

Discovery 2 Launch Webinar Transcript

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00:00:03.970 --> 00:00:06.490

Gabriella Frankl: Hello! Good afternoon, everyone.

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00:00:08.170 --> 00:00:11.010

Gabriella Frankl: Great to see so many people join.

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00:00:13.640 --> 00:00:19.209

Gabriella Frankl: So, thank you for joining today's launch webinar for the Water Discovery Challenge.

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Gabriella Frankl: The competition opened for entries last week, so we're excited to tell you a little bit more about the program and what you can expect.

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Gabriella Frankl: Do feel free to introduce yourselves in the chat. Let us know what organizations you're from, and where you're joining us from.

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00:00:40.610 --> 00:00:52.489

Gabriella Frankl: And just a little bit of housekeeping before we start. If you do have any issues during the webinar, please feel free to use the Zoom chat to let us know.

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Gabriella Frankl: The team are on hand to support if there are any problems, and they'll also be sharing relevant materials and links throughout the presentation as well.

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Gabriella Frankl: So, I want to welcome our speakers. Thank you all for being here with us today. So, the Water Discovery Challenge is delivered collaboratively by Ofwat and a delivery team from Challenge Works, Isle Utilities, and ARUP.

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00:01:21.600 --> 00:01:28.939

Gabriella Frankl: And we've got a number of the team here today, so I'll quickly introduce myself, and then I'll let the team introduce themselves.

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Gabriella Frankl: So, hi everyone. My name is Gabriella Frankel. I'm the Program Lead on the Water Discovery Challenge, from Challenge Works.

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00:01:40.490 --> 00:01:44.959

Hannah Muirhead: Hi everyone, I'm Hannah Muirhead, and I am on the innovation team at Ofwat.

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00:01:46.190 --> 00:01:51.180

Oli Raud: Hi, delighted to be here. My name is Ollie Raud, I'm Associate Director at our Utilities.

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Pranoy Dias: Hi, all, Pranoy, Senior Consultant at Isle.

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Gabriella Frankl: Right.

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Gabriella Frankl: Thanks, everyone. So you'll hear a bit more from our speakers throughout this webinar.

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Gabriella Frankl: So at the end of the webinar, there will be plenty of time for Q&A, and we'll be using Slido for this.

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Gabriella Frankl: The platform is live already, so please use the QR code or use the link

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00:02:22.950 --> 00:02:36.520

Gabriella Frankl: And please do start submitting your questions. Vote for the ones that you would most want to be answered, and we'll have some time at the end to cover those and go through some of the responses.

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00:02:36.520 --> 00:02:55.110

Gabriella Frankl: For any that we don't have time to cover, we'll be answering them offline, so don't worry, we'll make sure that we get you responses to any questions that you may have. And we will be recording this session, and we'll also be uploading that onto the Discovery website as well, so that will be available for you to have a look at.

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Gabriella Frankl: So, I think that is all of the housekeeping for now.

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Gabriella Frankl: So, what do we plan to cover today? So the purpose of today is to give you a bit of an introduction to the Water Discovery Challenge.

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Gabriella Frankl: and share some details that will help you prepare your entry. So, we'll go through an overview of the Water Innovation Fund, for any of you who might not be familiar with the fund.

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Gabriella Frankl: We'll introduce the Water Discovery Challenge, what our aims are, our ambition, we'll talk a bit about the innovator journey. We'll then go on to cover the eligibility criteria, what we're looking for, the assessment process, and then what you can win if you're successful.

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Gabriella Frankl: And finally, we'll then cover a few practical steps on how to enter, what support is available, and we will finish with plenty of time for the Q&A.

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Gabriella Frankl: So, I will hand over to Hannah, who will tell us a little bit more about the Water Innovation Fund.

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Hannah Muirhead: Thanks very much, Gabby. So,

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Hannah Muirhead: A quick headline overview of Ofwat's Water Innovation Fund, for those who aren't already familiar with it. So, it's a £600 million fund over 10 years to grow the water sector's capacity to innovate. It was £200 million for the first 5 years, and then we doubled it to £400 million for the period 2025 to 2030.

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Hannah Muirhead: We fund innovative projects that address the water sector's biggest challenges,

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Hannah Muirhead: And also a lot of other work on everything that goes around around that to support an innovation ecosystem that can self-sustain itself going forward. We've got three core aims, which are to accelerate the creation and rollout of new innovations.

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Hannah Muirhead: to grow the capacity and the capability of the water sector to innovate, and also to embed a culture that, that values, encourages, and supports innovation. So over the last five years, we've given around £200 million to 109 projects, all pursuing innovative solutions to some of the water sectors.

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Hannah Muirhead: most pressing challenges. We've also had over 300 organizations involved collaboratively in these entries, so yeah, we've seen great collaboration across the board. If we can go to the next slide, please.

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Hannah Muirhead: So we fund, our renovation projects through competitions. So we've got two established competitions, and as we double the value of the fund for this next five-year period.

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Hannah Muirhead: We increased the scope and the ambition of the fund, and we added, four new work streams. So, I'll start with the competitions. So we've got the Water Breakthrough Challenge. This is our water company-led competition. We fund, projects from \$150,000 to \$10 million, and it's run in two streams, called Catalyst and Transform, depending on the value of those,

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Hannah Muirhead: bids. Then we've got the Water Discovery Challenge, which is why you guys are all here, and we'll go into that one in much more detail in just a sec.

