

Locally-led Innovation Accelerators delivered in  
partnership with DSIT, Innovate UK and City Regions



Innovate  
UK



West Midlands  
Combined Authority

## WEST MIDLANDS INNOVATION PROGRAMME 3.0 (2025-2026)

### Flexible Innovation Fund Application Guidelines

Thank you for your interest in applying for the West Midlands Innovation Programme (WMIP). WMIP is funded by the Innovate UK as part of the [West Midlands Innovation Accelerator](#). The programme addresses regional innovation capability and capacity challenges through supporting innovation activities in the region key clusters, promoting cross-sector innovation, and enhancing the region's innovation ecosystem.

#### Context

Building on the success of WMIP 1.0, which generated over £28m in additional GVA, and WMIP 2.0, which levered over £13.5m co-investment into WM innovation ecosystem, WMIP 3.0 will continue to stimulate R&D&I activities across the region, generate additional public and private investment into innovation, and contribute to the regional economic growth.

Led by the West Midlands Combined Authority, WMIP 3.0 aligns with the objectives of the WM Plan for Growth and supports Cluster Leadership activities through Cluster Innovation Partners (CIPs). The programme budget includes Flexible Innovation Fund dedicated for development and delivery of innovative collaborative interventions that address barriers to innovation in the West Midlands. WMIP Flexible Innovation Fund budgeted in 2025-2026 is £715,000. A minimum of six pilot projects will be funded during this phase of the programme.

WMIP 3.0 has its focus on the following objectives:

- Piloting and expanding cross-sector and demand-driven innovation projects aiming to build greater capacity and capability to innovate across the regional businesses base.
- Securing funding to expand successful projects and aiming to increase public and private R&D investment in West Midlands.
- Supporting projects that address significant societal needs, challenges on net-zero, and health inequalities.
- Demonstrating impact of innovation interventions developed and driven at the regional level on stimulating high-quality applied and translational R&D activities.
- Building region's reputation as the innovation champion and promoting its R&D strengths and networks globally to attract talent, partners, and investment.

## Flexible Innovation Fund Scope

This funding opportunity is specifically designed for ***piloting small-scale limited-term interventions that stimulate innovation activities that, in the longer term, demonstrate scalability at regional / national / international levels and will lead to sustained structural changes in the regional innovation ecosystem.*** The funding is not intended for continuous or 'business as usual' activities. The focus is on testing and improving a proof of concept, demonstrating scalability, and attracting co-investment as key objectives.

## Eligibility Criteria

Funding is available to organisations and consortia of WM innovation ecosystem stakeholders. To be eligible for funding, projects must meet the following criteria:

**1. Novel Interventions.** Projects must introduce new and innovative solutions and activities that address barriers to innovation.

**2. Alignment with Regional Objectives.** Project proposals must align with the [West Midlands Plan for Growth](#) and contribute to building Research, Development, and Innovation capacity within West Midlands regional clusters / industry sectors.

**3. Collaboration.** Projects should identify opportunities for collaboration within the West Midlands Innovation ecosystem.

Applicants must engage with one or more WMIP Cluster Innovation Partners (CIPs), who to develop and submit their proposals (please reach out to CIPs in good time before the application deadline). This engagement should be documented and demonstrated in the application.

The Cluster Innovation Partner role is to ensure that the proposals are aligned with the region's priorities, and that the applicants have engaged or are working collaboratively with other regional stakeholders in relevant industry sectors / organisations / support programmes across the West Midlands and are not proposing to duplicate existing activities or solutions.

WMIP Cluster Innovation Partners contacts are as follows:

- Aerospace – Andrew Mair, Midlands Aerospace Alliance  
[andrew.mair@midlandsaerospace.org.uk](mailto:andrew.mair@midlandsaerospace.org.uk)
- Professional & Financial Services & Supply Chain – Hilary Smyth-Allen, SuperTech [hello@supertechwm.com](mailto:hello@supertechwm.com)
- Creative Content Production & Gaming – Tim Luft, Create Central  
[tim.luft@createcentraluk.com](mailto:tim.luft@createcentraluk.com)
- Tech / Digital Economy – Naomi Nash, TechWM [naomi@techwm.com](mailto:naomi@techwm.com)
- HealthTech / MedTech – Emma Yeap, West Midlands Health Technology Cluster [emma@wmhtc.co.uk](mailto:emma@wmhtc.co.uk)
- Electric Light Vehicles & Battery Storage – Gareth Thomas, Warwick Manufacturing Group [gareth.thomas@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:gareth.thomas@warwick.ac.uk)

- Sustainability / Net Zero – Beck Collins, Sustainability West Midlands  
[Beck.Collins@swm.org.uk](mailto:Beck.Collins@swm.org.uk)
- Robotics & Autonomous Systems – Amir Hajiyavand, University of Birmingham  
[a.hajiyavand@bham.ac.uk](mailto:a.hajiyavand@bham.ac.uk)

**4. Scalability.** While we understand that innovative projects are high risk activities and may not always yield the expected results, the applicants must demonstrate they had given a considerable thought to potential follow-on funding sources and how their projects can be scaled at regional, national, or international levels.

