



CoSTAR

THE UK R&D NETWORK FOR CREATIVE TECHNOLOGY

Applicant Guidance



Arts and
Humanities
Research Council

APPLYING TO THE CoSTAR PROTOTYPES & PILOTS PROGRAMME

All you need to know

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Welcome to CoSTAR

Convergent Screen Technologies and performance in Realtime, or CoSTAR for short, is a £75.6 million investment by the UKRI Infrastructure Fund, delivered by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC).

We are building the UK's first national R&D infrastructure to provide UK creative companies with unique access to specialised facilities, technology, cutting-edge connectivity and a national network of research and industry expertise.

Through open competitions and development opportunities, CoSTAR aims to transform great ideas into market-ready products, driving the continued growth of our gaming, TV, film, performance, and digital entertainment sectors.

The CoSTAR Network is made up of five R&D Labs located across the UK, each with their own research specialism, technical facilities, and expert researchers.



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Where are the CoSTAR Labs?

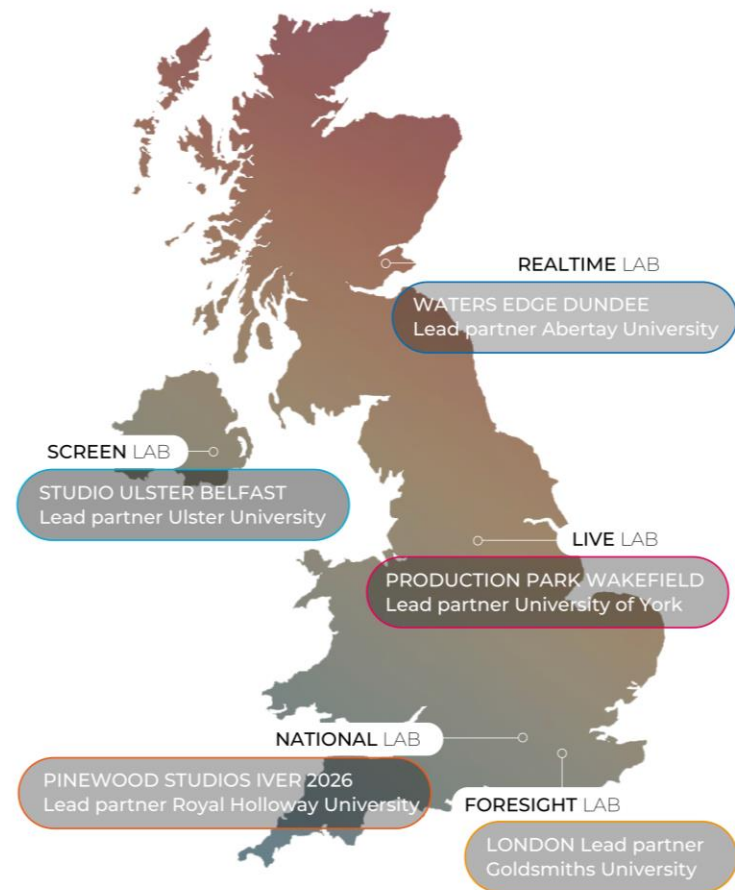
National Lab - is the central hub that co-ordinates the collaborative opportunities across the CoSTAR Network and will open a state-of-the-art facility at Pinewood Studios in 2026. Led by Royal Holloway, University of London.

Foresight Lab - is a community of industry leading researchers, policy experts and data analysts working to understand how new tech is shaping games, film, TV, performance, and digital entertainment. Led by Goldsmiths, University of London.

Live Lab - is a UK hub for developing new technology that makes live performance more immersive, flexible, and impactful. Led by the University of York and based in Production Park, Wakefield.

Realtime Lab - is a community of world-leading experts and industry pioneers exploring what's next in virtual production, realtime tech and gaming. Led by Abertay University and based in Dundee.

Screen Lab - is a facility for film, TV, gaming, and digital entertainment creators, focused on using technology to open up new ways of telling your stories. Led by Ulster University and based at Studio Ulster in Belfast.



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What is the CoSTAR Prototypes and Pilots Programme (PPP)?

The CoSTAR Prototypes and Pilots Programme (CoSTAR PPP) is a discrete element of funding awarded through the AHRC's grant to the CoSTAR National Lab. Its objective is to support applied and industrial research projects that demonstrate the benefits of CoSTAR infrastructure through the testing and use of the facilities and capabilities of the National, Screen, Realtime and Live Labs as they come online.

