



## Lignocellulosic Biorefinery Network October 2017

### OPERATIONAL GUIDELINES FOR PROOF OF CONCEPT FUNDS

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## Context

At £750k over four years, the Proof of Concept fund represents the largest part of the Lignocellulosic Biorefinery Network (LBNNet) budget, demonstrating the importance of the fund for the outcomes of LBNNet. Funding eligibility

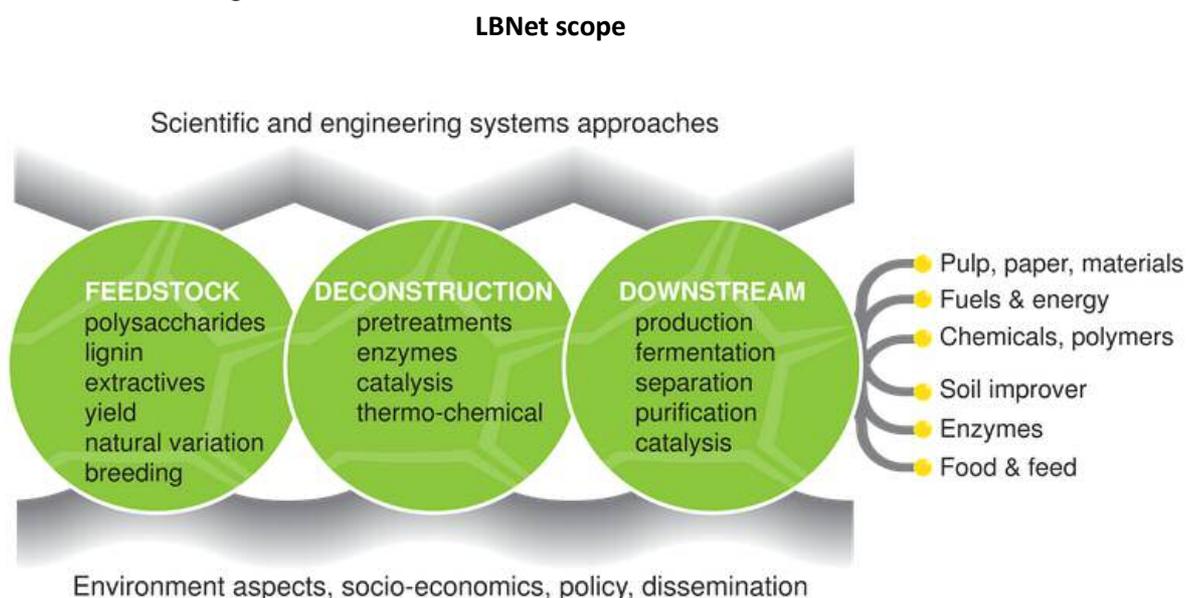
### Applicants:

Funding is available for current LBNNet members eligible to receive BBSRC funding (<http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Guidelines/grants-guide.pdf> - section 3 of this document); in certain cases funding will be made available to other LBNNet members (e.g. SMEs or Industry) if their involvement is essential to the project, but it will only be a minor part (<20%) of the entire funded project. Questions on eligibility beyond this will be referred to the BBSRC (reference to De minimis state aid rules).

Principal applicants who receive LBNNet funding to support the staff costs of a 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.

### Activities which funding will support:

Funds will support a range of activities, from research or data production through to theoretical, economic, environmental or social studies. The scope will be that of the LBNNet, described in the diagram below.



### Targeted funding:

Calls on funding may reflect key technology challenges facing the industry. LBNNet members will identify major technical and economic challenges in the lignocellulosic biorefinery field and the LBNNet Management Board will select some of those Challenge Areas as topics for our 6 Challenge workshop (sandpit event), leading to as much as £50,000 for proof of concept funding to multidisciplinary teams that come up with new innovative ideas to tackling the challenge area.

## Funding calls

All funding calls (Challenge workshops) will be well advertised using the LBNet's website, twitter and email, as well as other outlets to ensure wide coverage of the calls. PoC funding will be awarded six times during the life of the project, to coincide with Management Board (MB) meetings. Provided that there is no conflict of interest, the decisions will be made by the MB.