**5. Project Duration.** Projects are expected to be completed within approximately 6 months; projects can have a shorter duration. The mandatory end date for WMIP 3.0 pilot projects is 31 January 2026.

**6. Budget.** Funding requested from WMIP cannot exceed £119,166 per project; a lesser amount can be requested. A minimum of six projects will be funded in this programme cycle from the WMIP Flexible Innovation Fund.

**7. Impact.** While all projects will be considered, the preference will be given to the projects aiming to catalyse sustained structural changes in the regional innovation ecosystem. Project evaluation and dissemination activities must be included into the project plan; projects should engage with stakeholders relevant for securing the project follow on co-investment.

**8. Deliverables.** Pilot projects are expected to contribute towards overall WMIP programme deliverables. Applicants can choose which outputs they will contribute towards. While applicants do not have to include co-investment as match into their budgets, the projects that leverage additional funding towards co-investment targets will be given preference. Outputs agreed with the Innovate UK for WMIP 3.0 include:

- Innovation support provided to 250 businesses
- creation of 22 jobs
- facilitation of 100 new collaborations
- delivery of 30 innovation events for 1500 attendees
- £4m in co-investment.

It is up to applicants to decide which outputs their project will contribute towards. While applicants do not have to include co-investment as part of their budget, additional funding will be contributing towards the WMIP programme overall targets, and so the projects leveraging co-investment will be given preference.

## Application Process

Completed application form, accompanied by separate files containing project budget, detailed project plan, and risk register, should be submitted to Valentina Barker, WMIP Assistant Delivery Manager, at [valentina.barker@wmca.org.uk](mailto:valentina.barker@wmca.org.uk).

**The deadline for WMIP 3.0 Flexible Innovation Fund applications is 5pm on Monday, 9<sup>th</sup> June 2025.** Any submissions received after this deadline may not be evaluated.

## Proposals Assessment and Grant Award

Applications scoring will be undertaken independently by members of the evaluation panel. The following guidelines will be applied to scoring:

Score	Meaning	Assessed as
0	Very Poor	Application section lacks information to make a judgment.
1	Poor	Application section has many weaknesses / most criteria not addressed.
2	Fair	Application section has some weaknesses and some criteria not addressed.
3	Satisfactory	All criteria addressed but with limited detail.
4	Good	All criteria addressed but with a few gaps in detail.
5	Excellent	All criteria addressed to a high standard.
6	Outstanding	All criteria addressed to an exceptional standard.

In line with the above criteria and scoring system, reviewers will use Appraisal Score Card to comment and score each proposal. A moderation meeting may be held to discuss any scoring variances. Scores will be summarised, and top six projects will be recommended for approval. Applicants for these projects will be required to provide financial information for WMCA due diligence checks (accounts for the last 3 financial years including Profit & Loss Statement). Funding will be awarded via a grant agreement, subject to satisfactory due diligence checks.

Successful pilot projects will be publicised and promoted to regional businesses on the [Business Growth West Midlands website](#); delivery partners engagement with this promotion will be required.

Unsuccessful applicants will be provided assessment summary and feedback on ways to improve their applications. In the event your application is unsuccessful, there may be other ways the WMCA can help support your idea. If you would like to discuss how WMIP team could further assist you, please contact us.

## Grant Funding Timeline

Call publication, assessment and key deliverable timescales are included below. Please note these are indicative and maybe subject to change:

Call publication	13 May 2025
Deadline for submissions	9 June 2025
Notification of awards	by 30 June 2025
Expected project commencement date	1 July 2025
Pilot projects funding hard stop	31 January 2026

## Contact

If you have any questions or require any additional information about West Midlands Innovation Programme or Flexible Innovation Fund please contact Valentina Barker, Assistant Delivery Manager, via [valentina.barker@wmca.org.uk](mailto:valentina.barker@wmca.org.uk).

We look forward to receiving your project proposals.