Applications to our programme should be able to demonstrate a strong alignment with CoSTAR's offer of access to technical facilities, research expertise and cash funding to enable Research and Development in support of business growth.

Each CoSTAR Network Lab will articulate the focus and requirements for any of their live funding rounds in more detail, which can be found on the [Funding and Support](#) section of our website. We also highly recommend attending any workshops or webinars run by the Labs so you can ask questions and hear from teams directly.

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ELIGIBILITY

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What sorts of companies and organisations are able to apply for PPP competitions?

CoSTAR has been designed to support UK business growth across our Creative Economy. Research Organisations, Creative Practitioners and Sole Traders can be included in PPP applications, but the lead applicant must be a UK-based company and demonstrate a high level of ambition to deliver technological advancement and business growth in its application to creative industry challenges.

Can I apply to work with any of the CoSTAR Labs, regardless of where my business is based?

Companies from across the UK can apply to work with the CoSTAR Network through PPP calls. These calls are hosted by different Labs throughout the year and offer access to technical and research facilities at a subsidised rate as part of a broader package of support.

Applicants are encouraged to work with the host Lab wherever possible. However, if you wish to use facilities at another CoSTAR Lab (for example, because you require specialist expertise or infrastructure that is not available at the host Lab, or because geographical location presents a barrier to participation) please state this in your application. You should include a clear description of the CoSTAR infrastructure you wish to access and the rationale for your request.

If your application is successful, we will endeavour to accommodate your request where possible.

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I'm a freelancer - can I apply?

Only UK-registered companies can be a lead applicant on a PPP call. Freelancers can apply if you are part of an application where the lead applicant is a UK-registered company.

As the company applying, are there limits for us on our use of freelancers / subcontractors on our proposed project?

Yes, subcontractors must be based in the UK and you may only use up to 75% of your total budget on subcontractors. There is further information on this in the [Budget Guidance](#) document.

Can a research organisation apply for this call?

A research organisation can be included as part of an application, but the lead applicant must be a UK-registered company.

Can two companies apply as co-leads / partners on an application?

Companies can apply in partnership or as a consortia as part of a PPP application but there can only be one lead applicant.

Can a company appear on more than one application?

Yes, companies can appear on more than one application.

Can a company submit more than one application?

Yes, however, your proposed projects must be different from each other and must still meet the call objectives and requirements.

Can companies of any size apply for PPP calls?

There is no restriction on the size of company that can apply as a lead applicant (or as part of a consortia application), as long as you are a legal entity based in the UK. However, the amount of the total project costs that can be reclaimed via a PPP award does differ depending on the company size. Please read the [Budget Guidance](#) for more details. The qualifying criteria for company size are included below.

Qualifying criteria for company size

Company Category	Staff Headcount	Turnover OR	Balance Sheet
Micro	<10	<€2m/£1.76m	<€2m/1.76m
Small	<50	<€10m/£8.8m	<€10m/8.8m
Medium Sized	<250	<€50m/£44m	<€42m/£38m
Large	>250	>€50m/£44m	>€42m/£38m

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Would current projects that are already running be considered for funding or are you looking for new projects to fund?

A current project would have to illustrate a well-defined R&D problem that it is looking to address as part of this opportunity. The programme exists to deliver exciting R&D opportunities for companies to work on; it is not project completion funding.

Does the applicant company need to have been registered as a UK company for a certain period prior to application?

We are aware that some companies won't have been trading long enough to have submitted any accounts or may have submitted abridged accounts if turnover is not of a sufficient level. This should not prevent you from applying to the programme, providing your company is registered with Companies House. This has been communicated to the judging panel and will not affect the judging process.

If I do not want to use CoSTAR infrastructure, will it affect my application?

CoSTAR facilities are provided at a subsidy as part of the package of support attached to a call. If the facilities you require can be found at one of the CoSTAR Labs, then these should be utilised rather than another facility. If, as part of your project, you require facilities that are not available through the CoSTAR Network, then you may include this in your application. However, this must be costed into your request for funding support (as these cannot be provided in-kind). Please note, however, that projects that do not make significant use of the CoSTAR infrastructure (whether facilities or expertise) are not likely to be a good fit for this funding and may not be successful.

In summary.....

CoSTAR invites applications from teams comprising a variety of UK-based companies, technologists, researchers, and creative practitioners, however, the lead applicant must be a UK-based company.