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Hannah Muirhead: So, for the new work streams, then, below.

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Hannah Muirhead: We've got the Water Innovation Missions, and that's about bringing water companies together to collaborate on solutions to specific sector, strategic challenges that the water sector is facing. We've got the Implementation Programme, and that's about identifying and addressing barriers to,

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Hannah Muirhead: to the skilled, rollout of innovations. We've got the cross-sector challenge, so that's about working with sectors that sit adjacent with water and looking at how we can jointly support solutions to shared issues.

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Hannah Muirhead: And we've got the, the Water Efficiency Lab, which is a new challenge-led competition to fund innovations that will cut water use, specifically on how we can turn smart meter and other data into actionable insights for water efficiency. So, yeah, now on to the Water Discovery Challenge.

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Hannah Muirhead: So why, why discovery? So, the water sector, as we all know, is dealing with multiple overlapping challenges. We've got climate volatility, aging infrastructure, emerging contaminants, high energy use, all sorts of environmental and biodiversity concerns, and...

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Hannah Muirhead: we need to address these urgent challenges so that the sector can work for everyone, and we need fresh solutions because the status quo, isn't going to cut it. So many of these aspects of these challenges aren't unique to water. Other sectors already innovating.

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Hannah Muirhead: quite rapidly in adjacent spaces. There's a big opportunity to look at this and just ask ourselves, how could this transform the way the water sector operates? So we're looking for knowledge and ingenuity from other sectors.

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Hannah Muirhead: We also do, sorry, a lot of consultation with the sector, and through this, we're hearing that the water sector can be difficult to access for innovators.

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Hannah Muirhead: getting a foot in the door can be a big challenge, so the discovery is about opening the gates and helping these fresh perspectives and ideas find the right place, and to make the right connections to have the impact in the water sector from these ideas. Sorry, next slide.

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Hannah Muirhead: The first Discovery Challenge received, a lot of interest, and it helped to build the innovation pathway for new organizations, quite successfully to help them enter the water, the water sector.

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Hannah Muirhead: what that competition did was successfully engage innovators from outside the sector, introducing fresh ideas and novel approaches to some of the water sector's big issues. It also successfully created a pathway so that innovators can secure water company partnerships. So we've had winners go on to deploy their ideas quite widely in the sector, but we've also had,

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Hannah Muirhead: our winners progressed to get funding from other ofwat funds, such as the Water Breakthrough Challenge. And the example on this slide is Waterwhelm, who followed up their win with a very strong partnership with Northumbrian Water, and were awarded almost \$2 million for their follow-up project.

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Hannah Muirhead: The project was a powerful accelerator for these organizations. The structured funding, I think, enabled them to quickly expand their teams. The training offered helped ensure that their solutions were commercially viable when adopted in the sector.

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Hannah Muirhead: So that was a very brief introduction. I'll pass back to... back to you, Gabby, for the rest.

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Gabriella Frankl: Great. Thank you for that, Hannah.

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Gabriella Frankl: So, as you've heard from Hannah, Discovery is all about bringing fresh, diverse ideas into the water sector, and providing that pathway into the sector for new innovators.

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Gabriella Frankl: So, it's a £7.5 million competition, and our aims are around accelerating the discovery, development, and adoption of promising new innovation for the water sector.

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Gabriella Frankl: That benefit customers, communities, and the environment.

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Gabriella Frankl: We aim to achieve this by directly supporting organisations with bold, early-stage solutions and facilitating their engagement with water companies through our non-financial support package and also our sector-led mentoring program.

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Gabriella Frankl: And a little bit of an overview of the innovator journey and some key dates.

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Gabriella Frankl: So, the challenge opened on the 20th of January last week, and the entry period is open until the 8th of April at 1pm.

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Gabriella Frankl: The finalist selection will take place from April until mid-June, and there'll be a bit more on this shortly. Up to 20 finalists will be selected and announced by mid-July.

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Gabriella Frankl: And they will then enter the finalist stage, which will run from July until Feb 2027.

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Gabriella Frankl: They'll be awarded up to £100,000, and given support to produce their development plan, which they will submit at the end of the finalist stage.

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Gabriella Frankl: So they'll submit this development plan in February 2027, and winner's selection will then take place at that point between February and April.

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Gabriella Frankl: And then 10 winners will be selected and announced in April 2027. And those 10 winners will receive up to £550,000, and will also benefit

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Gabriella Frankl: From a 6-month package of non-financial support, including ongoing mentoring from water companies.

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Gabriella Frankl: And I'm now going to hand to Ollie, who will tell us a little bit more about what we're looking for, the assessment process, and what you can win.

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Oli Raud: Thank you very much, Gabby. So as we stated, the Discovery Challenge exists to bring forward disruptive, highly innovative solutions that are improving in the water sector.

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Oli Raud: But to be eligible to enter Discovery, you need to be a UK-incorporated entity, you need to hold a UK business account, and comply also with the T's and C's. Please note that water and wastewater companies in England and Wales are not eligible to enter this strand, and as Hannah mentioned at the top of this presentation, there are other options available.

