife Hub website as well as through other platforms to ensure wide coverage of the opportunity.

6. What is the application process?

The applicant should complete the application form available on the i-NutriLife Hub website (when a PoC call is open) or by request to the Hub Manager (i-NutriLife@soton.ac.uk). It is recommended, but not mandatory, that all applicants (including co-investigators and industry partners) join the i-NutriLife Hub. Membership is free and it only takes a few minutes to apply for Hub membership online.

Briefly, the application form asks for the following details:

- Applicant details
- Details about the industry partner(s)
- Project details
- Financial details (including details of the industry contribution)
- Any ethical or social issues
- A letter of support from the industry partner(s)

The completed application form, PI 2-page cv, letter of support and any other relevant documents should be emailed to the Hub Manager (i-NutriLife@soton.ac.uk). Receipt of your application will be acknowledged.

A 'Companies House' search of the industry partner(s) will be conducted.

The Hub Manager will check that the application meets the criteria and has the required information. Any omissions that cannot be easily remedied will result in the application being returned for revision and resubmission.

7. What will be the review process?

Applications will be peer reviewed. Funding decisions will be made by the i-NutriLife Hub Funding Committee (FC) based upon the peer review feedback. The FC will be composed of representatives from the Hub membership including industry; we have a process to avoid any conflicts of interest. The Chair of the FC (i-NutriLife Hub Lead) will review the award recommendations prior to their submission for approval by BBSRC.

Criteria for assessment will include:

- Quality of the science
- Relevance of the application to the remit of the i-NutriLife Hub
- Relevance to the funding call (if a specific theme has been set)
- Compelling industry relevance
- Potential for building long-term relationships and for future funding
- Feasibility within the budget and time allocation
- Opportunity for early career investigators (ECRs)
- Involvement of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) as industry partners
- Value for money

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8. How and when will the award be paid?

The successful applicant, co-applicant(s) and industry partner(s) will join the i-NutriLife Hub (apply for Hub Membership). They will agree a start date and need to have a signed agreement in place prior to the project commencing. IP and collaboration agreements will be drawn up by the respective partnering organisations (academia and industry) and the Hub Manager will require evidence that these are in place before releasing funds.

A formal offer letter (including award 'Terms and Conditions') will be issued by the University of Southampton to the successful applicant.

A final expenditure claim must be submitted within **one month of the project ending** as part of the Project Completion Report. The Project Completion Report template will be provided by the Hub Manager.

Funds will be transferred from the University of Southampton to the PI's institution. This will be detailed in the Award Letter.

9. What reporting will be required?

A Project Completion Report (authorised by the industry partner for use in the public domain) including a final expenditure statement (authorised by the academic organisation) must be submitted within one month of the project ending and should be sent to the Hub Manager (i-NutriLife@soton.ac.uk).

Briefly, the Project Completion Report will include:

- Summary of project outcomes
- Detail of the main findings
- List of outputs e.g., papers, patents, new products or processes, prizes, collaborations
- Testimonial(s) from the industry partner(s)
- Future plans
- Financial details of the actual spend of the project

The i-NutriLife Hub Executive Group (EG) will review and approve all reports; conflicts of interest in this reviewing will be avoided.

The report will be used to create a case study available in the public domain (e.g., i-NutriLife Hub website and BBSRC publications).

The awardee must acknowledge the support of the BBSRC award **BB/X51231X/1** on papers and other relevant outputs.

Awardees will act as ambassadors for the science area represented by the i-NutriLife Hub by attending and contributing to events within relevant areas at the request of Hub Lead or the BBSRC.

A full audit trail must be in place for all incurred expenditure on the project. BBSRC will not expect to see this evidence, but it should be in place and can be checked if the Research Organisation is subject to a funding assurance visit.

10. What data protection and data sharing policies are in place?

Copies of applications will be made available to peer reviewers and to the i-NutriLife Hub Funding Committee in confidence.

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Applications may be shared with other Hubs where the application is considered more relevant to another Hub.

Administrative staff of the University of Southampton will use the information provided in the application for processing the proposal, the award of any funding, and reporting.

To meet BBSRC obligations for public accountability and dissemination of information, details of grants (including successful awards) may also be made available on the Research Councils' websites and other publicly available databases, and in reports, documents and mailing lists. BBSRC will use this information for research-related activities, including but not limited to, transfer of funds, statistical analysis in relation to evaluation of BBSRC OIRC, study of trends and policy and strategy studies.

11. Any questions?

Please e-mail the i-NutriLife Hub Manager: i-NutriLife@soton.ac.uk

