Grant Funding Success

A Strategic Guide for UK Businesses

2025 Edition

Introduction

Securing grant funding can be a complex and competitive process, but it offers invaluable opportunities for UK businesses to drive growth, innovation, and success. At Wilby Jones Grants, we empower businesses with the knowledge and strategies needed to navigate this challenging terrain with confidence.

This guide provides a comprehensive overview of UK grant programs, practical tips for crafting compelling proposals, and insights into aligning your projects with funder priorities. With insider advice and proven strategies, we'll help you avoid common pitfalls and strengthen your applications.

At Wilby Jones Grants, we don't just write grants—we design tailored funding strategies to help clients achieve extraordinary outcomes, from Olympic partnerships to groundbreaking technological advancements. Whether you're a startup seeking seed funding or an established business looking to scale, we're here to guide you in unlocking the right opportunities. Explore this guide to take the next step in your funding journey.

Securing Funding in a Changing Landscape

In today's competitive business environment, securing funding is crucial for growth and innovation. For UK SMEs, grants offer a lifeline, but navigating the post-Brexit funding landscape is increasingly challenging. Businesses face the loss of EU structural funds, shifting government priorities, and controversies surrounding bodies like Innovate UK. Intense competition and concerns about transparency have resulted in low success rates—some as low as 2% for Innovate UK's Smart Grants—leaving many SMEs discouraged and uncertain about where to turn for support.

However, despite these challenges, grants remain a vital source of support for SMEs, fuelling innovation, driving growth, and fostering resilience. By understanding the changing landscape, staying informed about new opportunities, and adopting a strategic approach, businesses can increase their chances of navigating the grant maze successfully and securing the funding they need to thrive.

Let's explore the diverse landscape of grant funding available to UK SMEs and the strategies that can unlock your funding potential.

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Navigating the Maze: An Overview of Grant Programs in 2025

The UK's grant landscape is a dynamic and multifaceted ecosystem, offering a diverse array of funding opportunities for businesses with varying needs and ambitions. Staying informed about the latest grant offerings, including their success rates and funding levels, is crucial for navigating this complex terrain successfully.

Innovation Grants

Innovation grants fund groundbreaking ideas, emphasising research, development, and new technologies

→ ## Innovate UK Smart Grants

A flagship program offering grants of up to £2 million for game-changing ideas. It's a competitive program with success rates varying between 2-10% depending on the competition and scope.

In 2023-24, Innovate UK invested over £600 million in innovation grants across various sectors. The application process is rigorous, requiring a detailed business plan, financial projections, and a strong case for innovation.

To be eligible, your business must be a UK registered SME with fewer than 500 employees, and your project must demonstrate significant innovation that will lead to economic growth.

→ ## European Research Council

These grants support frontier research projects, pushing the boundaries of knowledge and driving scientific breakthroughs. They are awarded to individual researchers or teams based on the scientific excellence of their proposals.

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Innovation Grants

→ Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTPs)

These grants connect businesses with academic institutions to collaborate on research projects, fostering innovation through knowledge sharing. KTPs typically receive grants covering 50-67% of project costs, making them a valuable resource for businesses seeking to leverage academic expertise.

These partnerships can last from 12 to 36 months, providing ample time for in-depth research and development. Businesses of any size can apply, and projects must involve a graduate who will work at the company, embedded in the knowledge transfer process.

→ Horizon Europe

Despite Brexit, UK businesses continue to access funding through Horizon Europe, the EU's key funding program for research and innovation. This program offers opportunities for collaborative research projects with European partners, fostering international collaboration and knowledge exchange. Focus areas include green technologies, health innovation, and digital transformation. Success rates vary depending on the specific call and project area.

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Innovation Grants

→ ### European Innovation Ecosystems

This stream offers support for developing regional innovation ecosystems, fostering collaboration and knowledge sharing between businesses, research institutions, and other stakeholders. It aims to strengthen Europe's capacity for innovation by supporting initiatives that connect different actors in the innovation ecosystem.

