

Water Breakthrough Challenge 6 Launch Webinar

9 September 2025 Audience questions

1. Project Guidance

1.1 With judges historically favouring the physical nature of widgets/robots, have any steps been taken to ensure that non-physical solutions aren't disadvantaged?

The Water Breakthrough Challenge is open to solutions of all types and has funded a number of non-physical solutions over the years, including Spring, Stream, the Water Literacy Course, Support for All and the Water efficiency in faith and diverse communities project.

1.2 Will you be considering social innovation projects that look upstream to reduce the amount of pollution getting to WWTPs in the first place?

The Water Breakthrough Challenge is open to any kind of [innovation](#), provided its innovative and has the potential to deliver benefits to customers, communities and/or the environment.

1.3 Can you say anything about IP management and ownership

Please refer to the IPR section in the handbook for full details on both default and alternative IPR options. If you have further questions, you can book a surgery session.

1.4 If our proposal targets the same challenge as an ongoing project but uses a different design. Is that considered non-duplicative and eligible?

Yes, as long as the new entry can prove how it differs to the ongoing project, and how it is innovative.

1.5 How do we demonstrate that a project couldn't be funded outside the Ofwat grant? Surely all projects will be able to attract funding from a variety of funding sources.

We recognise that there are a range of funding mechanisms available for innovation projects in the water sector. However, the Ofwat Innovation Fund is particularly interested in supporting innovations which may be too risky or too

uncertain to be funded through more traditional funding pathways, in line with our approach to [risk and innovation](#).

2. Partners

2.1 Is there a central point to find contacts for linking with a water company if our collaboration partners aren't linked to one? Or is there a better-suited fund?

If you are new to the water sector, you may wish to contact [Spring](#), the water sector's center of excellence for innovation. We recommend you read the water sector's [innovation strategy](#) before contacting water companies to understand their innovation priorities.

2.2 Can Ofwat be a partner on a bid if the project relates to regulation?

Initially Ofwat would not be able to partner on an entry but are always keen to be involved in steering groups after a project has been awarded funding. It might be useful for an entry to reference an intention to engage Ofwat as part of their entry.

2.3 How do you tackle a situation where no water company last year was willing to tackle or lead on a challenge project of culture change water bill payers wanted

The Water Breakthrough Challenge supports water company-led innovations, and we would encourage innovators to work with water companies to consider how their proposed solutions meet their needs and priorities.

2.4 Do we need to be a water company, or working in collaboration with a water company?

The lead entrant to Breakthrough 6 must be [an appointed 'Water Company' \(a water and/or sewerage undertaker or infrastructure provider \(i.e. Tideway\) in England and Wales](#). So, you need to be working with a water company for either stream. For Catalyst, you can submit the entry on Submittable. For Transform, it must be submitted by the water company.

2.5 Can a NAV be a representative Water Company as your partner?

The lead entrant to Breakthrough 6 must be [an appointed 'Water Company' \(a water and/or sewerage undertaker or infrastructure provider \(i.e. Tideway\) in England and Wales](#). 'NAVs' are now referred to as Small water and sewerage undertakers and you can find them listed via the link. They can indeed be lead entrants or partners.

2.6 As long as the lead is a water company in England/Wales, can partners be funded in other parts of the UK?

There is no restriction on where partners must be located, as long as the lead entrant meets the criteria, and the entry can prove how its innovation will benefit customers, communities and/or the environment in England Wales.

2.7 Can we also involve Ofgem in our proposal, as they have aligned challenges to our idea?

There is no reason why Ofgem cannot be a partner on an entry to the Water Breakthrough Challenge, and we encourage cross-sector collaboration.

3. Other competitions

3.1 When will the cross-sector fund be launched? What will max funding per project be?

Please see the latest information available on all the new challenges via this [link](#). We also recommend signing up to the newsletter.

