

FIRST CALL FOR PROPOSALS

ECME Mini Project Grant Awards

COVID-19 Response

1. Introduction

The ECME research centre, managed by Ulster University, is welcoming proposals from eligible enterprises for grant awards of up to £30,000 (inclusive of VAT) to support the strategic objectives of the centre. The awards will support initiatives that allow build on established capabilities, accelerate current research and technology development, or enhance emerging strategic priority areas. Projects that receive funding through the ECME Programme will allow industry and researchers to remain at the forefront of exploration and discovery and make meaningful contributions to the social, health, environmental and economic well-being of citizens across the eligible area.

COVID-19 is having a significant impact on the research and innovation community, both in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Scotland and internationally. ECME will invite proposals that align with the challenge areas identified by the World Health Organisation – See *Section 8 - Scope of Work and Deliverables*.

2. Background

The Eastern Corridor Medical Engineering Centre (ECME) is a collaborative research project focusing on improving cardiovascular health. It is a partnership between five leading academic research centres, Ulster University, Dublin City University, University College Dublin, University of the Highlands and Islands, Dundalk Institute of Technology and the Southern Health & Social Care Trust.

ECME is funded by the European Union's Interreg VA Programme which is managed by the Special EU Programmes body (SEUPB). The INTERREG VA Programme aims to create a more prosperous and sustainable cross-border region. The €283m Programme is one of 60 similar funding programmes across the European Union that have been designed to help overcome the issues that arise from the existence of a border. These issues range from access to transport, health and social care services, environmental issues and enterprise development.

Full details on the ECME Programme can be found on our website at: <https://www.ecme-research.com/>.

3. Purpose of the Mini Projects

The ECME centre will make grant awards to several industry collaborators to assist with the commercialisation of co-developed products and services which align to national and international response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This will be done through a competitive process to maximise the impact of the grant awards on sustainable economic and COVID-19 activity.

4. Qualifying Criteria including Eligible Area

Enterprises and organisations who wish to submit proposals as part of this call must be located within the EU's INTERREG VA area or be able to measure economic impact from the funded project within the eligible area. Details on territory covered as part of INTERREG VA can be found here: <https://www.seupb.eu/iva-overview>

5. Eligible Spending

The expectation is that the companies will be awarded a grant of up to £30,000 to cover their costs of input into the Mini Project. Anticipated eligible spend would be for the following:

- Consumables
- Instrumentation
- Travel and subsistence
- Staff time
- Sub-contractor costs e.g. prototyping
- Tailored training (dependant on prevailing COVID-19 restrictions)

All costs must be verifiable and must be in accordance with the programme rules on eligibility. Please click on the following link for further information.

https://seupb.eu/sites/default/files/styles/Joint_Programme_Docs/Programme%20Rules_Final_Version6_September2019.pdf

6. Working with the ECME Project

Operational Requirements for all bids are as follows.

i. Potential impact on COVID-19 Response

A key criteria in evaluation of the submitted proposals will be its potential to deliver measurable impact on the national and international response to COVID-19. Other impacts on the enterprise will be evaluated be that revenue, new product development,

process improvements or skills development. All impacts should be, where possible, quantifiable and measurable and this will form part of the final project evaluation conducted after the Mini Project has concluded. The recipient of funding will be required to provide details on how the project has impacted on their business in terms of increased revenue, new market opportunities, increase in profitability, new employment opportunities created etc.

ii. Deliverability

It is expected that all applicants have the necessary resources at hand to deliver on the Mini Projects objectives within the agreed timeframes and in accordance with the expectations of the ECME project management team and funders.

iii. Alignment with ECME project objectives

All funded proposals should align with the strategic and operational objectives of the ECME project. These include creating a cross border centre of research excellence within the field of cardiac healthcare technology and carrying out research and development activities in the projects' thematic areas. Additionally, ECME will grow the economy by improving the productivity and innovation capacity of the region by completing relevant joint research projects with companies in the eligible region. ECME will also be sustainable centre which will carry out follow-on research in the area of cardiac healthcare technology and meet the challenges of tomorrow as well as today. Successful projects should involve one or more of the project partners. This will be further defined once a grant award has been made but the expectation is that these awards will form part of a wider engagement with the ECME research programme.

iv. Project Length

It is our expectation that these projects should be completed within 12 weeks from the date of commencement, but this time period should be adjusted depending on the nature of the project and the evolving needs of the COVID-19 response.

v. Monitoring and Post Project Evaluation

All successful applications will make themselves available for monitoring calls via phone, interim reporting during the lifetime of the Mini Project and also complete a Post Project Evaluation. Records associated with the mini project will be held in accordance with the INTERREG Programme Rules.

7. Application Process

Only one application per organisation may be submitted. A full application pack and additional information is available at: www.ecme-research.com/mini-projects/

8. Scope of Work and Deliverables

Applications for grant awards under this call are expected to support the objectives of ECME's COVID-19 response and could, but not exclusively, address some of the following themes and challenges. Applications from outside the scope of these challenges areas that demonstrate innovative solutions to the developing need, are also encouraged.

- Development of Machine Learning algorithms that can assist in COVID-19 modelling.
- Use of clinical datasets to enhance decision making and improve patient care pathways with reference to COVID-19.
- The design and manufacture of PPE equipment for use by front line staff in the healthcare system dealing with COVID-19 patients.
- The development of rapid diagnostic tests for COVID-19.
- Development of technologies aligned with the national and international requirement for additional ventilator equipment.

9. Evaluation Process and Criteria for Selection

All applications will be evaluated by the ECME Management Board, SEUPB and an external advisor. The following criteria will be used in selection of the successful projects:

- Alignment to national and international objectives and challenge areas regarding COVID-19.
- Alignment to ECME's strategic objectives with regard knowledge expansion, economic impact, and sustainability.
- Ability of the project to deliver measurable impact (within the period of the award) to the understanding of, and response to, the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Evidence that the proposal delivers value for money for public expenditure.
- Evidence that the applicant has the resources to complete the project within the given timeframe and within the current restrictions in place due to COVID-19.
- Applications should build on established capabilities, accelerate current research and technology development, or enhance emerging strategic priority areas.
- Meet De Minimis Regulations. The award of grants through the ECME programme should be considered State Aid and as such all successful applicants need to comply with European Community De Minimis regulations. If you use the de minimis regulation you don't need to formally notify the aid to the European Commission or get prior approval, but you must comply with all of the conditions of the regulation. If you are going to use the de minimis regulation for State aid cover, you must be able to justify your decision, and you must understand the requirements of the regulation and be sure that you can meet them. Further information can be found here: <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/state-aid-rules-regulations-and-guidance>

10. Important Dates for this Call

- Deadline for submitting applications Friday 24th April 2020
- Evaluation period (indicative): Monday 27th April 2020 onwards
- Information to applicants (indicative) Friday 1st May 2020

11. Contact Details

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