→ ### EIC Accelerator

This program provides funding for startups and SMEs to develop and scale breakthrough innovations. It supports high-risk, high-reward projects with the potential to create significant impact in their respective fields. It offers grant funding (up to €2.5 million) and equity investments (up to €15 million).

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Growth Grants

Growth grants fund business scaling, often focusing on innovation, market entry, or workforce development

→ ## Northeast Fund

Provides grants and loans to businesses in North East England to support job creation, innovation, and expansion.

→ ## Regional Growth Funds

Administered through LEPs or regional development agencies, these funds support businesses in specific localities. Funding levels and success rates vary by region and program.

→ ## Scottish Growth Scheme

Provides grants and loans to businesses in Scotland, supporting a wide range of activities, including innovation, internationalisation, and capital investment.

→ ## Midlands Engine Investment Fund (MEIF)

Offers debt and equity finance to businesses in the Midlands, focusing on supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with growth potential.

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Growth Grants

→ ## British Business Bank Programs

The British Business Bank offers various loan and grant schemes to support business growth, providing access to finance for businesses at various stages of development. These include the Enterprise Finance Guarantee, the Start Up Loans program, and the Future Fund.

→ ## Internationalisation Fund

Offers grants for businesses to participate in trade shows and other international events, facilitating networking and business development opportunities.

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Growth Grants

→ **Exporting Grants**

Help businesses expand their global reach by providing financial assistance for activities such as market research, trade shows, and overseas marketing campaigns. The Department for Business and Trade (DBT) has streamlined its export support programs.

→ **Export Academy**

Provides training and support for businesses new to exporting, equipping them with the knowledge and skills to succeed in international markets.

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Sector Specific Grants

These grants cater to the unique needs and challenges of businesses operating in specific industries

→ ### Manufacturing

The Made Smarter Adoption Programme has expanded its scope to include support for sustainable manufacturing practices, encouraging businesses to adopt environmentally friendly technologies and processes. This program offers grants and support to help manufacturers in England adopt digital technologies and improve their productivity and competitiveness.

→ ### Agriculture

The Farming Innovation Programme is prioritising projects that contribute to the UK's net-zero targets, supporting the development of sustainable and climate-resilient farming practices.

→ ### Farming Innovation Pathways

Supports collaborative research and development projects, fostering innovation in the agricultural sector.

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Sector Specific Grants

→ Industry-Led R&D Partnerships

Funds larger-scale research projects, driving advancements in agricultural technology and productivity.

→ Technology

There is a strong emphasis on supporting the development of artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and quantum technologies, recognising their potential to transform various industries and drive economic growth.

→ AI for Healthcare

Funds the development of AI solutions for healthcare challenges, improving patient care and outcomes.

→ Cybersecurity Innovation Fund

Supports the development of innovative cybersecurity technologies, protecting businesses and individuals from cyber threats.

Sector Specific Grants

→ Export Academy

Provides training and support for businesses new to exporting, equipping them with the knowledge and skills to succeed in international markets.

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Regional Grants

Regional grants address local economic priorities and challenges, often focusing on specific geographic areas

→ ## LEPs

LEPs continue to play a key role in supporting local businesses, with grant schemes tailored to the needs of their regions. They provide valuable resources and support for businesses seeking to grow and contribute to their local economies.

→ ## Growth Hubs

Offer free advice and support to businesses in their regions, acting as a central point of contact for businesses seeking information and guidance on various aspects of business development.

→ ## Regional Development Grants

Provide funding for businesses to invest in new equipment, infrastructure, and skills development, supporting regional economic growth and job creation.

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Regional Grants

→ Devolved Administrations

In the UK, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland each have their own Devolved Administrations responsible for governing their respective regions. These administrations have their own funding agencies and grant programs, separate from those offered by the UK government, that support businesses within their jurisdictions. These programs are designed to address specific regional challenges and priorities, recognising the unique economic and social landscapes of each region.

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Regional Grants

→ ## Scotland

Scottish Enterprise, the national economic development agency, offers various grant programs for businesses, including innovation grants, growth grants, and internationalisation grants.

→ ## Wales

The Welsh Government provides funding through Business Wales, offering grants for various purposes, such as research and development, skills development, and environmental sustainability.

