

North East Local Innovation Partnerships Fund

Applicant Guidance

March 2026

North East Local Innovation Partnership Fund

Guidance, context and appendices

Introduction

This guidance document has been developed to support organisations across the region interested in submitting project proposals to be considered for inclusion in the North East Local Innovation Partnerships Fund (LIPF) portfolio submission. It sets out our approach, the role of the North East Combined Authority (North East CA), and the process and requirements for submitting a project application.

This document complements the official [UK Research & Innovation \(UKRI\) LIPF guidance](#), which outlines the Fund's objectives, eligibility criteria, and submission process and should be read alongside it.

Strategic context

The [North East Local Growth Plan](#) highlights innovation as a critical driver of growth and productivity across all sectors, vital to achieving the Mayor's five missions:

- Home to a growing and vibrant economy for all
- Home of the green energy revolution
- A welcoming home to global trade
- Home of real opportunity
- A North East we are proud to call home

Raising innovation levels is also a shared priority agreed between the North East CA and national Government, including by increasing the concentration of businesses innovating and those with the potential to scale-up or export.

While many of the region's innovation strengths are rooted in its industrial legacy, the North East has also seen the emergence of new clusters born out of a convergence of traditional sectors and cutting-edge technology. This is generating a breadth of growth and innovation opportunities across the North East.

North East LIPF development: process to date

The North East CA is dedicated to driving inclusive, innovation-led growth across the region to make the North East home to a growing and vibrant economy for all. As a Mayoral Combined Authority with devolved powers, we act as a regional convenor by bringing together partners from the public, private, VCSE sector and academia, coordinating the region's innovation ecosystem to shape economic strategy and unlock the region's full potential through innovation.

We have been working closely with UKRI and regional partners since the LIPF was [first announced](#) in July 2025. In line with the LIPF criteria, we have established a North East Local Innovation Steering Group (triple-helix partnership), to oversee the LIPF process and the development of a project portfolio that will be submitted to UKRI for assessment and approval.

The Steering Group has overseen the evidence-based prioritisation of regional innovation clusters and the submission of the first-stage LIPF Readiness Check to UKRI. Our priority innovation clusters for the LIPF are outlined in **Appendix 1** of this document.

The Steering Group has nominated the North East CA to act as the Lead Bidder for the LIPF. The Lead Bidder is responsible for convening and coordinating the partnership, and managing the project portfolio development and submission. We are now launching an open call for projects to inform the project portfolio.

We will commission external consultancy support to review and appraise the submissions received through the open call. Following a shortlisting process, a selection panel - formed as a time-limited sub-group of the Steering Group - will work with the CA to prioritise shortlisted projects aligned with the LIPF criteria and the innovation cluster priorities. The sub-group will report its recommendations to the Steering Group for final consideration, before the CA submits the project portfolio to UKRI for approval an independent expert panel.

Further guidance on the LIPF objectives, which UKRI will use in their assessment process, are set out in Appendix 4.

Details of the submission process are provided below.

1. Submission instructions for project applications

- Project applications must be submitted using the Microsoft Word LIPF project application form provided on the North East CA website.
- Please name your file using the following convention:
OrganisationName_ProjectTitle_LIPF2026.docx
- All sections of the application form must adhere to the specified word limits in line with UKRI's requirements — applications exceeding word counts may not be accepted.
- A maximum of two A4 pages of supporting appendices may be submitted per project.

Project applicants must submit completed applications to the North East CA by the deadline of 11 April 2026. Applications should be submitted by email to Lipf@northeast-ca.gov.uk.

2. Project assessment criteria

Projects must meet the UKRI eligibility and match funding requirements. A non-exhaustive list of eligible activities that LIPF can fund can be found in Appendix 3. In addition, projects should demonstrate strong alignment with the North East CA's innovation objectives.