Projects must focus on the UK's screen and/or performance sectors and demonstrate a high level of ambition to deliver technological advancement and business growth in its application to creative industry challenges.

Organisations applying must:

- have a lead applicant that is an enterprise or legal entity registered and trading in the UK
- be from or support the screen and/or performance sectors
- have an operations and/or project team based in the UK
- intend to carry out any project work arising from this award in the UK
- intend to exploit the results of work from or in the UK
- only include eligible project costs in their application (see [Budget Guidance](#) on Allowable Costs)
- not attribute more than 75% of project costs to subcontractors. Such subcontractors should in all normal circumstances be based in the UK.

SUBSIDY CONTROL

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Why is subsidy control a consideration for the PPP programme?

The UK subsidy control regime is a legal framework that regulates how public authorities award financial assistance to businesses. CoSTAR PPP grants are delivered through the Research, Development and Innovation Streamlined Subsidy Scheme which is part of this regime. For projects to qualify for funding under this scheme there are eligibility criteria, evidence requirements and cost rules that must be applied.

Why do I need to declare any previous subsidies I have received for this project or activity?

The Subsidy Control Act 2022, which came into effect on 4th January 2023, applies to any subsidies granted by a public body (including any university) to a company. The public body needs to consider any previous subsidy awarded to a company when it awards a grant that is a subsidy to the company.

What are the R&D requirements in order to apply?

To be eligible for support, your project must:

- Meet all five Research & Development (R&D) criteria
- Be 'innovative'

These criteria ensure that your proposed work constitutes genuine research and development and contributes meaningfully to innovation in the sector.

The R&D criteria are outlined in the next section.



What are the R&D criteria (cont'd)

The R&D criteria are:

Novel: your project must seek to generate new knowledge, methodologies, or solutions not currently available in the public domain.

Creative: your work should involve original, innovative approaches (new experiments, theories, designs), not routine work.

Uncertain: your project must involve scientific, technical, commercial, or financial outcomes that cannot be predicted in advance.

Systematic: your activities should follow a planned, well-documented and methodologically structured process.

Transferable / Reproducible: outputs should have the potential to benefit wider users, markets, or future projects, and be capable of being tested, validated, and reproduced beyond their immediate context.

And what are the qualifying criteria in order for my project to be deemed "Innovative"?

Innovative in this context means your project should involve:

- a new or significantly improved product or process
- is clearly different from what previously existed
- has not yet been released to users (for products) or implemented (for processes)



Is my research "Industrial Research" or "Experimental Development"?

You must also tell us whether your project constitutes:

1/ Industrial Research OR

2/ Experimental Development

as this affects your permitted subsidy ratio.

For these purposes:

Industrial Research means the planned research or critical investigation that is aimed at the acquisition of new knowledge and skills for developing new products, processes, or services; or that is aimed at bringing about a significant improvement in existing products, processes, or services.

Experimental Development means acquiring, combining, shaping and using existing scientific, technological, business, and other relevant knowledge and skills with the aim of developing new or improved products, processes, or services. Experimental development does *not* include routine or periodic changes made to existing products, production lines, manufacturing processes, services, and other operations in progress, even if those changes may represent improvements.

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Industrial Research or Experimental Development (cont'd)

As a guide:

	Industrial Research	Experimental Development
Purpose	Generate <i>new</i> knowledge or skills; or <i>significant</i> improvements.	Apply existing knowledge and skills to produce <i>new</i> products, processes or services.
Technology readiness levels¹	4, 5, 6	7, 8, 9
Typical outputs	Prototypes, demonstrators, pilots in test / simulation environments.	Prototypes, demonstrators, pilots in real-life environments.

As CoSTAR offers its technical facilities as a "test / simulation environment" as part of the Pilots and Prototype Programme (PPP) award, the majority of PPP projects thus far have been classified as "industrial research"

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How is the value of the PPP grant calculated and what % of my eligible costs am I able to claim back?

Grant awards are calculated by a subsidy ratio. The final subsidy amount is calculated by applying the correct ratio and comparing it against the project's total eligible costs. The applicable ratio depends on whether the project is Industrial Research or Experimental Development and on the size of the enterprise, as set out in the table below.