→ ## Northern Ireland

Invest Northern Ireland is the economic development agency that offers a range of programs to support businesses, including Innovation Vouchers, R&D grants, and skills development programs.

Devolved Administrations support regional businesses by providing funding and resources to foster growth and innovation. Businesses should be aware of the specific programs available in their region, as they may better align with their needs than UK-wide options.

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Social Impact Grants

These grants support businesses that are making a positive difference in society or the environment

→ ### National Lottery Community Fund

The fund is prioritising projects that address social inequalities, supporting initiatives that benefit communities and improve people's lives.

→ ### Reaching Communities

Funds projects that support people and communities, addressing a wide range of social issues such as poverty, homelessness, and social isolation.

→ ### Awards for All

Offers grants of up to £10,000 for community projects, providing accessible funding for smaller-scale initiatives that benefit local communities.

→ ### Climate Action Fund

Supports community-led projects that address climate change, empowering communities to take action on environmental issues and build a more sustainable future.

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Social Impact Grants

→ Big Lottery Fund

The fund is focusing on supporting projects that promote sustainable development, addressing global challenges such as poverty, inequality, and climate change.

→ Building Better Opportunities

The fund is focusing on supporting projects that promote sustainable development, addressing global challenges such as poverty, inequality, and climate change.

→ Empowering Young People

The fund is focusing on supporting projects that promote sustainable development, addressing global challenges such as poverty, inequality, and climate change.

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Bridging the Gap: Developing a Winning Grant Strategy

You've explored the diverse landscape of UK grant programs, and now it's time to chart your course. A strategic approach is essential to navigate this complex terrain and secure the funding you need to bring your vision to life.

→ **Define Your Objectives**

→ **Prioritise Opportunities**

→ **Assess Your Capacity**

→ **A Compelling Narrative**

→ **Evaluation and Monitoring**

Define Your Objectives

What are your goals?

First, clarify what you hope to achieve with grant funding. What are your goals? Is it driving innovation, expanding your team, or creating a positive social impact? Define these objectives clearly, ensuring they align with the funding priorities of potential grant providers.

Use the SMART framework (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) to clearly define your objectives. Replace general statements with specific goals. For instance, instead of stating, "We want to improve our technology," specify that, "Our goal is to increase production efficiency by 15% within 12 months by adopting a new AI-powered manufacturing system."

Prioritise Opportunities

Not all grants are created equal

With so many options available, it's crucial to prioritise those that align with your organisation's needs, eligibility, and project scope.

Grant Type

Does your project need a research, capital, or development grant? Identify the types most relevant to your project's needs and stage.

Funding Levels

Does the funder typically award grants that align with your financial needs? Review their guidelines and recent awards to understand their funding range.

Geographic Focus

Many funders prioritise specific regions or sectors. Ensure your project aligns with these priorities before investing time in an application.

Application Deadlines

Create a realistic timeline that allows sufficient time for research, preparation, and submission.

Assess Your Capacity

↘ **Take an honest look at your internal resources and expertise before diving into applications**

Time Commitment

Do you have the time and staff to dedicate to the often time-consuming grant application process?

→ **Tool**

Use a project management tool or a simple calendar to estimate the time required for each stage of the application process. Break down the process into smaller tasks and assign realistic timeframes.

Grant Writing Expertise

Do you have the necessary skills to craft compelling narratives, align with funder priorities, and develop realistic budgets?

Financial Management

Can you accurately track and report on grant expenditures?

→ **Tool**

Utilise accounting software or spreadsheets to track project expenses and ensure compliance with grant requirements.

A Compelling Narrative

Your grant proposal is your chance to tell a story

Go beyond simply presenting facts and figures. Capture the funder's attention and highlight the impact of your project.

Showcase the Problem

Clearly articulate the challenge or need your project addresses. Use data and evidence to support your claims. For example, if your project addresses a skills gap in your industry, provide data on the current workforce and the projected demand for skilled workers.

Present Your Solution

Explain how your project offers an innovative and effective solution. Highlight your unique approach and its potential for wider adoption.

