Collaborative Networks Programme

Funding is available up to £250,000

Collaborative Network Programme
Application Guidance Notes
Digital ICT Expression of Interest Call

1. Network Composition
Each network must consist of a minimum of four Northern Ireland companies. Beyond that networks can have representation from public sector organisations, academic institutes, the voluntary sector and organisations/companies outside of Northern Ireland.

You should seek to ensure that network membership best reflects the range of stakeholders and skills that the project needs in order to be successful.

The network must have a lead company who will accept the formal Letter of Offer on behalf of network members. This company must be an Invest NI customer company. It will be the responsibility of the lead company to pay out on all the eligible costs associated with the project and then claim this amount back from Invest NI. It is therefore important to consider whether or not the lead company has the necessary financial viability to undertake this role.

2. DETI MATRIX
This competitive call is aligned to the recent publication of the DETI MATRIX panel’s Digital ICT foresight report. The report was produced by a panel of experts selected from industry, government and academia and identifies four areas - Big Data Analytics, Software Engineering, Cyber Security and the Internet of Things (IOT) where Northern Ireland has potentially world class strength.

In developing your proposal you should provide evidence of how you believe your project supports the MATRIX priorities. Examples of project thematic areas include:

Software engineering
- Integration
- Requirements Architecture
- Operations
- Support
- Quality/Testing
- Mobility
- Standards
- User Experience
- Agile Methods
- Services API
- Migration
- Closed/Open Source Software
- Construction/Coding

Data analytics
- Cognitive Analytics
- Big Data
- In-Memory Analytics
- Machine Learning

Cyber Security
- Authentication
- Privacy and Trust
- Device and Network Security
- Security Analytics

Advanced networks and sensors
- Network Management and Optimisation
- SDN
- Protocols
- Devices and Sensors
- Mobile and wearable devices

You can read more about the MATRIX Panel and the Digital ICT report here: http://matrixni.org/matrix-digital-ict-report-launched-at-stormont/
3. Project Content

For the purposes of this call Invest NI will consider a range of projects from scoping studies at early stage of development through to fully fledged collaborative proposals requiring implementation support.

In both cases the proposed projects must be innovative and focus on new products, services or ways of working which rely on the collaborative efforts of a range of organisations in order to be successful. Funding is not available under this Programme for those projects which are focused on research and development activities, nor those designed to ensure compliance with mandatory obligations.

Successful funding applications will provide an indication of the economic benefits likely to accrue to both the individual organisations and the Northern Ireland economy as a whole. These benefits can take a number of forms including new jobs; exports; domestic sales; knowledge transfer; enhanced infrastructure; and improved skills.

There may also be broader impacts at a societal level as a result of collaborative projects, and while these are welcome the project must demonstrate economic outcomes as a priority.

If your project is at a stage where detailed project plans are available, please include these with your application. If you are at an earlier stage in your project evolution you will still need to provide a clear indication of your key objectives and the tasks that you intend to undertake in order to meet these objectives. We prefer to see these objectives expressed using the SMART approach (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timebound).

4. Project Costs

You will need to provide details of your project’s proposed costs at the outset. These must be further broken down into eligible cost categories. Eligible costs for the Collaborative Network Programme include facilitation and consultancy fees; travel and subsistence (for facilitator only); and administrative costs.

If the application is successful, the grant amount will be formally confirmed in a Letter of Offer to the network lead company. Once offered the amount cannot be amended, nor the cost categories adjusted.

Depending on the maturity of your project, the following grant aid is available:

- Phase One (Scoping/Feasibility Study) = a maximum of £25,000 at a maximum 50% grant rate, over a six – nine month period.
- Phase Two (Implementation) = a maximum of £250,000 at a maximum 50% grant rate, over a 24 – 36 month period.
5. In-Kind Contributions
The Collaborative Network Programme allows for project match funding to be met via the contribution of in-kind time by the network members. All those participating in the project must be willing to complete timesheets and supply details of their salary, in confidence, to Invest NI in order that a value can be attributed to their time contribution.

A vouching system is in place to audit the value of contributions made by those who are paid via the PAYE system. Non-PAYE contributors will have their contribution assessed by reference to a published salary survey acceptable to Invest NI.

Network members who are unwilling to share their salary details can still participate in funded projects, but their time contribution will be considered ineligible for the purposes of match funding.

If the total value of the in-kind contributions in any claim period is less than the invoiced costs already paid out, the lead company will be liable for the shortfall. It is therefore important to bear in mind the likely level and value of in-kind contributions when assessing your project’s overall costs.

6. Project Facilitation
All collaborative networks should collectively agree the appointment of a facilitator to manage the project and convene the network. This person must be completely independent of all the network member companies and be acceptable to everyone in the network. Invest NI requires networks to seek three quotes for the provision of facilitation services and to conduct the selection process in line with best practice guidelines for the appointment of consultants.

It is the responsibility of the lead company to formally contract with the agreed facilitator and to pay his/her costs before claiming these back from Invest NI in line with the conditions outlined in the Letter of Offer. When agreeing costs with your preferred facilitator you should ensure that you negotiate the best possible rate. Invest NI reserves the right to challenge project costs which do not demonstrate good value for public money.

7. Application Process
The closing date for applications under this call is 29 June 2016. You should ensure that a copy of the application signed by all those participating in the proposed network, and accompanied by the completed Annex A company background information sheets, is delivered to Invest NI before 5pm on the date above.

While you also are welcome to email your application to bisinfo@investni.com we will be unable to appraise any application that is not accompanied by a signed original document.

All proposals which meet the essential criteria of having a minimum of four Northern Ireland companies, one of which is an Invest NI customer company, will have their applications assessed by a panel consisting of representatives from the DETI MATRIX and Invest NI.