

National Alternative Protein Innovation Centre

Collaborative Programme Funding CPF II

Call Guidance: Proof of Concept 1 (PoC 1)

V1.1 (December 2025)

1. Background

NAPIC Collaborative Programme Funding (CPF II) is for projects to support the alternative protein sector on their innovation journey leveraging the UK's world-leading science and innovation strengths in alternative proteins. All project proposals will be considered and ranked based on their merit resulting in a high-quality portfolio of projects.

NAPIC has allocated a pot of £4 million to fund UKRI funding-eligible academia and research organisations to work collaboratively to facilitate the delivery of a diverse array of innovation challenge-driven projects. This funding will be allocated through several calls between 2025 and 2028.

Funding will be allocated to UK Research organisations who will work collaboratively to:

- Accelerate groundbreaking research
- Deliver innovation challenge projects
- Overcome technical, regulatory, market hurdles
- Address science driven reformulations
- Maximise impact

2. Purpose

The Proof of Concept (PoC) funding opportunity supports early-to-mid stage commercialisation activities that validate the development of concepts that have arisen from research. There are two tiers of PoC projects - PoC 1 funds larger research and innovation challenges. PoC 2 funds smaller, shorter projects.

This call guidance relates to PoC 1.

Projects will be expected to develop a concept, idea or technology from any alternative protein sector which can be in a laboratory, model or real world setting to give confidence for further work. The PoC programme is not aimed at basic research, but is expected to build on existing research, findings or technology and show how the collaboration will move the research towards practical exploitation in a specified application. The project may be the first between a set of collaborators or may come from an existing relationship.

NAPIC CPF II funding is not intended to fund Studentships or student resource. Studentships and student resource are ineligible costs and may not be requested or included in your application.

3. Scope

Projects will support the development of innovative solutions to address significant challenges in alternative proteins within the UK AgriFood sector.

All projects must relate to alternative proteins. This includes proteins from plants, microbes (fungi, bacteria), insects, food waste, aquaculture (aquatic plants, seaweeds, micro/macroalgae), cultivated meat and dairy, and proteins produced using precision fermentation.

Applications can address a range of areas, including food, feed, ingredients, services, equipment and systems development, nutrition, and environmental sustainability.

NAPIC will fund projects addressing the following innovation challenges faced by the alternative protein sectors:

1. **Unlocking Nature's Potential** - Boosting protein quality and quantity from the complete biome i.e., plants, microbes (fungi, bacteria), insects, food waste, aquaculture (aquatic plants, seaweeds, micro/macroalgae)
2. **Protein Discovery** - Identifying important peptides present in traditional proteins that offer the desired functionality, mouthfeel and nutritional benefits and replicating these in alternative proteins, through cutting-edge tools
3. **Structuring for Functional and Nutritional Benefits** - Structuring alternative proteins using colloidal expertise including microgelation, targeted enzymatic fragmentation, creation of cultivated meat, hybrid technologies, and health-led formulation to enhance finished product functionality, whilst improving nutritional value, minimising allergenicity and sensory issues
4. **Enabling Sustainable Bioprocessing at scale** - Accelerating industrial alternative protein production, bringing costs down by deriving best practice from fermentation-intensive industries, developing optimisation tools supporting the transition towards continuous processes that improve efficiency and reduce manufacturing footprint
5. **New metrics and standards for product quality and environment** - Creating standardised and validated new metrics to quantify technical, nutritional, sensory, quality and safety of alternative proteins, objectively
6. **Acceptability and accessibility** - Encouraging consumer behavioural shifts across a wide range of age, culture and socioeconomic status towards acceptance of alternative proteins, including cultivated meat

4. Eligibility

To be eligible for NAPIC PoC 1 funding, applicants must comply with the following requirements:

- The project lead must be a [UKRI eligible research organisation](#)
- The project lead must collaborate with at least one non-research partner which must be one of the following UK registered:

- business of any size
 - public sector or non-ministerial government department
 - charity
 - not for profit
- For CPF II, if required, applicants may include additional Research Organisation(s) (RO) as a Project Partner. The Lead Research Organisation will be awarded the total requested funds (80% FEC), and as the grant recipient, will be responsible for managing the project's budget. This includes establishing appropriate flow-down terms and conditions and payments to the additional Research Organisation(s). Any resultant agreement with the additional RO must not breach the terms and conditions outlined in the NAPIC sub-award letter. The Lead RO acts as the sole contracting party with University of Leeds: NAPIC.
 - The project lead must attach a letter of support from the Head of School or Commercial Director as appropriate
 - The non-research partner(s) should either be registered in the UK or have a UK research and development or manufacturing site
 - The non-research partner(s) must be able to provide a minimum of 50% match funding as **cash**
 - If there is more than one non-research partner, the non-research partners share the 50% match funding requirement.
 - If successful, participants will be required to register for NAPIC Membership
 - Any individual can only be project lead on 1 application per funding stream, per round
 - When applying you will be asked to provide the name of the Principal Investigator from the Lead research organisation. You may also include an optional Co-Investigator from the same organisation. Where there is additional Research Organisation(s) included in the application, the Researcher(s) must be named and costed on the finance form. Additional RO's can include Co-I's from their organisations on the application. A letter of support from the Head of School will also be required.

5. Funding

Up to £1.6 million funding is available from NAPIC to fund PoC 1 and PoC 2 projects in this call. It is expected we will fund approximately 6 PoC 1 projects in this call.

We will fund projects lasting between 12 and 18 months with a total project value (TPV) of up to £200K. This is split equally into the grant value (GV) and a mandatory contribution from the non-research partner(s). NAPIC will award the GV at 80% FEC to the Lead research organisation. Partner contributions must be cash for this stream of funding.

6. Eligible costs

Eligible costs include investigator / researcher time, travel and subsistence appropriate to the delivery of the project and consumables. Subcontracting costs are allowed at a maximum of 20% of the total project cost. Subcontractors must be UK-based. Please refer to UKRI guidance on subcontracting, available here: [Collaborations – BBSRC – UKRI](#).

Studentships or student resource are ineligible costs and may not be requested or included in applications for NAPIC CPF II funding.

For further information on eligible costs visit:

- [Directly allocated costs – BBSRC – UKRI](#)
- [Directly incurred costs – BBSRC – UKRI](#)

7. How to apply

All applications must be submitted via the online application form.

Please complete the online application by 17th April 2026 16:00 UK time. Applications received after this time will not be considered. Please do not send us your application via email/mail.

The collaborative application should be jointly written but must be submitted by the project lead (Research organisation) via the online portal.

8. Supporting Documentation and Information

Please fill in the application form with as much information and as accurately as you can, within the word limits specified. The information we ask for will help our reviewers and panel to evaluate your project.

All Research partners must provide your research institution's financial approval as a Letter of Support and all partners must complete the partner contribution declaration. Please start to obtain these as soon as you can.

Please ensure that your costings include a detailed breakdown rather than headline figures for staffing, materials, etc.

The following documents must be provided with your application:

- Project Plan
- Completed Finance template(s) Lead Research Organisation and any additional Research Organisation(s)
- Research Organisation Letter of Support(s)
- Non-research Partner(s) Contribution Declaration
- Intellectual Property Plan
- EDI questionnaire

9. Key Dates

Call opens: Monday 19th January 2026, 10:00 UK time

Call closes: Friday 17th April 2026, 16:00 UK time

Decisions and offer letters will be provided by July 2026.

10. Review of applications

All eligible applications submitted will be reviewed by three external reviewers from industry and academia followed by consideration for funding by NAPIC's Funding Evaluation Panel comprising representatives from NAPIC's Advisory Boards. NAPIC's Non-Executive Board (NEB) will make the final decision on projects to be funded.

NAPIC reserves the right to apply a 'portfolio' approach. The portfolio can be spread across a range of NAPIC:

- Focus areas
- Pillars
- Innovation Challenges
- Sectors
- Project durations
- Locations

The 'portfolio approach' is used to make sure that funds are allocated across the strategic areas identified in the scope of the funding call. This may mean that a proposal that scores less than yours is successful.

Notifications of the outcome of applications will be sent to Lead Applicants. Feedback will be limited to a statement of success or otherwise unless the group decides that additional feedback is necessary or useful.

11. Terms and conditions

The University of Leeds contracts team, on behalf of NAPIC, will generate a Sub-Award Letter for each successful project. UKRI (UK Research and Innovation) Standard Terms and Conditions apply.

12. Collaboration Agreement

The lead organisation is required to ensure all partners have signed the collaboration agreement, formalising the relationship between the project partners.

13. Privacy notice

The NAPIC team will monitor the demographic data of applicants for reporting to UKRI if needed. The responses to the questions will be collated across all applicants. Your personal information will not be shared, nor any identifiable data. For all questions, a 'not disclosed' option is available, should this response be the preferred option. Public summaries of successful projects might be used on a public-facing webpage and should be written accordingly.

14. Contact us

For any queries regarding this call, please contact us at funding@napic.ac.uk.