Highlight the Impact

Demonstrate the positive outcomes and benefits your project will achieve. Use quantifiable metrics to showcase the value of your work. For example, if your project aims to improve community health, specify the estimated number of people who will benefit from increased access to healthcare services.

A successful grant application requires more than just a well-written proposal. Gather all necessary supporting documentation: financial statements, project plans and timelines, letters of support, and risk assessments.

Evaluation and Monitoring

Establish clear metrics and indicators

Identify specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) indicators to track progress and evaluate outcomes. Align these indicators with the grant's objectives and the funder's reporting requirements.

Example: If your project aims to increase community engagement, track the number of participants in community events or the number of volunteers involved in project activities.

Develop a monitoring plan.
Outline the frequency and methods for collecting data, including data sources, responsible personnel, and reporting timelines. Utilise tools and technologies to streamline data collection and analysis.

> → **Tool**
>
> Consider using project management software or online survey platforms to collect and analyse data efficiently.

Create an Evaluation Plan

↘ ## Regularly review and analyse data

Conduct periodic reviews of the collected data to assess progress, identify challenges, and make necessary adjustments to project activities. Use data visualisations and reporting tools to communicate findings effectively.

→ ### Technique

Create dashboards or reports to track key performance indicators (KPIs) and present progress to stakeholders.

Incorporate feedback mechanisms.

Establish channels for gathering feedback from stakeholders, including project participants, partners, and the funder. Use feedback to inform project implementation and improve outcomes.

Conduct regular surveys or focus groups with project participants to gather feedback on their experiences and identify areas for improvement.

Checklist for Grant Application Preparation

☑ **Define project goals and objectives**

☑ **Research potential funders and their priorities**

☑ **Gather all required documentation**

☑ **Develop a detailed project plan and timeline**

☑ **Create a realistic budget**

☑ **Draft a compelling narrative that highlights the project's impact**

☑ **Proofread the application carefully**

☑ **Submit the application before the deadline**

Avoiding Common Grant Application Issues

Grant applications can be complex and competitive, and even small oversights can jeopardize your chances of success. By understanding and addressing the most common application issues, you can significantly improve your submission's quality.

This section highlights common pitfalls that many businesses face during the grant application process and offers practical advice on how to avoid these issues

By being aware of these challenges and taking proactive steps, you can increase your likelihood of securing the funding necessary to achieve your goals.

Eligibility Oversights

You might be surprised how many applications are rejected simply for missing basic eligibility criteria. A 2023 report by the UK's National Audit Office found that a full 20% of applications fall at this first fence. So, before you even put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard!), scrutinise every detail of those guidelines. Pay particularly close attention to anything relating to your company's legal structure, trading history, and financial status. If in doubt, reach out to the funding body for clarification.

Generic Proposals

Put yourself in the funder's shoes. Each has unique priorities, and a generic proposal won't suffice. To stand out, research the funder beyond their website - look at their annual reports, press releases, and social media. Understand their values and goals to tailor your proposal effectively.

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Failure to Demonstrate Impact: Making a Strong Case with Evidence

Don't just describe your project; bring it to life. Use storytelling, strong evidence, and data to build a compelling case. Instead of saying your project will create jobs, detail the roles, their impact on the local economy, and the number of jobs created. For environmental projects, quantify the reduction in carbon emissions. Support your claims with evidence such as market research, financial projections, letters of support, or pilot results. A Big Lottery Fund report shows proposals with measurable outcomes are 30% more likely to succeed.

Dawn, Director of Grants

Watch out for platitudes and redundancies in your writing, your word count is always critical so make sure every word counts.

→ Weak Foundations

Funders want to see a well-thought-out plan, not just a great idea. The Institute of Fundraising reports that a surprising 40% of grant applications are rejected because of a poorly defined project or an unrealistic budget. So, map out your project meticulously, outlining key milestones, deliverables, and how you'll handle potential risks. And when it comes to your budget, detail is key. Be realistic, justify your costs, and consider using visual aids like Gantt charts or timelines to show that your project is feasible.

