Consultant Innovation Fund
Frequently Asked Questions

1. **What is the purpose of the Innovation Fund under the terms of the Public Only Consultants Contract?**

   The Innovation Fund under the POCC23 has been developed to empower and support Consultants to be active agents of change and innovation in the services they lead. It is a unique fund dedicated to leveraging the knowledge and skills of senior clinicians for the purposes of innovation.

2. **What is defined as innovation under the terms of use for the innovation fund?**

   The innovation fund provides funding for research and innovations that are not covered under the normal allocation of equipment/staff/infrastructure/other resources by the employer and are directed at patient care. Innovation is defined as a novel idea, process, innovative/translational research, technological support or new way of working that represents a 'step change' in the way in which services are currently designed or delivered in practice.

   Examples include:

   - Innovation in terms of piloting a new development
   - Equipment/diagnostic appliances etc. necessary to support the above
   - Service enhancements / improvements to the clinical pathway
   - Innovative research / supporting the translation of research into practice and new ways of delivering services

   This list is by no means exhaustive. The nature of innovation is that new needs and opportunities emerge constantly. As such, the HSE Spark Innovation Programme will remain responsive to including new innovation directions that emerge over time.

3. **Am I eligible to apply for the innovation fund?**

   All Consultants who are contracted under the Public Only Consultants Contract are entitled to access an annual innovation fund of up to €8,000 annually on a pro rata basis. However, applications must also satisfy the eligibility and assessment criteria set out in the National guidance. Consultants are strongly encouraged to review their application against the 'Application Assessment Checklist' prior to submission to ensure their application is compliant with the guidance.

4. **How do I apply for the innovation fund?**

   Simply complete the dedicated electronic application form. Consultants are strongly encouraged to engage in the optional consultation and pre-submission review, where you can discuss your project and receive feedback to strengthen your application before submitting. Once submitted to the formal application submission, applications will be assessed using Application Assessment Checklist, in line with the National Innovation Fund guidance and **further changes will not be possible**.

5. **Will the funds be sent directly to me?**

   No, the funds will be transferred to your organisation from HSE Spark through the internal BPC transfers in March or June. Your site will then trigger the use of the funds in the normal manner. For example, if the application was to purchase a device, the funding for the device is provided to the site to make the purchase for the proposed project. The equipment remains the property of the site. In the event of pooling the innovation fund, you may elect for your allocated funding to be released to a partner organisation within the HSE.

6. **What supports are available to me from the HSE Spark Innovation programme?**

   Supports include access to feedback and guidance on proposed projects from the Spark team through the optional consultation and pre-submission review. Support packages for teams and individuals are curated on a bespoke basis relative to the needs and objectives of the innovator(s). A full list is available on www.hse.ie/spark.

7. **Can equipment be purchased with the innovation fund?**

   Yes, equipment can be purchased to support your innovation or research project. All equipment must comply with relevant regulations, including CE approval and MDR regulations where required, and must follow procurement rules under the National Financial Regulations Document B-1 Procurement. In addition, applications that include the purchase of equipment must have confirmation of support to ensure suitability and compliance from Clinical Engineering and/or ICT and comply with HSE procurement policies.

8. **Can I implement any innovation/research I wish using the innovation fund?**

   At its core, innovation and research must comply with some core fundamentals such as governance, quality and patient safety. Research and innovation activity must add value, protect the patient, represent value for money, compliment ‘systems thinking’ and abide within the rules of purchasing frameworks, regulation and competition law in Ireland.

Research proposed under this initiative must have an explicit intent towards innovation and/or translation.

The HSE Spark Innovation Team will be on hand to assist you, if required, in refining your idea to ensure alignment with the factors outlined above **before you submit your formal application**.

9. **Can I procure external services to help me deliver my innovation?**

   Yes, you can engage third-party suppliers (e.g., designers, researchers, etc.) to facilitate or contribute to your project, provided normal tendering and recruitment rules are followed. For projects that involve workforce dependency or are reliant on hiring staff, applications must demonstrate how the project can be sustained beyond the duration of IFC funding.

10. **Can I pay for a course or training with the innovation fund?**

    In exceptional circumstances, and with approval from the Clinical Director/Executive Clinical Director/Line Manager, the balance of innovation funding may be transferred for CME if CME allowance is insufficient. The final transfer in Spark takes place in November. Therefore, consultants who meet the exceptional circumstances criteria must submit their transfer request, together with the required confirmation of approval from their Clinical Director, before 1 November.

    Please note that retrospective transfers are not eligible, and transfers apply only to the innovation fund from the relevant year.

11. **How much funding am I entitled to on an annual basis?**

    As a POCC23 holder, you are entitled to an annual fund of €8,000 on a pro rata basis.

12. **Can I combine my application with another Consultant who is contracted under the POCC23 contract?**

    Yes, you can submit a joint application with other Consultants contracted under the POCC23 contract to engage in collaborative work up to the value of €50,000. The electronic application portal will allow you to indicate if you are engaging in joint work with other colleagues on the POCC23 contract. To be eligible for combined funding, all applicants must be employed under the POCC23 contract.

13. **If I am applying for joint funding with colleagues across multiple sites, which site will the funding be released to?**

    The preferred receiving site can be nominated by the lead applicant. Agreement will be

made on a case-by-case basis with Clinical Director/Executive Clinical Director/Line Manager and HSE Spark Innovation Programme.

