



**European Union**  
European Regional  
Development Fund

## Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership - European Structural Investment Funds

### Call for Proposals European Regional Development Fund March 2015

#### Briefing Paper – 10 April 2015

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## 1 Introduction

This briefing paper accompanies the formal Call for Proposals for ERDF in Oxfordshire issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government on March 27<sup>th</sup> 2015:

*Priority Axis 3: Enhancing the Competitiveness of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises*

**Potential applicants should refer to the details of the call and the process for submitting proposals on the gov.uk site: <https://www.gov.uk/european-structural-investment-funds/sme-support-call-in-oxfordshire>**

The closing date for proposals is 29 May 2015.

This briefing provides additional contextual information on Oxfordshire and lists additional sources of information that may be of use to potential bidders in the preparation of their proposals.

## 2 The Oxfordshire context

Oxfordshire has one of the most dynamic and successful economies in Europe and is a significant strategic asset for the United Kingdom. Retaining and developing this position however brings with it challenges, and the need for targeted investment and participation by the public, private and VCO sectors.

The priorities for Oxfordshire's economic development over the coming decades are set out in detail in the Strategic Economic Plan (SEP)<sup>1</sup> 'Driving Economic Growth through Innovation', published by the county's Local Enterprise Partnership in March 2014.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.oxfordshirelep.com/cms/content/oxfordshire-strategic-economic-plan>

The SEP establishes the case for intervention across a range of issues and sectors, against a vision that:

*“By 2030 we will have strengthened Oxfordshire’s position as a vibrant, sustainable, inclusive, world-leading economy driven by innovation, enterprise and research excellence”*

Potential applicants for support under this call for applications are advised to familiarise themselves with the goals set out in the SEP.

The SEP focuses on four key areas: People, Place, Enterprise and Connectivity



people

Deliver and attract specialist and flexible skills at all levels, across all sectors, as required by our businesses, with full, inclusive employment and fulfilling jobs.



place

Provide a quality environment and choice of homes needed to support growth and capitalise upon the exceptional quality of life, vibrant economy and the dynamic urban and rural communities of our county.



enterprise

Encourage innovation led growth, underpinned by Oxfordshire’s strengths in University research and development, business collaboration and supply chain potential.



connectivity

Allow people to move freely, connect easily and provide the services, environment and facilities needed by a dynamic, growing and dispersed economy.

It sets ambitious goals for each. In relation to this ERDF SME support call, the Enterprise and People axes are of particular relevance:

#### **Innovative Enterprise**

- Grow Oxfordshire’s world-class technology clusters leading to a GVA uplift of £6.6 billion to 2030
- Achieve a more balanced economy through fostering a dynamic private sector and new business start-ups, creating at least 85,600 new jobs by 2031
- Capitalise on the global reputation of Oxfordshire’s knowledge base translating academic and research excellence into wealth generation for all our residents
- Fulfil our potential as an internationally renowned business, academic and research centre to attract a minimum of 30 new international investments per year
- Increase our business base and the number of businesses that trade internationally to 7,500 reflecting government ambition of 25% of businesses trading internationally

## **Innovative People**

- Increase the working age population qualified to level 2 and above to 90%
- Ensure our further education capital stock meets the needs of 21st century learners and employers
- Improve school attainment above the national average of 60.4% of GCSE students achieving at least five A\* to C grades including English and Maths
- Increase the amount of Skills Funding Agency that supports STEM sectors by 15%
- Deliver 1,150 more apprenticeships for young people with a focus on our priority growth sectors
- Retain our business and graduate talent
- Maximise our environment to encourage sustainable living, enhancing quality of life and a range of opportunities for people to learn, improve their skills and improve health and well-being

Progress is already being made against many of the SEP's priorities, including agreement of a Growth Deal with Government in 2014. Successes include:

- £108.5m Government Growth Deal funding with an associated £100m additional investment from local partners and the private sector
- £30m commitment to support for four Innovation Hubs and the Centre for Applied Superconductivity
- Rapid developments in development of the county's skills system to meet the needs of business including the Technology Skills and Innovation Centres
- Major new road, rail and integrated transport projects and flood protection
- Accelerated house building

The development of a supportive environment for business growth is a vital component of Oxfordshire's vision, set alongside capital investments and labour market supply side improvements. In this context, this ERDF Call for Applications is intended to build on the foundations established by Oxfordshire Business Support (OBS).



[www.oxfordshirebusinesssupport.co.uk](http://www.oxfordshirebusinesssupport.co.uk)

OBS brings together a range of different activities and services for businesses in the county. OBS aims to cater for the needs of all types of business at all stages of their development. Services include an enquiry desk for phone and email queries; signposting to specialist national and local advice and support; organisation of and information about events; and advice about sources of funding.