→ Underdeveloped Teams

Funders seek strong teams with the expertise to execute successful projects. If your team has skill gaps, address them in your proposal whether through recruitment, training, or external partnerships. Highlight your team's strengths and relevant experience, showing how their skills complement one another. Emphasise the importance of a diverse, skilled team to drive the project's success.

Overreliance on AI

Feeling tempted to ask ChatGPT to write your grant application? While AI tools can be handy for brainstorming and saving time, proceed with caution. Innovate UK, a major UK funding body, has even sounded a note of caution in their grant webinars. Why? Because while AI can help generate ideas, it often falls short when it comes to the in-depth analysis and original thinking that funders look for. If you do use AI, make sure you thoroughly review and edit the content, tailoring it to the specific funder and their priorities. And never skip the fact-checking!

Lack of Innovation

What makes your project stand out from the competition? Funding organisations are increasingly seeking to support projects that demonstrate genuine novelty and have the potential to create significant impact within their field. (Nesta, "The Innovation Funding Landscape," 2022). Highlight your project's unique selling points and emphasise its potential to create lasting impact.

Dawn, Director of Grants

Point of innovation is an area lots of clients get stuck on, I always frame it by asking what their closest competitor is doing and how their project is different. Start there but remember at its heart innovation is all about solving problems.

Unrealistic Goals

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While ambition is admirable, it's crucial to be realistic about what you can achieve within the proposed timeframe and budget. Overpromising can raise doubts about your planning abilities and the overall feasibility of your project. The UK's Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) advises in its grant guidance to set realistic and achievable objectives, as overly ambitious projects often fail to deliver on their promises, which can damage your credibility with funders.

Missing Deadlines

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Missing a deadline, even by minutes, can ruin your application. Mark deadlines clearly, set reminders, and aim to submit early to avoid last-minute glitches. Innovate UK advises against submitting in the final two hours, as technical issues can arise due to high traffic. Remember, some online applications have submission surveys and impact assessments that must be filled in during the submission process — ensure you have all necessary info ready.

Dawn, Director of Grants

Innovate UK for example has a range of surveys requiring annual business turnover details, employment metrics, etc that must be completed before submission. It is not unusual for this to catch people out. Make sure you complete it with plenty of time to spare.

Poorly Defined Outcomes

Funders need clear, measurable outcomes to assess your project's impact. Vague statements won't cut it. Use specific metrics and targets to define success. A guide published by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) emphasises that clearly defined outcomes are essential for demonstrating the value of your project to funders. Apply the SMART framework (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) to ensure clarity and precision.

Dawn, Director of Grants

Quantify. If you think you can't quantify things anymore, quantify again. It is that important.

Ignoring Instructions

Each grant program has its own set of rules and guidelines. Failing to follow these instructions demonstrates a lack of attention to detail and can create a negative impression with funders. Read the application guidelines carefully, follow the formatting requirements, and ensure you've included all the necessary documentation.

Dawn, Director of Grants

See Innovate UK's formatting parameters for their appendices as a case in point. Font no smaller than 11pts, and must be visible at 100% zoom.

Typos and Grammatical Errors

Your grant application is a direct reflection of your professionalism. Typos and grammatical errors can undermine your credibility. Proofread your application meticulously and consider asking a colleague or friend to review it with fresh eyes. There isn't any excuse for spelling or grammar issues with the maelstrom of software we now have at our disposal.

Inconsistent Information

Consistency is key! Make sure the information you provide in your application is consistent throughout. Any discrepancies in your budget, project timeline, or team bios can make funders question your attention to detail.

Dawn, Director of Grants

Have your grant specialist, or a specific person on your team be the final editor. There should be a 'hands-off' time where nothing is amended or changed and everything goes to the editor. Don't get confused with multiple drafts.

Lack of Follow-Up

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Don't just submit your application and forget about it. Follow up with the funder to confirm receipt and express your continued interest in the opportunity. A 2022 survey by the Grants Management Network found that 80% of funders appreciate receiving follow-up communication from applicants, as it demonstrates commitment and proactiveness.