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Oli Raud: For you in the Water Innovation Fund. Despite that, water and wastewater companies will be involved through the mentoring and other kind of the non-financial support aspects, so they will be appearing, obviously, throughout, but knowledgeable to enter as a recipient of the funding.

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Oli Raud: So we're looking for innovation of any kind, that has the potential to have an impact, a positive impact on water communities and the environment in England and

Wales, but you'll note here a specific focus, and maybe different to other challenges across the Water Innovation Fund, sorry, with a specific focus on TRL,

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Oli Raud: 3 to 6, so ideas that are ready for concept testing, early feasibility studies, and also verification in a sector context.

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Oli Raud: We're particularly interested in finding new ideas from outside of the water sector, as we've discussed already. These could be from any sector, domestic or international, and it's great to see some people on the call joining us from the States and other places I've just seen popping up in the chat. We're looking for disruptive and diverse ideas, as we said, that can help the water sector find new ways of tackling some of its biggest challenges.

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Oli Raud: So, drawing on some knowledge and ingenuity that have been proven potentially in other sectors that face potentially similar challenges. As we've written here, this is not exhaustive, but, you know, energy, construction.

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Oli Raud: Aerospace defense, as well as other sectors that can really help us in the water sector here to unlock that transformational impact and innovation in the water system, both now and into the future.

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Oli Raud: So, all submitted entries will go through our assessment process, as you'd hope. First, they will go through an eligibility check before being assessed by technical assessors against the four assessment criteria.

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Oli Raud: Sector reviewers from water companies, as I alluded to earlier, will then assess the entries for applicability in a sector context and an operational context, before the finalists are agreed with Ofwat.

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Oli Raud: We... if we receive over 150 entries, which we think we may, we'll have to run a progressive assessment process, and more details on this can be found in the handbook.

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Oli Raud: So please do visit the website, do have a look at that handbook process, and the assessment and entry period process is all laid out there.

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Oli Raud: Next slide, please.

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Oli Raud: So what we're looking for in terms of the assessment criteria, you might be asking yourself this, so what are the criteria against which my entry will be assessed? There are four of them, four main criteria assessors will be using to assess the eligible entries. That's distributed across, impact, which is weighted at 40%,

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Oli Raud: Here, we're looking to understand, you know, what the solution is, does it address a relevant need within the water sector, and will it deliver clear benefits for customers, community, and the environment?

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Oli Raud: This is an innovation program and challenge, so naturally innovation is important here, weighted at 25% of the overall funding, which is looking at innovation new to the sector in England and Wales, and how it is better than the incumbent or current alternatives.

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Oli Raud: We look at capacity, capability, and commitment, to understand the delivery team's experience, skills, and capabilities, and the timeline and delivery plan, and how the team will spend the budget if awarded.

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Oli Raud: And then lastly, at 20%, we also look at the ability to succeed, to be sustainable, and gain adoption in the sector, so really critical

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Oli Raud: assessment criteria here, which looks at the feasibility, viability, desirability of the solution within the sector, and does it have the potential also to be widely adopted once proven? So we're very interested here to see that any

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Oli Raud: Any anticipated risks as well are well managed and highlighted to make sure that, you know, we are putting our money where we want to be doing.

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Oli Raud: So finally, onto the part that most maybe have been waiting for. If you're successful, what can you win? So up to 20 finalists will be awarded up to £100,000 of funding to develop their solution.

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Oli Raud: In this first stage, we're calling the finalist phase. Finalists also receive a wealth of non-financial support to strengthen and accelerate the development of their solutions.

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Oli Raud: This includes mentoring from water companies, as well as access to technical experts and a range of other wraparound skills and startup support, and training.

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Oli Raud: Water company mentors will provide teams with bespoke guidance, as well as feedback on their solution and its applicability to the sector, crucially. By the end of the program, winning teams will have worked directly with water companies for over a year, so we'll see, hopefully, a building of those partnerships and increase, increasing of that potential for adoption.

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Oli Raud: And where possible, we will aim to naturally match those teams based on skill set and experience.

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Oli Raud: So there are up to 10 winners, then, if you go through that phase, will then go on to be awarded up to £550,000 to further develop their innovation, receiving ongoing mentoring and support for a further 6 months to accelerate progress.

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Oli Raud: There's not a deadline, actually, for this spending award, so it could go into the future.

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Oli Raud: And with that, I'll pass on to Gabby. Thank you.

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Gabriella Frankl: Great, thank you, Ollie. So, now for a few sort of practical bits on how to submit your entry and where to find, support for doing this.

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Gabriella Frankl: And a reminder, do please continue to add any questions that you've got onto the Slido, as we will shortly be looking at those and giving you some responses.

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Gabriella Frankl: So, firstly, you must submit your entry using the Submittable platform, and you can find the link to that on the Discovery page, so please make sure you submit via Submittable.

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Gabriella Frankl: You can start and save a draft in the platform, so, if you need to save a draft and still come back to it, that's fine. You can also download a Word document of the entry form that is also available on the Discovery website.

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Gabriella Frankl: And that should support you with drafting your entry offline before you're ready to submit it.

