

The Productivity Institute brings together world-leading and UK experts from a range of disciplines and backgrounds, working directly with policymakers and businesses to better understand, measure, and enable improvements in productivity across the whole of the UK, with the aim to improve living standard and well-being.

Impact Acceleration Funding allows research organisations to work with partners from all sectors to apply social sciences knowledge to challenges in society.

The aim of this Productivity Institute Business Innovation funding call is to better understand strategic approaches adopted by organisations to improve productivity and develop the evidence base to support the conversation around productivity with business leaders.

We invite research proposals which will provide tested or testable frameworks, solutions or tools to address productivity at functional level or at the level of executive leadership teams within organisations.

We are looking for academic researchers to help better understand within-firm decision making and strategy to improve business performance and productivity within key professions /firm functions such as Digital & IT, Finance, Human Resources, Marketing and Operations.

BACKGROUND

Although research shows some examples of firms explicitly addressing productivity, it often is not recognised as a key driver of sustained business growth; let alone that businesses recognise their productivity performance is critical to the economic health of their local area and the nation as a whole.

A typical scenario is that firms track and manage other key performance indicators (KPIs) such as efficiency, profits and margins, employee engagement, customer satisfaction and brand impact. However, the link between those KPIs and productivity is often not very well understood. As a result, the executive leadership team and/or Board of organisation fail to explicitly address productivity as part of their strategy.

The Productivity Institute is undertaking a multi-year research project to help executives better understand how their actions feed into productivity, both at a functional level and at an organisational level. For a preliminary report, see:

<https://www.productivity.ac.uk/research/strategic-productivity-for-the-leadership-team/>

More specifically, the key research questions for this call are:

- What key aspects of performance drive productivity within one specific or multiple functions, such as operations, finance, HR, R&D and innovation, digital and IT, marketing, etc.? How is productivity reflected in decision making at the functional level?
- How do these functional aspects of productivity feed into planning and strategy at the organisational level?

More specifically we want to understand:

- How do business leaders make decisions around investment and activity on five key productivity drivers (listed below)?
- How do they engage in strategic planning and decision making for productivity?
- Where are the barriers and blockages to make or implement decisions to improve productivity, and how are they being addressed?
- How productivity is included in strategic planning?
- How do different functional leaders address productivity in their strategic planning?

The five productivity drivers according to research by The Productivity Institute are:

1. Innovation and digital adoption
2. Worker skills, engagement and well-being
3. Management competencies
4. Access to finance and cost savings
5. Marketing and communication

We are particularly interested in proposal to understand the actions and behaviours of senior leaders in one or more the following functions

- Digital / IT / Technology
- Finance
- HR / People & Organisational Development
- Marketing
- Operations

We also invite proposal that focus on how the functional insights on productivity are brought together and made operational for strategic planning and decision-making by the Executive Leadership Team led by the General Manager of CEO.

FUNDING CRITERIA

A maximum of £20k (@100% fEC) will be awarded per application. Applications may be submitted by organisations eligible to receive ESRC funding. These include

- Researchers at any UK university
- Independent research organisations within the UK.

Eligible partner organisations include:

- UK-based businesses or UK sites of international businesses
- UK charities

Applicants should have a PhD or equivalent industry experience. It is expected that project duration will be between 3 – 6 months.

HOW TO APPLY

Application process:

1. Applicants are required to submit a written proposal for their research activity using the application template provided.
2. The application should clearly demonstrate that the proposed research explicitly relates **to the investment decision making and business planning process within UK firms** and should include:
 - (i) An outline of the proposed research including research title or research question, methodology and expected outputs of the research.
 - (ii) Timeline and summary budget of project costs.
 - (iii) Details of how partner organisation will contribute actively to the project through the provision of direct and in-kind resources (including finance, facilities, equipment, consumables and technical expertise).
 - (iv) Names and affiliations of the research team (institution/school/faculty/discipline as applicable) and names and affiliations of the partner organisation.
3. The deadline for applications is Monday 10th April 2023 and all submissions should be made via email to <mailto:TPI-Applications@manchester.a.cuk>.

4. The Productivity Institute commissioning panel will meet in April 2023 to review applications. Successful applicants will be notified no later than midnight Friday 28th April 2023. Unfortunately we are unable to provide individual feedback to unsuccessful applicants.
5. Proposals which are likely to contribute to promoting and improving UK business innovation, growth and development are particularly welcomed as are proposals that include collaboration between research organisations, firms or business support organisations from across all parts of the UK.
6. Applications from early career researchers will be looked upon favourably.

CONDITIONS OF THE AWARD

- The proposed activity will lead to a report that will be published as an Insight paper by The Productivity Institute.
- All funding will be subject to [ESRC/UKRI terms and conditions](#) and additional terms as may be required by The Productivity Institute, which are non-negotiable.
- Proposals will need to be costed by the applicant's research support team. Funds can be used for a range of research costs including researcher time, travel, events and consumables.
- Proposals will need to show 100% of full Economic Cost (fEC) of the proposed research. Approved proposals will be funded at fixed percentage of 80% of this sum. By accepting the funding, the Research Organisations agrees to find the remaining 20% from their own resources.
- Funded projects are expected to contribute to future Productivity Institute seminars/events, and to inform The Productivity Institute of any research successes resulting from this award (such as subsequent grants, awards and publications).
- Applicants are expected to undertake any engagement activities which arise from the project and report on these activities to The Productivity Institute (as per UKRI terms and conditions).
- The Productivity Institute will seek a short mid-project update and a brief end of project report (max 1 page) following the completion of the research.
- Funds will be paid quarterly in arrears based on actual costs incurred on the submission of a detailed expenditure report of costs incurred. The final payment will be made on completion of the project and the submission of final report on the project.
- The Productivity Institute is unable to arrange for any extension of the funds past the agreed end date.
- Any intellectual property, know-how and results created in the course of the Project ("Results") shall be owned by The Productivity Institute at The University of Manchester.
- Applicants will need to adhere to data protection and GDPR guidelines, and to the UKRI's guidelines and procedures on research integrity, according to the UKRI's [Policy and Guidelines on the Governance of Good Research Conduct](#), as well as the [ESRC's](#) - ethics policies and procedures.

Any queries, please contact Michael Livesey, Institute & Fellowship Manager, The Productivity Institute: <mailto:TPI-Applications@manchester.ac.uk>