Poor Communication with Funders

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Maintain clear, professional, and timely communication with the funder throughout the application process. Building a positive relationship with the funder can significantly increase your chances of success.

Dawn, Director of Grants

In the non-profit world this is standard, but in the business space we are seeing funders more willing to provide opinions in advance of application. Utilise this!

Forgetting the 'PR' Factor

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Think of your grant application as a PR campaign for your project. You're selling your idea to the funder to convince them it's worth investing in. Craft a compelling narrative that highlights the problem you're addressing, the innovative solution you're proposing, and the positive impact your project will have. Use persuasive language, strong visuals, and quantifiable data to capture their attention and make a lasting impression.

Not Seeking Feedback

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If your application is unsuccessful, don't be discouraged, some funding has a 2% success rate. View it as a valuable learning opportunity. Reach out to the funder and request feedback on your application. This feedback can provide crucial insights into areas for improvement and strengthen your future applications.

Dawn, Director of Grants

Innovate UK's Smart Grant is well-known as being a grant that people are more likely to win on their resubmission. Disappointment is natural if you don't get a grant but see feedback as a further refinement and try again

→ Overlooking the Appendices

Don't underestimate the importance of supporting documents. Many grant applications require additional materials like risk registers, project plans, financial statements, or letters of support. Failing to provide these can significantly weaken your application or even disqualify you. Carefully review the guidelines to understand exactly what's required and ensure all appendices are complete, accurate, and submitted on time.

→ The Budget Tightrope

Don't fall into the trap of over- or under-pricing your project. Funders want to see that your project is competitively priced, but they must also be confident in its viability. Making your project seem artificially cheap by minimising salaries or essential costs can backfire, raising concerns about your team's commitment and the project's long-term sustainability.

Dawn, Director of Grants

I see this a lot; it's often CEO's and project leads not adding a salary for themselves to ensure the project gets funded. It has the opposite effect.

A Strategic Approach to Grant Success

Thoroughly researching requirements, defining clear objectives, and following guidelines, will enable you to create a compelling application. With the correct strategies in place and by knowing which common mistakes to avoid, you are one step closer to achieving success.

Partnering for Success

Securing grant funding is a journey full of complexities, one that many businesses struggle to navigate alone. The process can be overwhelming: from identifying suitable grants to crafting high-quality proposals, managing deadlines, and overcoming tight competition. Many businesses face the daunting task of balancing grant applications with day-to-day operations, often leading to missed opportunities and suboptimal outcomes.

Without a dedicated team, the application process can quickly become resource-draining and stressful. An Innovate UK grant, for example, can take up to 80 hours of work for a single application. With limited capacity, many businesses end up neglecting funding opportunities that could fuel their growth.

Partnering for Success

At Wilby Jones Grants, we understand the challenges of securing grant funding. Acting as an extension of your team, we provide the expertise and support to simplify the process, allowing you to focus on running your business.

→ ## Efficient Application Development

We streamline the process, completing high-quality Innovate UK applications in roughly 20 hours, saving your team significant time and effort.

→ ## Tailored Grant Identification

We assess your business needs and identify the most suitable grants, sparing you the hassle of reviewing countless options.

→ ## Multi-Application Management

By managing multiple applications simultaneously, we increase your exposure to potential funders and maximize your chances of success.

→ ## Bespoke Funding Pathways

We create long-term strategies tailored to your growth goals, ensuring a consistent flow of funding.

→ ## Ongoing Grant Monitoring

We keep you informed about emerging opportunities and deadlines, so you never miss a chance to secure funding.

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Expert Support for Your Grant Journey

→ **Ongoing Grant Monitoring**

We keep you informed about emerging opportunities and deadlines, so you never miss a chance to secure funding.

→ **Improved Success Rates**

Leverage our expertise to boost your chances of securing funding.

→ **Access to Expert Support**

Our PhD-level team brings 20+ years of experience across business, innovation, academia, and non-profits.

→ **Cost Efficiency**

Avoid the need to hire a dedicated funding team, we provide all the support you need.

Ready to elevate your grant strategy?
Contact us today to discuss how we can help you achieve your funding goals.