Specific encouragement for innovation is provided in the form of Innovation Support Vouchers, subsidising access to specialised facilities and training particularly for SMEs. 'Start-Up Success' is a structured programme for entrepreneurs and new starts ups providing advice, guidance and training through the initial stages of business creation. A key feature of the whole service is the web of 'network navigators', leading figures in the County's main sectors able to help people obtain specialist and detailed answers to their questions, lifting the service beyond generic, generalist information.

Core funding from the Regional Growth Funds at present supports the overall initiative, in particular networking for innovation amongst businesses, researchers and investors and the network navigator service. This funding is time limited, and this ERDF Call for Applications is intended to bring forward provision to build on and continue the OBS idea and brand to 2018 in the first instance. The key role for OBS is to bring together any and all support for business in Oxfordshire under one umbrella, to ensure efficient identification of the most appropriate support for any given enquiry, and to help business navigate their way to quality help to enhance their potential and growth.

EU funds are being used in Oxfordshire to support growth through innovation. The majority of the c£20m EU investment will be directed towards support for business and skills across a range of activities, which are detailed in the Oxfordshire European Structural and Investment Fund Strategy (ESIF)<sup>2</sup>. *This March 2015 call is specifically related to European Regional Development Fund work related to the needs of Small and Medium Enterprises, and is set in the context of OBS.* Further ERDF projects will be commissioned later in 2015 and beyond targeted more specifically on priority sectors, such as Low Carbon, and for entrepreneurship and innovation, as well as the provision of investment loan finance. In parallel, European Social Fund investment will be commissioned for apprenticeships, skills development and work placements.

Oxfordshire is therefore expecting to see applications submitted which take full account of the OBS idea and current service offer, and seek to enhance and maintain them for the next three years. The broad range of activities which can be funded under ERDF Priority Axis 3 are set out in the Call for Applications. This makes clear that support will only be available for activity which *'does not duplicate [the Government's new] Business Growth Service'*. In the Oxfordshire context, OBS as a business support framework already works to complement the national provision bundled into the Business Growth Service by prioritising highly specialist, locally tailored support. This March 2015 ERDF call is specifically focused on the particular needs of SMEs, with the aim of encouraging their growth and in particular actions to improve their competitiveness as individual companies or as thematic or local sectors and networks – all under the OBS umbrella. The Call document lists the following types of activity as particularly needed for SMEs in Oxfordshire:

- Provision of highly specialised and expert advice, training and consultancy, going beyond generic business advice to address the specific needs of particular sectors, markets and localities. This might include for example issues around intellectual property; investment and financial planning for new production in dynamic and

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.oxfordshirelep.org.uk/cms/content/eu-strategy>

volatile markets; HR strategies where highly specialist skills are needed to adopt new capacities; locating specialised premises or infrastructure; compliance with standards or regulatory regimes; development of new business or production models needed by new products or services

- Support for SMEs in similar or complimentary markets or sectors to network and develop mutual and peer support, for example joint investments in productive capacity; consortium building; joint or shared research and development; access to facilities in research institutions
- Helping SMEs develop the capacity to participate in high value supply chains particularly where larger Oxfordshire or greater Thames Valley enterprises source elsewhere but could be supplied locally
- Increasing the reach of SME productive capacity and innovation support services into the county's rural and less accessible areas, including both increasing accessibility and offering support and advice to overcome barriers capacity development arising from location or lack of infrastructure
- Targeting sectors and services with the highest growth potential including those not currently reached by specific sector programmes

### 3 Sources of further information

This Call for Applications is being managed by the Department for Communities and Local Government, which provides an email address for exceptional issues related to its details (see Call document page 16), but makes clear that DCLG itself is unable to enter into correspondence about outline applications.

In relation to the Oxfordshire context, the Strategic Economic Plan, the current OBS offer and how Oxfordshire LEP sees OBS developing in the future, potential applicants may email:

[Dawn.Pettis@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Dawn.Pettis@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

Queries raised and the response to them, when potentially useful as background for all applicants, may be posted on the Oxfordshire LEP web site in the European Funding section, which also includes a link to the Oxfordshire ESIF strategy document:

<http://www.oxfordshirelep.com/cms/content/eu-strategy>

Any further contextual information of value to applicants which emerges during the period this call is open (ie up to 29 May) will also be posted on the LEP EU Funding pages.

Oxfordshire's Strategic Economic Plan may be found here:

<http://www.oxfordshirelep.com/cms/content/oxfordshire-strategic-economic-plan>

The OBS service web site is here:

<http://www.oxfordshirebusinesssupport.co.uk/>