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Gabriella Frankl: The entry form, as you'll see, covers three sections, so there's the eligibility criteria, then there are unassessed questions, and then the assessed questions.

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Gabriella Frankl: And the deadline for submitting entries, just as a reminder, is 1pm on the 8th of April, so do make sure you have hit the button in Submittable before that deadline.

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Gabriella Frankl: And there is plenty of support throughout the entry period for prospective entrants.

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Gabriella Frankl: And you can find this on the entrance support page on the Discovery website.

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Gabriella Frankl: So to make sure that all potential entrants have access to a foundational understanding of the water sector and the opportunities for innovation, we'll be hosting another webinar around discovering the water sector.

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Gabriella Frankl: So, that will be on the 12th of February, so do please register for that, and join us.

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Gabriella Frankl: And we also have a wealth of additional content.

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Gabriella Frankl: On the website, covering, all sorts of different, topics and challenges, within the water sector.

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Gabriella Frankl: So that can, also support you with learning a bit more, about the water sector and some of the sort of specific, elements that may be relevant to your, your solution. So do please go and have a look at that content series as well.

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Gabriella Frankl: On the entrance support page, you will find all the information that you need

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Gabriella Frankl: To help you prepare your application. The Innovator Handbook is really key. That should be your Bible for this. That's got everything that you need in there. There's also the T's and C's. There are FAQs as well, which do cover, a lot of the key topics, as well, so do please have a look at those.

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Gabriella Frankl: If you still have a question that hasn't been answered in any of that content, then please do reach out to us, so our email is on there, and is also, of course, on the website, so please feel free to reach out once you've had a look at some of the existing content.

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Gabriella Frankl: And then finally, we will also be running an entry clinic on the 18th of March, so that will support you with resolving any specific questions that you may have about the entry process, the assessment criteria, before you hit submit on your entry.

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Gabriella Frankl: So, I think, those are all the key things from us. So, to sum up.

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Gabriella Frankl: The Water Discovery Challenge is currently open for entries, and will close on the 8th of April at 1pm, so make sure you submit your entry before then. It is a £7.5 million, competition.

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Gabriella Frankl: So there's £7.5 million available to be shared between 20 finalists and 10 winners. So finalists will receive up to £100,000, and then 10 winners will receive up to £550,000.

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Gabriella Frankl: And as I mentioned, the Innovator Handbook is critical, so please, do download that. Do make sure you've had a read, because it has all the information you need, it has everything that we've gone through here as well, and you'll find further support and information on the Discovery website.

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Gabriella Frankl: So I think those are all the key things from us. Hopefully that was valuable, just to take you through some of the aims of discovery, what the process looks like, what the assessment criteria are.

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Gabriella Frankl: There will be a Zoom poll that will pop up, so do please let us know of any feedback. We would really appreciate that.

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Gabriella Frankl: And now we will move on to the Q&A, that's on Slido.

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Gabriella Frankl: And Pranoy is going to help us, direct any questions to the, the speakers, if I can ask speakers to make sure that their, their cameras are on.

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Pranoy Dias: Yeah, thank you, Gabby. There's a lot of questions coming through, so I think...

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Pranoy Dias: I'll just prioritize some of these questions, and if we haven't answered your questions, we can always respond them, via email separately. So I think the first one, is there a... I think this is for Hannah, is there any risk that discovery could change if, when or what is dissolved?

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Pranoy Dias: For example, is there any chance it does not progress to the winner stage?

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Hannah Muirhead: Thanks for that. Yes, I appreciate there's a lot of change going on in the sector at the moment, but the government is not revisiting the 2024 price review funding decisions, and we will be delivering the Innovation Fund as planned. The funding is allocated, and that includes for this round of discovery, so it's all safe there.

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Pranoy Dias: Thank you, Anna. So the next one is, what are the conditions for IP ownership? Cabi, this one is for you.

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Gabriella Frankl: Yep.

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Gabriella Frankl: No problem. So... let me...

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Gabriella Frankl: just, make sure I've got my response for you. So, there... so there are no IPR requirements for the Water Discovery Challenge.

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Gabriella Frankl: So, any IP brought into the challenge by an innovator remains with the innovator, with no obligation to share that, royalty-free, and any IP developed during the challenge also remains with the innovator.

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Gabriella Frankl: With no obligation to share that royalty-free. So hopefully that helps to clear that up.

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Pranoy Dias: Okay, thank you. So the next one is, do applicants scope out a project for the \$100K budget, or for a follow-on \$500K project as well, in case chosen as a winner? Do you want two project proposals?

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Pranoy Dias: Ollie, you want to take this one?

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00:23:28.900 --> 00:23:48.680

Oli Raud: Yeah, I mean, so the two phasings of it would mean that we would only assess one at a time, sequentially, so you would be required to submit an entry for Phase 1. If you were successful within that, you would be, obviously, then invited to go on to Phase 2 for the application process within that.

130

00:23:48.880 --> 00:24:13.019

Oli Raud: I mean, it's not going to do you any harm to have an end point in mind, or a continuation or development pathway for your renovation, so I wouldn't discourage that at all, but there is no need or requirement within the fund itself to have both those laid out at time of entry for the first phase, so... and naturally, you'll be working with the sector, you'll be working with experts and mentors.

