

BIOCATNET Proof of Concept Guidelines

1. General Information

- 1.1 Funding is available to BIOCATNET members for short-term Proof-of-Concept (hereafter, PoC) projects. These projects are designed to stimulate collaborations between BIOCATNET members leading to further applications for funding.
- 1.2 The PoC awards will support short-term, precompetitive research projects and scoping exercises in order to de-risk future research and development projects, thereby increasing chances of success and opportunities for uptake of biocatalysis in industry. PoC awards will support high quality integrated research and development projects that bring together key academic and business components of the UK Industrial Biotechnology and Bioenergy community. Interactions can be either academic-only collaborations or academic and industrial collaborations but must be led by the academic partner. All projects will be expected to take into account the sustainability, social, economic and environmental aspects of the processes and products that are being developed.
- 1.3 Scope of the Network – BIOCATNET PoC projects must fall into one of the following categories. BIOCATNET will release targeted calls under these general schemes.
 - 1.3.1 Biocatalyst discovery and screening
 - 1.3.2 Biocatalyst development and optimisation
 - 1.3.3 Biocatalyst scale-up
- 1.4 **Principle applicants who receive BIOCATNET funding to support the staff costs of a post-doctoral research assistant (PDRA) will not be eligible to receive support under the BBSRC New Investigator scheme.** See [Section 3.13](#) of the BBSRC Grants guide for further details.

2. Funding eligibility

- 2.1 All applicants, whether eligible to receive funding or not, must be registered Members of BIOCATNET. Membership of BIOCATNET is by approval of the Network Management Board, subject to registration of an individual or organization on the BIOCATNET member database after completion of a valid Membership Application Form.
- 2.2 PoC projects must be led by a principle applicant who is a current Member of BIOCATNET and eligible for BBSRC funding. See BBSRC [Grants guide](#) for further details.
- 2.3 PoC projects should include at least one other partner in addition to the principle applicant. Partners other than the principle applicant do not need to be eligible for BBSRC funding.

- 2.4 Project costs incurred by partners not eligible to receive BBSRC funding will not be eligible for reimbursement under the BIOCATNET Proof of Concept funding scheme, other than as specified in section 2.5 and subject to the prior approval of the BIOCATNET Management Board.
- 2.5 BIOCATNET funding is only directly available to organisations and individuals belonging to such organisations who are eligible to receive BBSRC funding, but up to 20% of the total project value can be subcontracted to industry to buy a service or to an SME to facilitate involvement. Applicants who wish to subcontract part of the PoC project must detail why there is the requirement for subcontracting. See BBSRC [Grants guide](#) for further details on eligibility before submitting an application.
- 2.6 Applicants should indicate costs at 100% fEC (Submitted costs) on the application form. Project costs will be reimbursed a rate of 80% fEC. The awarded institution must cover the remaining 20% project costs.
- 2.7 The total costs for a single project should not exceed £100,000 (100% fEC).
- 2.8 Proposals with greater total costs may be considered where an exceptional case for funding can be made, but submission of such proposals must be agreed in advance by the Network Managers in consultation with the BBSRC.
- 2.9 BIOCATNET PoC funds may be considered *de minimis* aid. Applicants will provide affirmation on the application form that they understand the relevant regulations, and that they will not be in breach of *de minimis* aid rules by accepting PoC funding. For further information see <https://www.gov.uk/state-aid>.

3. Funding calls

- 3.1 The PoC funding calls will be targeted towards specific topics which will be linked to specific BIOCATNET Events. The topics for each meeting and subsequent PoC call will be decided upon by the BIOCATNET management board. The management board will periodically solicit suggestions for topics from the wider network membership.
- 3.2 The calls will be announced at the relevant BIOCATNET Event, and advertised via biocatnet.com and the usual BIOCATNET dissemination routes.
- 3.3 BIOCATNET is targeting two funding calls per year for the first four years of the network. Each funding call will have roughly £125,000 (100% fEC value) available to fund projects (this is only a guideline figure and the total amount awarded during each call may vary depending upon the type of project applications received – any increase in this figure will have to be ratified by a majority of the management board).

4. Application and Evaluation process and identification of conflicts of interest

- 4.1 Funding calls will be published via the BIOCATNET website (biocatnet.com). Applicants should request an application form along with all guidance documents from the Network Manager via email (biocatnet@manchester.ac.uk). Applicants will receive a unique identification number which should be quoted in all correspondence.
- 4.2 Completed application forms will be submitted in pdf format to Network Managers no later than 4 weeks after the call opens. The Network Managers will acknowledge receipt of completed application forms within 3 working days of receipt, and will hold all applications in confidence.
- 4.3 The applications will be initially reviewed by the Network Managers, who will categorise the applications into the relevant subthemes for review purpose; reject with feedback any ineligible or incomplete application forms; identify conflicts of interest.
- 4.4 The applications will then be reviewed by at least three additional MB members; the academic and industrial lead of the subtheme in question and the Network Director/Co-Director. Additional members of the management board may be brought in to assist in the review of applications that are outside the primary expertise of the Network Director/Co-Director and subtheme leaders.