Enterprise type	Industrial Research	Experimental Development
Small enterprise	up to 70%	up to 45%
Medium enterprise	up to 60%	up to 35%
Large enterprise	up to 50%	up to 25%

****Recipients may receive an additional 15-percentage-point uplift to the applicable subsidy ratio where the project involves "effective collaboration".***

How will I know if my project qualifies as "effective collaboration" and when will that 15% uplift be applied?

The CoSTAR Lab you are applying to will determine whether projects qualify as effective collaboration and that uplift will be applied at point of award.

For the project to qualify, it must include either effective collaboration:

- between businesses (including the recipient), where at least one of the businesses is a SME; or
- between the recipient and a CoSTAR Lab, where the CoSTAR Lab has the right to publish its own results.

"Effective collaboration" for these purposes means collaboration between at least two independent parties to exchange knowledge or technology, or to achieve a common objective based on a division of labour where the parties jointly define the scope of the collaborative project, contribute to its implementation and share its risks as well as its results. So, for example, effective collaboration in the project would:

- involve a jointly defined project scope;
- include meaningful contributions from all partners; and
- share project risks (including technical and delivery risks) and results between the collaborators.

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What are the eligible costs that I can include in my PPP grant application?

For more detailed information on budgeting and eligible costs please read the [Budget Guidance Documentation](#) included in the Application Pack.

Your budget must only include costs directly related to the R&D project. As part of your application, we have included a budget template for you to complete with eligible cost lines that include;

- 1/ Labour Costs
- 2/ Materials
- 3/ Capital Usage (Equipment)
- 4/ Subcontractors
- 5/ Travel and Subsistence
- 6/ Overhead at 20% of Labour Costs (we allow a flat 20% overhead on Labour costs only)

What are the ineligible costs I should not be including?

You must not include costs that pertain to:

- 1/ Sales, marketing or business development
- 2/ Routine operating costs not directly associated to R&D
- 3/ Asset purchases not related to R&D
- 4/ Entertainment or hospitality
- 5/ Costs already funded by another public body
- 6/ VAT on labour, overheads and capital usage

Is there a way for me to quickly calculate what the grant offer is likely to be if I'm successful?

Yes, please read the [Budget Guidance](#) document which provides full details on how to calculate your possible grant based on your total Budget.

You can then download the [Budget](#) to make your calculations. (The download should start immediately when you click the link and be saved automatically to your designated downloads folder.)

This should help you to determine approximately what your funding offer might look like as well as calculating the legal subsidy reporting obligations.

If you plan on applying, please save your final budget and upload it to your application.



Why is our company asked to make a "Company Contribution"?

Leverage and in-kind contributions represent the value your company brings to the R&D project. This shows CoSTAR that you already possess the foundational tools and operational baseline required to deliver the project successfully and that any public investment is unlocking a greater sum of total economic activity.

Company Contribution

Your required contribution may be provided as:

- ☐ In-kind labour
- ☐ Materials
- ☐ Use of internal equipment
- ☐ Hired equipment, facilities or other costs

Contributions must be:

- ☐ Identifiable
- ☐ Auditable
- ☐ Not sourced from other public funding



INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

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How is data related to the R&D I am proposing in my application treated?

Your data will be managed according to our Data Protection Privacy Policy which can be found [here](#).

Will I own the IP of the output or product developed via this PPP award?

Successful applicants will own any new IP created through their projects. The owner of any Background IP will own any improvements to the Background IP used in any PPP project.



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If there is 3rd party IP to clear, when would that be done?

If there is a 3rd party IP, owned by a party that is not a part of your project consortium then the clearing of this for usage in your PPP project will rest with the lead applicant. It is the responsibility of the lead applicant to make certain that they have all the necessary rights and permissions in place to work with third party IP if this is requirement for your project.

Can I see the contract I would need to sign if I am selected?

We have provided a Summary of Terms [here](#) which outlines key points from the full award Terms.



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CoSTAR INFRASTRUCTURE

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How do I find out what CoSTAR infrastructure is available?

The technical specification for each CoSTAR Lab's is listed on our website.

[National Lab](#)

[Live Lab](#)

[Realtime Lab](#)

[Screen Lab](#)

We also hold webinars for each PPP call that we run to invite questions from potential applicants and where you will hear about the facilities and the research support available.

If you are unable to attend webinars, they will be recorded and available to watch online.

If you have subsequent questions, you can email us at costar.pilots@rhul.ac.uk

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What studio technical support is provided versus what should I budget for?