131

00:24:13.070 --> 00:24:29.749

Oli Raud: from those water companies, so it might well be that actually things change. You know, we know innovation isn't necessarily a straight line, is it? So, there might be requirements to pivot, so I would say, you know, be agile, be fleet of foot, and be responsive to the needs of the sector, but, you know, naturally a longer pathway vision for what the

132

00:24:29.750 --> 00:24:36.449

Oli Raud: Success and goal could look like across those two phases will... will help you articulate that better, maybe, in the first phase.

133

00:24:38.460 --> 00:24:52.100

Pranoy Dias: Thank you, Oli. I think there's another one that you can answer. So, between the finalist and winner stages, what criteria will matter most in demonstrating readiness to move from a 100K pilot to a 550K delivery scale solution?

134

00:24:54.070 --> 00:25:02.249

Oli Raud: So, we will be releasing the, the, the assessment criteria, I suppose, on the, on the second phase,

135

00:25:02.280 --> 00:25:17.849

Oli Raud: after this first phase, but as you can see from the slide that I, presented, the assessment criteria is weighted on 40% on impact, 25% on innovation, 15% around the kind of capability, capacity, commitment, and then 20% around

136

00:25:17.850 --> 00:25:32.089

Oli Raud: its ability to succeed at scale and again adoption in the sector. So that's the breakdown of what we're looking for within innovation. So, hopefully that's clear within the guidance as well, around what we'll be looking for for entries.

137

00:25:33.260 --> 00:25:41.700

Pranoy Dias: Yeah, thank you. There's a couple of similar ones around how startups can apply if they don't have a connection with a water company.

138

00:25:41.760 --> 00:25:55.009

Pranoy Dias: Or do applications need a water company partner, steering groups? So I can take this one. So I guess the challenge is built on the basis that you don't need a water company to partner, so it's...

139

00:25:55.120 --> 00:26:09.139

Pranoy Dias: predominantly based, that we are looking for innovators, because we... you won't have that particular relationship with a water company. And through this competition, we will be providing you with mentors and experts as well from the water sector itself, so you don't really need a

140

00:26:09.140 --> 00:26:15.730

Pranoy Dias: What a sector lead or partner to be partnering, in this competition itself. You can apply on yourself.

141

00:26:18.680 --> 00:26:22.149

Gabriella Frankl: And I think, just to reiterate on the eligibility criteria.

142

00:26:22.280 --> 00:26:27.079

Gabriella Frankl: So, water companies themselves are not eligible to apply.

143

00:26:27.250 --> 00:26:29.549

Gabriella Frankl: Just to make sure that that's... that's clear.

144

00:26:30.620 --> 00:26:32.430

Pranoy Dias: Yes, definitely.

145

00:26:33.370 --> 00:26:52.930

Oli Raud: Can I maybe just jump in quickly? I was seeing a couple of conversations in the chat there around international applicants, so I think, again, going back to kind of one of the slides that I mentioned around eligibility, it doesn't necessarily matter if you're not necessarily headquartered in the UK. You need a UK-incorporated entity.

146

00:26:52.930 --> 00:27:04.929

Oli Raud: and you need a UK business bank account. So, you may well be headquartered elsewhere, you may have actually proven your innovation elsewhere, but it's about the applicability to the water sector in the England and Wales that we're most focused on.

147

00:27:04.930 --> 00:27:29.290

Oli Raud: And having some footprint, within, that territory, then to be able to scale and grow and actually deliver against what your application is doing. And for that, we need that UK incorporated entity, and then the business bank account registered in the UK. So, hopefully that's helpful for those which are looking maybe on from an international perspective, and maybe looking at the England and Wales water market as a

148

00:27:29.330 --> 00:27:30.979

Oli Raud: It was an interesting opportunity.

149

00:27:32.490 --> 00:27:41.919

Pranoy Dias: Thank you, Oli. I think another one for you, are entries for universities eligible? Is there any requirement to spin out a company to receive any finalist winner's prize?

150

00:27:43.510 --> 00:28:00.360

Oli Raud: So no, not that I'm aware of at the moment in terms of the, you know, the need to spin out. I think we did see from the last, discovery a number of universities with successful applications, naturally being a kind of earlier stage, TRL, or innovation maturity level.

151

00:28:00.360 --> 00:28:08.319

Oli Raud: this fund does attract, university and potential spin-outs within that space. I think you'll need to just,

152

00:28:08.400 --> 00:28:21.179

Oli Raud: think about your, ability, I suppose, as an academic, to be able to affect the change or the impact that you're looking to seek within your... sorry, that you're seeking within the application.

153

00:28:21.180 --> 00:28:28.959

Oli Raud: So, if that is better suited to a spin-out venture or a vehicle which is maybe separate to the university.

154

00:28:29.270 --> 00:28:46.200

Oli Raud: that's something that you need to take a call on. We're not going to necessarily judge on that. We'll judge on the merits of the application and what is most fit for purpose, if that makes sense. So, yes, very much welcome universities within this space, whether they're spun out as a separate venture.

155

00:28:46.260 --> 00:28:58.189

Oli Raud: That's not something that we... it's not a prerequisite, let's put it that way, and we would assess the eligibility and assess the, kind of, its fit for purpose based on what we receive in the entry.