Project proposals will be assessed against the following criteria:

<p>Strategic fit: Is the project aligned with the North East Local Growth Plan, regional innovation objectives (see Appendix 2) and UK Industrial Strategy with a clear focus on at least one North East LIPF priority innovation cluster? (see Appendix 1)</p>
<p>Will the project deliver at least one LIPF eligible activity?</p>
<p>Will the project be delivered in the North East CA area and provide economic impact within the area?</p>
<p>Will the project deliver near-to-market research and innovation activity with strong potential for commercial application, industry adoption and scalable impact?</p>
<p>Is the project supported by committed private match funding? Projects with a private to public funding ratio of at least 1:1 during the LIPF delivery period, and at least 2:1 over the 7-year monitoring period, will be viewed favourably.</p>
<p>Can the project be delivered (and can the LIPF funding be defrayed in full) between April 2026 and March 2031?</p>
<p>Will the project deliver scalable and long-term local economic impact by delivering tangible outputs (e.g. new products, services, technologies, infrastructure) and by increasing productivity, attracting investment, and creating high-value jobs?</p>

Projects will also be considered for the extent to which they contribute to creating an overall portfolio focused on specific technologies where the North East has particular expertise.

3. Assessment process and key milestones

- All applications received will be reviewed against the assessment criteria by the North East CA. If clarification is required, applicants may be contacted by the CA and asked to provide further information.
- Based on the initial project assessment, a recommended shortlist of projects will go through an external appraisal, and review by the North East Local Innovation Steering Group Sub-group.
- Following this process, the CA intends to submit the project portfolio to UKRI for consideration by the Wave 2 deadline on 5th May 2026. If needed, we may defer the submission to a later date.
- Final project selection will be made following UKRI's quality assessment process. The CA, with the Steering Group and UKRI, will agree the final portfolio of projects to be approved for funding.
- Funding decisions and project mobilisation will take place from Summer 2026 – with exact timescales to be confirmed by UKRI.

Please note: These dates are indicative and subject to change. We will keep all applicants informed of updates to the timescale throughout the process.

Not all proposals received through the open call will be taken forward into the North East's LIPF project portfolio submission.

Selection will be based on strategic fit, deliverability, private match funding secured, impact, and proposal strength.

Final selection of the North East LIPF portfolio will follow UKRI's independent quality assessment process. However, passing this assessment does not guarantee funding.

Projects that show promise but are not fully aligned with LIPF objectives, or are not deliverable within the fund's timeframe, may be considered for other regional or national funding opportunities where appropriate.

Engagement with the LIPF process does not replace formal application routes for other funding programmes, nor does it guarantee future investment.

Appendix 1: North East LIPF priority innovation clusters

Please note: Depending on the applications received through this call, and feedback from UKRI, there may be further refinement of these cluster definitions in order to shape a focused project portfolio.

Materials innovation

Underpinned by applications of advanced sustainable materials and formulated products within advanced manufacturing and clean energy industries, enabling sustainable manufacturing processes and accelerating decarbonisation across the economy.

Sectoral context: **Advanced manufacturing**

Health innovation

Underpinned by new innovations in diagnostics, advanced therapeutics and drug discovery, including through the application of AI.

Sectoral context: **Life Sciences**

Space technologies

Underpinned by the integration and application of space-based communications, key technologies (including Radio Frequency, AI, cybersecurity, autonomous systems etc.) and advanced materials (including sensors, semiconductors, photonics etc.)

Sectoral context: **Defence, security and space**

Appendix 2: Strategic vision and innovation priorities

The North East's deep expertise in advanced manufacturing, engineering, pharma and life sciences have evolved into three uniquely strong, innovation-led clusters in: **materials innovation**; **space technologies**; and **health innovation**.

These are well-positioned to accelerate the delivery of the North East LGP missions by:

- harnessing university research to support industrial strengths and accelerate decarbonisation — helping the region become **home to the green energy revolution**
- scaling proven translational research and commercialisation, driving advanced health innovation — supporting **a growing, vibrant economy for all**
- attracting more investment and prime manufacturers, strengthening local supply chains — making the region **a welcoming home for global trade**.

Leveraging these cluster strengths will help deliver the region's innovation objectives, by accelerating digitally enabled, inclusive, business-led growth and productivity through innovation.

These clusters will enhance the UK's global competitiveness across National Industrial Strategy sectors, by driving next-generation components and sustainable manufacturing, mission-critical technologies and medTech – accelerating the National Industrial Strategy missions: net zero transition, strengthening national and economic security, and improving health outcomes.

Regional innovation objectives

The North East Innovation Action Plan is being co-developed by North East CA and Innovate UK. A series of innovation roundtable engagements carried out to date with regional stakeholders has led to the development of the following three core innovation objectives:

- Unlocking Local Growth Plan sector growth opportunities and increased productivity through innovation.
- Increasing the development, adoption and diffusion of digital technology including UK critical technologies, across North East businesses.
- Harnessing inclusive innovation and promoting inclusive economic growth.