CoSTAR provides a facilities and studio operations team to get you underway as part of your subsidised access to CoSTAR studio space and infrastructure, but if you need specialist skills (e.g. audio engineers, Vis FX specialisms etc.) you should budget for these as part of your application. As part of every PPP call, we will hold webinars where each Lab will explain what technical and research support will be made available and where you can ask questions about technical support.



APPLICATION PROCESS

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Do I have to use Submittable to complete my application?

For your planning and for accessibility we have provided a PDF of the Application Questions in your applicant pack.

These are for information purposes only. Please note, we do need your application to be completed via the Submittable platform.

If for any reason you need support to submit your application, please apply for one of our [Access Support Bursaries](#) or contact us by emailing costar.pilots@rhul.ac.uk to discuss your needs further.

What documents are required at the time of application?

In your application, you will need to respond to 10 questions. Two of those questions ask for supporting documents – a Budget and a Project Plan. Please use our downloadable templates which are available on the [website](#). You will then need to upload them to the section in your application..

If we require any additional clarification or supporting evidence to your application, we will contact you.

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I want to include more detail than a section in the application form allows, is this permitted?

No, only the information contained within the application form and within page limits specified for each section will be evaluated when selecting proposals. This is to ensure all proposals are scored fairly and equally and helps assessors to more easily compare proposals.

Are you able to provide reasonable adjustments and support where needed?

Yes, we encourage applicants to let us know about any reasonable adjustments they may require for the application process or their proposed project.

CoSTAR provides [Access Support Bursaries](#), based on a disability, health conditions, or access needs, to support those making applications to, or participating in, our Access Programmes.

For more information and how to apply, please click [here](#) or to discuss your needs further, please contact costar.pilots@rhul.ac.uk

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Can I use AI in my application?

We adhere to the [UKRI policy on the use of generative artificial intelligence in applications](#). Please read this policy carefully before using AI tools in your application.

Applicants may use AI to support drafting; however, they remain responsible for ensuring that the content is accurate, original, free of fabricated references, and reflective of their own ideas and expertise.

Use of AI in your application will not impact the outcome, however, any use of AI should be transparent and appropriately acknowledged where relevant. There will be the opportunity to declare AI usage within the application form.

Can I speak to someone from the team before submitting?

Please ensure you have read the full brief and have attended or watched the Webinar recordings. If you still have a specific question, please email us at costar.pilots@rhul.ac.uk

We cannot provide individual guidance on your application or specific feedback on your ideas in advance of your application.

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How do you assess my application?

Firstly, your application will be checked to confirm it meets the eligibility criteria and fits the competition scope. If so, it will proceed to assessment.

Your application is then reviewed by two independent experts from business or academia, selected for their relevant expertise. They assess applications independently, cannot see previous feedback, and cannot view each other's scores or comments.

All CoSTAR assessors are trained, must declare any conflicts of interest, and handle applications confidentially in line with data protection rules.

Shortlisted applications are then reviewed by an industry expert panel against the competition's portfolio criteria. The panel recommends projects for funding, with final decisions made by the CoSTAR Lab / Challenge Lead.

You will be notified of the outcome by email.



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Is there an interview stage?

Typically, the Submittable application form is the only stage in the selection process. If there is an interview stage, this will be clearly stated in the Call specific information provided on the website.

However, we may contact you if we require any clarification regarding the information provided in your application.

Will I receive feedback on my application if I am unsuccessful?

Feedback cannot always be provided but, where available, feedback will consist of assessor overall comments (not specific to each question), and with a focus on highlighting strengths and areas for improvement.

Please note there will be further opportunities to engage with our CoSTAR Access Programmes and we encourage you to re-apply for subsequent calls if you are unsuccessful in this round.



EQUALITY DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

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How important is our company's approach to Inclusion (EDI) and Sustainability in our application?

Environmental Sustainability and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) are central to our work at CoSTAR and all our Access Programmes. All projects, regardless of their main R&D focus, are expected to have a demonstrable engagement with either EDI, sustainability or both. This will be supported by CoSTAR training and mentorship in social impact areas that include: equitable design, developing environmental sustainability principles and working with diverse user groups.

Why do I have to complete personal EDI questions to apply?

The CoSTAR Network monitors the diversity of the applications we receive to ensure we are reaching and serving appropriately diverse audiences. This information also enables us to provide anonymised demographic reporting to funders, partners and stakeholders to ensure that we are open and accountable in our commitment to diversity and equality.

CoSTAR National Lab

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