156

00:29:00.480 --> 00:29:15.020

Pranoy Dias: Thank you. I think you've touched on this, is what TRLs are we expecting innovations to be at? I think you mentioned we, you know, this roughly needs to be around the lower TRL solutions from 3 to 6. Do you want to elaborate on that, Ollie?

157

00:29:15.190 --> 00:29:20.479

Pranoy Dias: And because there's another question around what kind of solutions we might be expecting, or example types.

158

00:29:21.590 --> 00:29:39.589

Oli Raud: Yeah, I suppose those are... I favor the kind of TRL and innovation maturity levels. This is around testing a concept, so it would have potentially gone beyond, that initial ideation and concept and bench testing into something which is actually starting to become more operational, kind of...

159

00:29:39.590 --> 00:29:56.730

Oli Raud: or testing within the field, so some of those early feasibility studies, potentially, concept testing, proof of concepts, and then verification within an actual operational environment in a water sector context. So that's the kind of sweet spot, I suppose, for this fund, as we see it.

160

00:29:59.160 --> 00:30:08.069

Pranoy Dias: Thank you. I think you've touched on the next one. So can multiple entries be submitted by the same company for different projects?

161

00:30:08.430 --> 00:30:10.769

Pranoy Dias: Gabby, I'll pass this on to you.

162

00:30:12.480 --> 00:30:31.870

Gabriella Frankl: Yeah, so provided they are different initiatives, yes, that is fine. You can't submit the same entry multiple times, or if you've submitted a solution to a previous round of discovery, then you wouldn't be able to submit that again.

163

00:30:34.030 --> 00:30:51.139

Pranoy Dias: Thank you. So the next one is, is there a reason it's so slow? Sorry, I think it's just moving. So slow, no money awarded, really, to April to 2027. We've already waited 2 years since off-port at Utility Week 23. Said culture change is key.

164

00:30:51.790 --> 00:30:56.529

Pranoy Dias: Is this... is this another question to Gabby?

165

00:30:57.720 --> 00:30:58.890

Pranoy Dias: Or maybe Hannah can...

166

00:30:58.890 --> 00:31:03.139

Gabriella Frankl: I think... I think maybe we take that one away, I feel like I might need to dig into...

167

00:31:03.410 --> 00:31:06.050

Gabriella Frankl: The detail of that a bit more, if that's okay.

168

00:31:06.500 --> 00:31:07.480

Pranoy Dias: Yeah, sorry.

169

00:31:08.400 --> 00:31:14.870

Pranoy Dias: So the next one is, is the \$550K intrusive of the initial 100K? Gabby, I think it's one for you.

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00:31:19.250 --> 00:31:29.140

Gabriella Frankl: So, it's... it's not inclusive, so the total that you can, be awarded is up to \$650, so there's an initial,

171

00:31:29.140 --> 00:31:42.710

Gabriella Frankl: 100,000 up to 100,000 in the finalist stage, and then for the 10 winners, they will receive up to \$550. So those winners could be receiving, in total, up to 650,000.

172

00:31:45.010 --> 00:31:54.579

Pranoy Dias: Thank you. You mentioned funding of up to \$100,000K, 100,000. Does the amount requested factor into decision process?

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00:31:55.590 --> 00:31:58.560

Pranoy Dias: Gabby, if you can maybe share some insights on that.

174

00:32:00.230 --> 00:32:19.690

Gabriella Frankl: No, that doesn't... doesn't... doesn't influence the assessment, no. So, we'll ask you how much you're requesting and, what... what activities, you plan to... to

support, with that... with that budget, but that has no, the amount requested doesn't have any bearing on the assessment.

175

00:32:21.360 --> 00:32:39.660

Oli Raud: There's another one in the chat around the intervention rate in Grantspeak, as we call it. So this is 100% funded. There isn't a need to provide match funding within this, which is maybe slightly different to the breakthrough funds, and maybe other funds you're maybe used to as well, be it European or be it...

176

00:32:39.660 --> 00:32:44.310

Oli Raud: UKI, or I, or researching, or whatever. So yeah, 100% funded,

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00:32:44.360 --> 00:32:46.149

Oli Raud: You get all of what you're given.

178

00:32:48.100 --> 00:32:55.990

Pranoy Dias: Thank you. Is there any advantage to applying early in the entry period? Gabby, this one's for you.

179

00:32:56.930 --> 00:32:58.520

Gabriella Frankl: No advantage at all.

180

00:33:01.410 --> 00:33:03.159

Oli Raud: Maybe... maybe for your sanity.

181

00:33:03.500 --> 00:33:11.480

Gabriella Frankl: And you're, like, not pushing it towards a deadline. Yeah, don't leave it until the last minute, but no, there is no advantage to, entering, early.

182

00:33:12.520 --> 00:33:23.230

Pranoy Dias: Yeah, I guess it's just to add a bit more to that is, every entry will be started... we will start assessing all the entries after the entry period closes, so there's, not really an advantage unless you really want to apply earlier.

183

00:33:25.900 --> 00:33:34.120

Pranoy Dias: are water companies allowed to provide a support letter for the application?
Gabby, maybe this one's for you?