3.2 Does the introduction of the WEL preclude water efficiency or broader demand innovations in the WBC6 streams? How will judges view water efficiency bids?

The existence of the WEL does not prevent entries addressing water efficiently from entering Breakthrough 6. However, note that you cannot enter the same innovation into both competitions. Judges will view water efficiency bids in Breakthrough 6 in the same way that they view any other entries and will judge them against the assessment criteria.

3.3 Will there be any early guidance issued on the difference between Transform and Discovery, and how projects can decide which to go for?



The Water Breakthrough Challenge consists of two streams: The Catalyst Stream, open to entries seeking between £150,000 and £2 million (where any partner can submit the Submittable form) and the Transform stream, open to entries seeking between £2 and £10 million (where the lead entrant water company must submit the Submittable form). While the Fund welcomes a range of innovation stages, entries to the Transform Stream should be at a stage of development where the concept is supported by evidence and progressing toward real-world application. Very early-stage concepts with high levels of uncertainty or limited testing may be better suited to the Catalyst Stream.

Discovery 2 is still in design, but in Discovery 1, entries could apply for up to £50,000 to further their ideas, and then finalists were awarded up to £450,000. Water companies were not allowed to apply or be partners in Discovery (as the aim was to bring new innovators into the water sector)."

3.4 When will Water Discovery calls be launched? And how do these differ from Catalyst Stream of WBC6?

Discovery 2 is currently in design and will launch in January 2026. Please see our blog [here](#) and we also recommend you sign up to the [newsletter](#) for the latest information.

4. Past projects

4.1 Where can we find the repository / index of reports and outputs from projects completed to date?

The final reports for completed projects are not currently available, but you can refer to the updated executive summaries on the [winners pages](#) of completed projects. You can also see the learning reports that have been published [here](#).

5. Fund

5.1 How do you listen to water bill payers to hear their input each year, to what their perceived “needs” are they want each year. e.g. if they request certain changes

Ofwat launched an open consultation about the future of the Ofwat Innovation Fund in early 2024. You can see the consultation, the responses and the outcome via this [link](#).

5.2 How are customers involved in the selection of projects to be funded?

An independent panel of judges will review the shortlisted entries put forward through the assessment. We aim to form diverse panels whose members will bring a wide range of perspectives, with a good balance of water sector and non-water sector voices. We include judges who will represent the customer's voice.

5.3 Is the funding for SME 100%?

A maximum of 90% of the total financial cost of the entry will be provided by funding from Breakthrough 6. Entry partners must provide the remaining 10% of the entry's total financial costs as a mandatory 10% financial contribution. Entry partners have the flexibility to decide how the remaining 10% is funded, as long as it is not funded by charges to water customers in England and Wales. It is up to the lead entrant and its partners to determine who will provide the 10% from within their partnership.

5.4 How can this help water companies overcome the "budget" excuse for not adopting at scale some previously funded solutions that proved large impact potential?

We understand that previously funded solutions have encountered barriers to their implementation at scale. This is why Ofwat is establishing the [Implementation Programme](#), a new £40 million initiative being developed as part of the Ofwat Innovation Fund. Its primary objective is to accelerate the speed and scale at which proven innovations are implemented across the water sector in England and Wales.

Within the Water Breakthrough Challenge you must outline your plans for implementation of your solution, if successful, by the lead entrant and the entry partners (question 2.2). You should then outline the plans for implementation in the wider water sector in question 2.3."

5.5 Please can you remind me what the innovation themes are?

Following the consultation on the future of Fund, from April 2025 Ofwat will stop using the Innovation Fund themes. We will continue using the water cycle tags.



We are keen to see entries addressing a variety of problems and delivering a range of benefits that help customers, communities and the environment.

6. Financial

6.1 We understand the grants sit outside VAT. But do the innovation grants count as “revenue” for normal corporation tax purposes?

Unfortunately, we are unable to provide advice on tax matters and would recommend you speak to an accountant.