4.5 Scoring Criteria

- 4.5.1 Applicants must complete all sections of the application form. Failure to complete the application form will result in the application being rejected with feedback by the Network Managers.
- 4.5.2 Any application that scores less than 60% for any of the sections will be rejected with feedback. Scoring is as follows.
- 4.5.3 **Project Background (scored out of 30 points)** – Applicants should describe:
 - 4.5.3.1 The relevant IB challenges that the project seeks to address and how the project will accomplish this.
 - 4.5.3.2 What is innovative about the proposed project and where relevant outline any prior experimental/technical evidence and explain how the previous results bridge to the proposed study.
 - 4.5.3.3 Provide an overview of the work plan, including the technical approaches and milestones. Applicants should attach a Gantt chart or similar highlighting major milestones and projecting a timeline for applications for further funding based on the outputs of the PoC project.
- 4.5.4 **Funding and Added Value (scored out of 10 points)** – Applicants will provide details of how this PoC funding will lead to further funding applications.

Applicants need to explain how these further funding applications would not be possible without conducting the proposed PoC project.

- 4.5.5 **Partner Details (scored out of 10 points)** – Applicants are to provide details on any partner organisation within the project. Explain the nature of the consortium and how this adds value to the application. Also, for any industrial partners please provide details of their financial contribution to the project.
- 4.6 **Conflicts of Interest** – Applicants must declare any potential conflicts of interest with members of the Management Board; the list of current MB members is available either upon request to the Network Manager or via biocatnet.com. Members of the Management Board reviewing applications will similarly declare conflicts of interest to the Network Managers upon receipt of a PoC Project application before reading the proposal.

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)

- 4.6.1 Conflicts of interest will be documented by the Network Managers and resolved as follows:

4.6.1.1 The identified member of the management board will not be allowed to review the application in question, during any review of said application the identified MB member may be asked to step out of the room during any face to face review/not be included in any communication of the application form via any form of electronic distribution

4.6.1.2 As the KTN is not eligible to apply for PoC funding BIOCATNET will employ impartial review by the Yvonne Armitage of the KTN who has indicated that she is willing to review specific applications where the conflict of interest cannot be resolved by implementing 4.6.1.1.

- 4.6.2 Members of the MB review panel will not be allowed to review their own applications, additionally members from the same institution as the applicant will not be allowed to review the application. In this case Yvonne Armitage will be asked to review the application along with any remaining neutral MB members.

- 4.7 Applicants will be informed of the outcome of their application no later than 6 weeks after close of call.
- 4.8 Funds will be allocated upon signature of the project agreement (contract). This contract will consist of: i) description of work (the application form), and ii) signature by the awarded institution of the grant offer letter issued by The University of Manchester on behalf of BIOCATNET.
- 4.9 Subject to the written approval of the Network Manager, the start of the grant may be delayed by up to 3 months from the start date shown in the offer letter, the duration of the grant remaining unchanged. The grant may lapse if it is not started within this period. The start of the grant may precede the start date shown in the offer letter, but must not be earlier than the date of the offer letter itself.
- 4.10 The final ranked list of applications will be approved and signed off by the Director/Co-Director, the Chair of the Management Board and the Network Managers.
- 4.11 BIOCATNET has provisions for bringing in external consultants; should the need arise BIOCATNET may ask for external review of applications if there is not the necessary expertise within the pool of internal reviewers/management board members.

5. Monitoring, Reporting and Payment of awards

- 5.1 The Network Managers will act as monitoring officers for all PoC projects and may request meetings to review progress during the lifetime of the project. Any projects longer than 6 months will be required to submit interim progress updates in a form to be agreed with the Network Managers at the point of signature of the contract. This typically will consist of a mid-term report.
- 5.2 All projects will be required to submit a report to the Network Managers no later than 2 calendar months after completion of the project. These reports must include: a financial summary from the awarded institution to indicate the actual incurred costs to the project; a public summary of outcomes of the project; a plan for exploitation and dissemination of the knowledge, including further funding. Subject to satisfactory completion, the final reports will be agreed and signed off by the Network Managers and Director or Co-director.
- 5.3 Only actual incurred costs will be reimbursed by PoC award. Any underspend will be reallocated back into the main PoC funds held by BIOCATNET and will assist in the funding of subsequent PoC applications.
- 5.4 Payment of funds will be made in arrears and only upon satisfactory completion of all reporting requirements imposed by BIOCATNET and the BBSRC, and only after BIOCATNET has received the funds from the BBSRC.

6. Data protection regulations

- 6.1 Copies of proposals will be made available to the BIOCATNET management board, unless there is an identified conflict of interest (see 4.6). All information submitted in the application form will only be used for the purpose of reviewing said application.
- 6.2 BIOCATNET management board members will be required to sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) before they are allowed to review PoC proposals.
- 6.3 Successful applicants are requested to provide a non-confidential abstract of their proposal which will be made publically available according to the [BBSRC's Data Sharing Policy](#), including via the Website (biocatnet.com) and the BBSRC.
- 6.4 BIOCATNET and the BBSRC may make publically available, alongside the non-confidential abstract, the PI and Institution/Organisation, identity of Industrial partners, the amount of the award, and the length of the project. Any other information divulged in the application form will be treated strictly confidentially by BIOCATNET, unless publically disclosed by the applicant.
- 6.5 Unsuccessful applications will be treated with strictest confidence by BIOCATNET.
- 6.6 Projects will abide by the BBSRC's Data Sharing Policy.
- 6.7 To facilitate dissemination of network activities BIOCATNET may invite project partners to present their results at future network events.