184

00:33:36.090 --> 00:33:39.239

Gabriella Frankl: Could you repeat that? Was that... are they allowed to...

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00:33:39.590 --> 00:33:41.669

Pranoy Dias: Are they allowed to provide the support now?

186

00:33:41.670 --> 00:33:42.489

Gabriella Frankl: What letter?

187

00:33:42.850 --> 00:33:43.630

Pranoy Dias: Yeah.

188

00:33:44.400 --> 00:33:57.749

Gabriella Frankl: I mean, that... that's not sort of part of the process, so, we... we won't necessarily be reviewing anything like that as part of the assessment, so I don't think that... that's necessary, no.

189

00:33:59.090 --> 00:34:04.299

Gabriella Frankl: And of course, part of the intent is that, we, match

190

00:34:04.420 --> 00:34:19.529

Gabriella Frankl: innovators, with water company mentors to help you create that, that connection and that partnership, and... and sort of help to get that, that solution sort of developed and adopted by the sector. But no, no letter is required.

191

00:34:21.239 --> 00:34:24.249

Pranoy Dias: Thank you. So I think the next one...

192

00:34:24.639 --> 00:34:34.669

Pranoy Dias: Can you confirm the dates? The slide said awarding and support in 2027. Is that really the case, as it is not working at the speed of startups?

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00:34:34.839 --> 00:34:39.259

Pranoy Dias: And Gabby, if you can take this one.

194

00:34:41.920 --> 00:34:49.609

Gabriella Frankl: Yeah, that's fine. So, our initial finalist phase, is a, 7-month phase.

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00:34:49.780 --> 00:35:05.740

Gabriella Frankl: That is ever so slightly longer than last time, because we received some feedback that it would be beneficial for finalists to have a little bit more time to make the most of the mentoring, make the most of the other expert technical support they were offered.

196

00:35:05.740 --> 00:35:15.250

Gabriella Frankl: And the other skills training, and of course, to have the time to, allocate the budget and develop their, their development plans.

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00:35:15.250 --> 00:35:19.870

Gabriella Frankl: So that has been extended in response to that feedback.

198

00:35:19.870 --> 00:35:25.960

Gabriella Frankl: Which is why that... that phase now runs until February 2027.

199

00:35:25.980 --> 00:35:28.220

Gabriella Frankl: So that is... that is a...

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00:35:28.420 --> 00:35:32.689

Gabriella Frankl: a direct learning from last time. So we hope that that will be

201

00:35:32.860 --> 00:35:35.860

Gabriella Frankl: Beneficial to those finalists to have a little bit longer.

202

00:35:37.080 --> 00:35:52.760

Oli Raud: Just to jump in maybe there as well, maybe there's some confusion here around the funding being released in 2027. I think maybe I was reading, or interpreting that question as the... as a slight kind of criticism to the timeframes.

203

00:35:52.760 --> 00:36:16.170

Oli Raud: looking at the, actual Innovator Journey slide that Gabby talked to, and the timeline for this, the final stage will run from July 26th, so we're actually only talking about 3 or 4 months away, once we've actually gone through the process now, so funding will be awarded at that point, and won't be, you know, we won't be waiting till the end of that, period to then award

204

00:36:16.170 --> 00:36:27.590

Oli Raud: funding. So, funding will be released in 2026. Appreciate, that, you know, funding, is, you know, a critical path, or critical part of startup life.

205

00:36:27.590 --> 00:36:48.810

Oli Raud: And, you know, startups move quickly, but this is within a broader context of other programs as well, and the second time of running this fund, so there's naturally a fair amount of setup and design that's needed to have gone into this, hence why we're coming out to the market now, and then this process will be ongoing.

206

00:36:48.810 --> 00:36:53.019

Oli Raud: With a second, discovery as well at some point in the future.

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00:36:53.020 --> 00:36:59.610

Oli Raud: different to the last period where we only had one. So, hopefully we're addressing some of the, some of the...

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00:36:59.720 --> 00:37:15.330

Oli Raud: Learnings that we received from last time, and the demand, the incredible demand that we had from the first discovery, so we're able to meet that a bit better with increased amounts of funding and more of the actual, competition this time, if that makes sense.

209

00:37:17.750 --> 00:37:20.079

Pranoy Dias: Thank you, Oli. Thank you, Gabby.

210

00:37:20.640 --> 00:37:32.489

Pranoy Dias: so the next one, we unsuccessfully applied in the first round of discovery. Can we apply for the same project in round two? And are there any differences between the rounds? I think, Ollie, this one's for you.

211

00:37:33.410 --> 00:37:44.729

Oli Raud: There's nothing to say that you can't submit, the same project. If it was, kicked out last time. I think you would need to kind of articulate very clearly as to why

212

00:37:44.770 --> 00:37:48.570

Oli Raud: It's maybe different this time, why the timing is right now.

213

00:37:48.590 --> 00:38:04.310

Oli Raud: why maybe it wasn't right last time. I think it'd be really important to articulate some of those, clearly, some of those improvements that have been made, or, the addressing of any feedback that was there last time. But I think, yeah, I would urge you very...