14. **What considerations are made in terms of desirability, feasibility and viability when evaluating applications?**

- Managing duplication of effort: Applications will be evaluated to monitor for the duplication of already validated tools and technology or indeed tools and technology which have not met the burden of suitability in other settings. The HSE Spark Innovation Programme will hold a central repository of applications and activity to mitigate against unnecessary duplication and ensure value for money.
- Alignment with organisational goals: Applications will be evaluated to determine whether or not Management and Clinical Director have been made aware of, and are supportive of, the proposed innovation.
- Complex system considerations: Application will be evaluated to ensure that research and innovation opportunities have been considered in the context of the wider complex health system.
- Innovation in a highly regulated environment: Applications will be evaluated to ensure that proposals that pertain to equipment selection and procurement are in line with medical device regulation requirements, European Safety Standards and HSE procurement rules.
- Quality and Patient Safety: Applications will be evaluated to ensure that applicants uphold the standards of patient safety as the bedrock of health care provision and will be subject to the quality and patient safety guidelines of their organisation and the HSE.

15. **Can I apply if my project has received funding from the IFC previously?**

No. Repeat funding for the same project is not permitted. However, projects that build on a previously funded IFC project may be considered if they demonstrate significant changes or additional value. In such cases, applicants must provide evidence of outputs from the original funded project to support consideration of funding a second phase.

16. **Can non-consultants lead a IFC project?**

No. The IFC is designed to be POCC23 consultant-led. Non-consultants may collaborate but cannot be lead applicants.

17. **Are routine service delivery projects eligible?**

No. Routine service delivery or procurement-only initiatives are not eligible. The IFC supports innovation with measurable impact.

18. **Can I submit a project that is research-focused?**

    Research-related projects are welcome where they include a strong translational component with demonstrable impact on service delivery, patient care, or system improvement. However, pure research projects (e.g., basic science, literature reviews, feasibility studies or registry development without a clear service-delivery impact) are not eligible.

19. **Do applications need to demonstrate alignment with national/HSE priorities?**

    Applications should demonstrate appropriate alignment and free from conflict with HSE priorities such as Sláintecare, HSE Digital Health Strategy, National Clinical Programmes, etc.

20. **Can training or simulation (SIM) activities be funded through the IFC?**

    Training or simulation (SIM) activities may be considered fundable where they are an essential component of delivering an innovative new service or a significant change to an existing service. Such applications will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. However, the IFC does not fund the development or refurbishment of simulation centres, nor related infrastructure such as centres of excellence, furniture, pods, or similar capital items.

21. **Are POCUS (Point-of-Care Ultrasound) projects eligible for IFC funding?**

    POCUS applications are only considered innovative for IFC purposes, when they are directly tied to the development of a new clinical pathway. Applications must clearly demonstrate return on investment and provide strong cost justification.

22. **Can I use IFC funding to cover PhD/MD fees, stipends, or dissemination costs such as conferences and publications?**

    No. IFC funding cannot be used to pay for PhD or MD fees, stipends, or similar academic costs. In addition, dissemination expenses such as publication fees, conference attendance and travel, or academic posters are not eligible for funding. The IFC is focused on supporting innovation projects that deliver direct service or patient care impact.

23. **Do I need to provide a detailed budget with my IFC application?**

    Yes. All applications must include a clear and detailed budget that outlines how the requested funding will be used. This breakdown is required to support auditing, transparency, and good governance, and helps ensure that the proposed costs are appropriate and aligned with the aims of the project.

24. **Can IFC funding be used alongside industry funding or matched with external grant**

    Yes, in certain circumstances IFC can be used in conjunction with external or industry funding, provided the project remains compliant with the IFC eligibility criteria and governance requirements. Applicants must ensure that any co-funding arrangements are transparent, clearly documented, and do not result in duplicate funding for the same activities or outputs. Each application will be assessed on a case-by-case basis, and applicants should highlight any proposed industry partnership or matched funding in their submission.

25. **What is the maximum amount of funding a project can receive, and can applications be pooled for a single project?**

    The maximum value of IFC funding that can be awarded to a single project is €50,000. Consultants may pool their individual allocations to support a shared project, provided the combined total does not exceed €50,000. Applications cannot be divided into multiple pooled applications for the same overall project.

26. **What are the next steps if my project is approved?**

    If your project is approved you will be asked to return a signed Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), confirmation of CME availability, your POCC start date, and relevant departmental approvals (e.g., Clinical Engineering, ICT, or University support) as relevant to your project. Once documentation is returned, the Spark team will schedule a transfer of your project funds on the designated transfer schedule.

27. **If my project is approved for IFC funding, by when must the funds be spent, and does this depend on when the funds are transferred?**

    If your project is approved for IFC funding, all funds must be fully spent by **31 December of the year in which they are awarded**, **regardless of when the funds are transferred**. While your project does not need to be completed within this timeframe, **all expenditure must occur by 31 December** of the award year.

28. **If my application is not approved, can I use my innovation fund for another project**

    Yes. If your original application is not approved, you may submit a different project for consideration or reallocate your funding as a pooling consultant to a different project, provided it is submitted before the deadline for formal application submissions. **After this deadline, funding cannot be reassigned to a different project.**

29. **Are there any post-funding requirements?**

Yes. If your project is approved, you will receive a MOA which you are required to sign. As part of this MOA, you must complete two post-funding obligations: a 6-month progress report and a 12-month final report.

Applications from consultants who have previously received innovation fund projects but have not submitted the required reports for those projects will have their new application assessment paused until the outstanding reports are received. Applicants will be notified if reports are outstanding, and given sufficient time to submit all required reports before the final fund transfer.