## Application process

Idea proposed for PoC funds

At the end of day 2 of the sandpit event, multidisciplinary teams will each be expected to give a presentation of their idea and also to submit a 1-page summary of it. The summary should be presented in the following format (up to 1-page, Arial 11 - not including the participants involved)

Title:
What is the research challenge?
What is your idea?and How it relates to industry?
How is your idea innovative?
What might this project lead to?
How much funding are you asking for and how will you use it?

Participants involved:

Name	Surname	Organisation	Role in Project

On day 3 the Management Board will assess these summaries and decide which ideas are going to be invited to undergo development into a formal application for pump-priming funds.

The following criteria will be used to assess the ideas presented at the end of the workshop:

Criteria
Quality of science/contribution to knowledge
Relevance to LBNet scope
Industrial relevance
Potential to impact
Relevance to the UK

Any MB member that has a conflict of interest because they are applicants or employed by the same institution as the applicant will withdraw from the discussion of that particular application. Invitations for full proposals will be issued within three weeks of the end of the workshop. Please note that it is the responsibility of the applicants to ensure the PI meets the BBSRC eligibility criteria and LBNet reserves the right to reject projects based on this even if invited to submit.

All information submitted will be held in strictest confidence; the MB and the workshop participants will all sign a confidentiality agreement prior to the workshop.

The MB will invite ideas to be developed into full proposals. The POC Application form template contains the following sections and it will be provided to the applicant:

1. Applicant(s) details: Partner(s): name, position, university/ company, address, e-mail and telephone.

2. Project title:

3. Public description of project

4. Duration of the project

5. Case for support

**5.1 Work plan:** details of the work proposed, clearly defined project milestones and deliverables, how the project will be managed, and relevance to the scope of the network.

**Pathways to impact:** Details of how the proposed work will lead to impact, industrial interactions, new collaborations and benefits. Likelihood of the grant resulting in being able to bring in further support, bigger grants, investment for industry.

**Ethical and social considerations:** Statement on whether there are any ethical or social considerations in the proposed work and how these will be dealt with. If relevant, details of how economic, environmental and social impacts of the proposed research will be considered.

6. Finances: Detailed expenditure breakdown of the project and brief justification; the following outline table will be used.

Funding Summary Heading:	Fund Heading	Total Award at 80%	Total Award at 100%
Directly Incurred	Staff		
	Travel & Subsistence		
	Other Costs		
Directly Allocated	Investigators		
	Estate Costs		
	Other Directly Allocated		
Indirect Costs	Indirect Costs		

Equipment purchase is not eligible; equipment costs such as instrumentation time or equipment access are eligible.

In addition, any financial and in-kind contributions from each partner need to be listed in this section (please give actual value in £s).

**Awards will be made at 80% FEC. For example, applications up to £50,000 (100% FEC) will be awarded at 80% FEC i.e. £40,000.**

7. Reviewers: The applicant should declare if they are aware of any reason why any individual on the Management Board should not review the proposal.

In addition, cv of the lead applicant will be submitted (no more than 2 sides of A4) and a letter of support from the applicant's University confirming acceptance of the 80% FEC rate and that the applicant is eligible to receive BBSRC funding.

## Submission of applications and further information

Applications are to be submitted, by e-mail to: [veronica.ongaro@york.ac.uk](mailto:veronica.ongaro@york.ac.uk); within a month of receiving the invitation to submit a full proposal. All applicants will be acknowledged within a week. All information submitted will be held in strictest confidence; as mentioned above the MB will all sign a Management Board CDA which will require their confidentiality.

## Evaluation process

The Network Manager will check that the application meets the criteria and has the required information. If there are any problems the Network Manager will contact the applicant to request further information. However, if this cannot be easily remedied (within three working days) then the application will be returned.

The Network Manager will then process the application recording specific information: date received, further information requested, whether the application requires MB review, whether external review is required, which MB members have been allocated to review and introduce the application at the MB meeting, and a conflict of interest register.

If the application is for ≤ £10k and straightforward, the EG may award the funds without review and will report such proposed funding to the MB prior to its final agreement. The MB will receive a summary of all funds awarded in this way at the next meeting. In the case of conflict of interest (see *Conflict of Interest guidance* on page 5), the EG will engage a representative from the MB to evaluate the application.