Appendix 3: Non-exhaustive list of LIPF eligible activities

The following is an extract from the [UKRI LIPF Guidance](#) published in October 2025.

Activity	Description
Research commercialisation	Technology transfer to industry; new product development; industry collaboration; securing patents, copyrights, or trademarks for research.
Adoption and diffusion of new technologies	Support for approaches that enable the adoption and diffusion of cutting-edge / cross-cutting technologies by businesses including enabling access to innovation assets and collaborative R&D with industry.
Business growth / development initiatives	Support for high growth SMEs and spinouts to boost company growth, including access to private finance to support local scaling.
Translational R&D	Collaborative R&D with strong industrial outcomes, including partnerships between businesses and the research base.
Cluster development, networking and leadership	Sharing and embedding best practice, including collaboration agreements which enable subject matter experts to share knowledge, develop skills and solutions, and attract investment.
Talent and skills development	Support for research fellowships and knowledge transfer partnerships which are strongly focused on building collaborative relationships between research organisations and businesses.
R&D infrastructure	Including investment into scale-up infrastructure and equipment critical for building capabilities of the innovation ecosystem. Proposals for new 'centres' will be evaluated on the basis of future sustainability.
Knowledge exchange and R&I networking	Activities that strengthen and build relationships between stakeholders across research and innovation.
Seed corn funding	Operational or early-stage funding that build on existing cluster strengths, building resilience of the business base by supporting technology adoption and support growth of the cluster.
Access to / attracting overseas business and investment	Activities including collaborative research, business relocation, and growing local supply chains. Programme funding for non-UK businesses will only be eligible if a clear case is made for how it will anchor business activity in the UK with demonstrable local benefits.

Appendix 4: LIPF Logic Model

The following is an extract from the [UKRI LIPF Guidance](#) published in October 2025.



Objectives

- Grow high-potential innovation clusters across the UK.
- Build capacity, capability, and collaboration across UK innovation ecosystems.
- Support adoption, diffusion, and commercialisation of new technologies.
- Strengthen local partnerships for place-based innovation.



Outputs

- New or improved R&D and innovation infrastructure.
- Stronger partnerships and governance.
- New products, services, and spin-out companies.
- Jobs created and private investment leveraged.



Outcomes (2–5 years)

- Businesses and clusters scale, attract investment, and improve productivity.
- Stronger talent base, supply chains, and innovation ecosystems.
- Local partnerships make more confident, evidence-informed decisions.
- Alignment of national and local efforts to support innovation.



Outcomes & Impacts (5+ years)

- Innovation clusters drive economic growth.
- Increased innovation capacity and long-term R&D investment.
- Higher value jobs and skills development
- Stronger resilience and contribution to societal goals (net zero, inclusion, health).

Appendix 5: criteria for match funding / investment sought by LIPF

The following is an extract from the [UKRI LIPF Guidance](#) published in October 2025.

Each partnership will be expected to demonstrate that their portfolio of activities (not individual projects) can generate an **absolute minimum private to public investment ratio of 1:1 during the delivery phase and 2:1 across the portfolio's lifespan** (7-year reporting period). Ideally, they should demonstrate how they could deliver a ratio of 3:1 over the lifespan. The focus on leveraging private sector activity from the LIPF is particularly important in the longer-term, even if it cannot be achieved out the outset of projects.

The LIPF is also intended to act as a means to de-risk innovation and crowd in additional investment from partners, the private sector and institutional investors. This would encompass upfront industry co-investment right through to follow-on funding, spanning four types of investment, but **only non-public funding will count towards the ratios above:**

- **Type 1: Matched / Co-investment.** Only non-public sources of funding will be recognised as matched funding. As per UKRI policy guidelines and guidance to institutions on match funding, there is no expectation of match funding from research institutions to ensure transparency and fairness in research funding. In-kind contributions will not be eligible as LIPF seeks to raise private sector investment.
- **Type 2: Accompanying.** Additional public (but non-UKRI) and non-public investments that support LIPF-funded R&D activity over and above those which are considered eligible costs as part of the grant subsidy.
- **Type 3: Aligned.** Investment in a technology/research area thematically aligned to, and catalysed by, LIPF-funded R&D activities.
- **Type 4: Follow-on.** The investment to take to market, or exploit, outcomes from LIPF-funded R&D activity. This often involves combining with other Intellectual Property or technology to deliver a commercial product.