

Benefits of collaborative projects

Over the past few decades business and technology have become increasingly interdisciplinary. A good example of this is industrial biotechnology – once the specialism of biologists but now a viable alternative to chemical processes for making chemicals. As a consequence chemists, biologists and engineers are working together to develop new processes for making both new and existing products.

But what if you are a company that has never tried out industrial biotechnology – or some other new and emerging technology? Or a company that has developed a technology but doesn't have the capability to exploit it? The solution might just be a collaborative R&D project.

So under what circumstances should you consider a collaborative project to help you move forward? Let's start with why not to do it!

- Not just for the money!
- Not to pursue a scientific hobby

But if you want to explore a science or technology which:

- fits with the medium to long term business technical strategy
- is new and emerging
- is risky and/or expensive
- has new markets which need development
- requires knowledge or capability that your company doesn't have
- and where knowledge exists somewhere else in Europe

then you should seriously consider a collaborative project.

Collaboration provides many benefits. It enables those participating to gain access to specialist or complimentary skills and capabilities, explore emerging science and technology, share costs, leverage investment and access new markets. Governments also understand the benefits of multiple partners collaborating in these kinds of projects and are keen to support them with public money. The rationale behind this is that the projects should, in most cases, lead to new products and processes – and hence innovation, new business and economic growth, all of crucial importance in the current financial climate. There are various types of financial support from the European Commission and the individual

Member States, typically taking the form of grant programmes, with associated work programmes which have assigned budgets and issue calls for proposals for collaborative projects, perhaps once a year.

What are they?

A collaborative project must by definition involve at least two partners but will typically involve a larger number – perhaps 6 – 10 partners for a small project and perhaps 20 partners for a large one. The typical types of partner would be:

- companies which are end users of technology – for example manufacturing companies – and can therefore steer the project to deliver technology which industry will want to use
- companies which are developers of technology, which can develop a sustainable business in further developing and selling the technology at the end of the project
- academics who can provide the basic academic input to ensure that the technology developed is sound
- industry bodies and consultants who can provide helpful roles as experts or in disseminating project output into other potential markets.

Of course one of the partners also has to coordinate the project, which involves overall project management and also being the prime link with the European Commission.

If you haven't been involved in a collaborative project before, there are a number of options you might want to look into.

- A small targeted project involving a small number of partners – maybe two or three – where the cost of the project is shared between the partners. This might work where development of a particular technology is beneficial to two or more companies, for example where they are in an established supply chain. The advantage of this is that there is less bureaucracy and no requirements to report progress, other than what the partners themselves deem to be necessary.

- A medium sized project where the partners' contribution is used to leverage public money. This type of project is often suitable for national schemes which operate within most Member States, where the funding is either available nationally or within a region.
- A larger project, perhaps with more than ten partners; this is often suitable for European funding under the Framework 7 (FP7) Programme. This type of project can attract funding of the order of €5 – 25 million, with typically 50% of the funds (more in some cases) coming from the European Commission.

With the second and third options there is inevitably a requirement to report progress to the funding body to accompany claims for the leveraged funds.

So if you're interested in pursuing collaborative R&D projects with public funding, how can you get help and advice?

Somewhere near you will be an office of the [Enterprise Europe Network](#). They will be able to provide general advice on a number of topics, including:

- **Awareness of funding schemes**
There are various agencies that can help you to understand which funding schemes exist which might be applicable to your business. But in addition there are various agencies in the Member States, both at national and regional level.
- **Advice on suitability and eligibility**
Many of the funding schemes have restrictions on eligibility and the agencies can advise whether your organisation is within scope. Just as important is a clear understanding of the type of project being targeted by the call; again advice is available on whether your project idea is a likely fit to this theme or specific call.
- **Partnering**
One of the critical components of any collaborative project is to assemble the right consortium. A typical collaborative project should have the types of partner described above but it is very important to get the right balance to meet the needs of the project.
- **Proposal Development**
It is worth considering whether to attempt to write the proposal yourself but make sure you read the call document thoroughly and respond to the specific requirements within it.

Alternatively there are many very able consultants, for example [PNO](#), who will give you a quotation for developing a proposal. If you decide to write it yourself it may be worth contacting your local Enterprise Europe Network office, or the national or regional innovation agency within your country, to offer advice on how to make it as compelling as possible.

- **Project management and dissemination**

One of the partners needs to take the role of project coordinator. This can be quite a demanding role since it involves overall project management and being the single point of contact for the Commission for reporting, financial claims and any other issues. The European Commission has become increasingly enthusiastic about having a partner who takes the role of dissemination, including identification of other potential exploitation routes for the technology developed in the project. It is worthwhile talking to anyone who has carried out this role before so that you understand the implications.

You can read more about this on the [European Commission's website](#). You can find information on the current calls for collaborative R&D projects on <http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/dc/index.cfm>.

Another source of information are the [National Contact Points](#). These exist in every Member State and are knowledgeable about the European programmes – and they often have early information about future call topics.

Clearly the bio-based products market is one which should be ideally suited to collaborative R&D. Many chemical companies know very little about industrial biotechnology and many technology providers have little knowledge of the chemicals sector and the end markets – so they should be able to learn from each other. In addition Europe has a wealth of leading academic groups who would be excellent partners for developing new technology or applications.

If you would like to know more please contact your national BIOCHEM partner – and especially [PNO](#), whose business is to provide independent advice on grants and public funding.

PNO is a partner within the BIOCHEM project and the person to contact is [Frederik Vandecasteele](#).