If the application is for > £10k it will be reviewed by the MB. Quorum for the MB for this activity will be 6 MB members. MB members will be given sufficient notice of all funding review meetings but in cases where attendance is difficult, the MB may accept written points for discussion, or that member may be allowed to join the discussion by telephone or video conference. MB members who made remote contributions to meetings will be counted in the quorum numbers. If the quorum number cannot be reached, the Network Manager will enter discussions with the BBSRC to attempt to find an acceptable alternative to ensure there is no delay in proof of concept awards.

Each application will be reviewed by two members of the Board. However, all applications will be available to all board members to read. Any MB member who has a conflict of interest (or has a reason for not reviewing the application, such as involving an industrial competitor) must withdraw from the discussion of that particular application. MB members will have around two weeks to review the applications, and at the end of this time a score must be submitted to the Network Manager.

Proposals will be introduced at meetings/teleconference, discussed by the Board and ranked by the following criteria:

Criteria	% contribution to total score	Threshold required	level
Quality of science/contribution to knowledge	40	24	
Relevance of application to LBNet scope	15	9	
Industrial relevance and pathway to impact	25	15	
Project management	10	6	
Value for money	10	6	

For each criterion, proposals must score a minimum of 60% of total marks allocated to be considered for funding.

The MB will be able to award proof of concept funds in tranches of up to £50k (100%FEC- that is £40,000 ay 80% FEC). The MB will have a good degree of flexibility in the decisions made, so that, at the MB's discretion, an application could for example be part-funded.

The ranked list will be reviewed and approved by the EG, MB and BBSRC and funds awarded;. Applicants will be notified of the outcome once the Network Manager has updated the BBRC NIBB Extranet with award details and BBSRC has agreed that funding may be awarded. Applicants who were unsuccessful will be informed promptly and the Network Manager will pass on specific feedback if the Management Board makes this available.

Independent external review of proposals will be sought, particularly if the area of application is not within the expertise of the Board.

External reviewers will be asked to evaluate the proposal and invited to submit a detailed commentary. The commentaries will be made available to all MB members and review will proceed as described above. In the case of conflict of interest, the MB member concerned will not receive the written reviews.

## **Payment of awards**

Consortia of applicants will need to have signed agreements in place prior to funded projects commencing; the Network Manager will check that this is the case. The University of York will provide the awardee with a simple contract assigning all rights to the awardee's University or consortium but requiring that funds are spent as detailed on the application, and that reports on progress are sent to the Network.

Funds will be transferred in arrears at 80% FEC from the BBSRC to The University of York. The University will then transfer funds to the awardee. For grants over £25k, the University of York will retain 10% of the total award payable until the final report is received.

## **Monitoring, reporting and finances**

Grantees are required to provide concise interim report every six months, updating progress towards milestones and deliverables, so as to ensure the project is on track. At the end of the award, a final report setting results against objectives will be submitted to the Network Manager and, where possible, a case-study template will be started and will be updated throughout the Network's lifetime.

Financial expenditure will be reported by the grantee in all reports. However, LBNet will not require receipts to be submitted, although these must be kept, as they may be required for possible future audits. The grantee's host institution will follow their standard procedures for financial accounts. Any underspend will be returned to LBNet and will be allocated to future PoC funding rounds.

All reports will be checked by the Network Manager. The EG will approve interim and final reports. In the case of conflict of interest, the MB Chair or senior nominee will review such reports.

## **Data protection regulations**

Copies of proposals will be made available to the LBNet evaluators (members of the EG and MB, plus external reviewers where applicable), who will use information provided in the application for processing the proposal, the award of any consequent grant, and for the payment, maintenance and review of the funds.

BBSRC will use this information for research related activities including, but not limited to, transfer of PoC funds, statistical analysis in relation to evaluation of the BBSRC NIBB, study of trends and policy and strategy studies.

To meet the Research Councils' obligations for public accountability and the dissemination of information, non-confidential details of awards may also be made available on the Research Councils' websites and other publicly available databases, and in reports, documents and mailing lists.

## **Conflict of interest guidance**

In cases of conflict of interest, there are specific alternatives to the stated guidance; these are referred to throughout the document.

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)
- Currently working closely with the applicant(s), for example as a co-author or PhD Supervisor, or has worked closely with them during 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)