214

00:38:04.310 --> 00:38:17.270

Oli Raud: Strongly to look at what that feedback was, and really articulate clearly as to, kind of, what's changed, and why now versus last time, given that you'd already had that, that,

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00:38:17.940 --> 00:38:22.749

Oli Raud: Slightly... yeah, what's the word? You know, you haven't been accepted in the first round.

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00:38:24.840 --> 00:38:26.540

Pranoy Dias: Okay, thank you, Ollie.

217

00:38:26.780 --> 00:38:37.899

Pranoy Dias: Another one is, are there any requirements with regards to how any prize money allowance is spent? What are the requirements with regards to reporting? Gabby, you can take this one.

218

00:38:40.350 --> 00:38:56.340

Gabriella Frankl: So there are no, sort of, specific, I guess, requirements as to, to how, that is, is, sort of, spent, but we will ask you to, tell us what that, sort of, breakdown, of your, your budget looks like.

219

00:38:56.560 --> 00:39:08.389

Gabriella Frankl: And then there will be, monitoring for winners, at the end of that winners phase, and we'll be able to explain a bit more about that as part of the sort of winners process.

220

00:39:11.070 --> 00:39:16.409

Pranoy Dias: Thank you. In terms of ensuring wide adoption for... of...

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00:39:16.580 --> 00:39:27.130

Pranoy Dias: Let's just come on up. In terms of ensuring wide adoption of the innovation across the water sector, what models for achieving this would you be open for? Example, open source software?

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00:39:27.420 --> 00:39:30.769

Pranoy Dias: Ollie, if you can maybe share some insights on that.

223

00:39:31.650 --> 00:39:49.910

Oli Raud: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I think those kind of open source models, anything which effectively reduces the barriers to fast followers and those in the sector that may

well benefit from it, as long as you can demonstrate that you're breaking those down, you're actively, I think, is the kind of key

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00:39:49.920 --> 00:40:03.199

Oli Raud: keyword. They're actively pursuing a learning culture and one that enables others to, kind of, to roll out and maybe kind of attest or even adopt and implement at scale, we would be obviously very interested in, but...

225

00:40:03.350 --> 00:40:20.489

Oli Raud: it's horses for courses, if that makes sense. You know, each of these projects will be different. They'll be looking at different, aspects of the water cycle and the water system with different solutions, so we don't have a one-size-fits-all model, necessarily. It will be down to you, again, to articulate how well

226

00:40:20.520 --> 00:40:39.349

Oli Raud: your approach will meet the needs of growing and then scaling and adopting within the sector. So, you know, that will be different for digital projects and software projects, maybe, as opposed to more hardware-related. So, there is some good work in the innovation implementation program.

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00:40:39.350 --> 00:40:48.400

Oli Raud: Which is newly launched as well. Might be worth just having a look at that within, I think that's coming out in a couple of months' time, in terms of...

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00:40:48.400 --> 00:40:58.330

Oli Raud: But there is also some, some website, some details on the website as to how we're embracing that learning culture and implementation culture within the fund itself.

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00:40:58.420 --> 00:41:13.309

Oli Raud: So, and other best practices out there as well, but there are no defined program-specific approach to adoption and scaling. It's down to you to make the case and articulate the clear benefits of your solution, to make that happen.

230

00:41:15.170 --> 00:41:27.099

Pranoy Dias: Thank you. I think just another one is water companies are not eligible to apply, but if the lead entrant was already partnering with a water company on an entry, is that a negative? Gabby, if you can take that one?

231

00:41:29.070 --> 00:41:40.489

Gabriella Frankl: No, that's not, not necessarily a negative. I think, sort of, part of the intent of the Discovery Challenge is to help to, sort of, broker those, those partnerships.

232

00:41:40.620 --> 00:41:46.929

Gabriella Frankl: But... There's no... there's no sort of negative, necessarily, in already, having that relationship.

233

00:41:49.750 --> 00:41:53.590

Pranoy Dias: Thank you. We've got time for a few questions.

234

00:41:53.850 --> 00:41:59.830

Pranoy Dias: Does the first stage include R&D activities, or just mentoring from off-road to the collaborative teams?

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00:42:00.040 --> 00:42:03.500

Pranoy Dias: Cabby, if you can take that one?

238

00:42:20.340 --> 00:42:21.799

Gabriella Frankl: Yeah, go on, you jump in, Oli.

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00:42:21.800 --> 00:42:32.159

Oli Raud: Yeah, so I suppose, the non-financial support is a broad package of support, which covers not just, the kind of water sector context and the technical

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00:42:32.200 --> 00:42:44.489

Oli Raud: context in which this solution is being tested or brought to the market. It also looks at some of that kind of venture support and startup support as well. So, I think the question mentioned R&D, so...

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00:42:44.580 --> 00:42:52.960

Oli Raud: naturally, there will be some learnings and a lens of R&D within this first phase, but it does cover

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00:42:52.970 --> 00:43:04.950

Oli Raud: Other aspects of startup and market entry, go-to-market, and other types of support, which will hopefully enable the solution to not just land, but,

243

00:43:05.170 --> 00:43:08.520

Oli Raud: Expand as well, if you are okay with that terminology.

244

00:43:10.930 --> 00:43:12.330

Pranoy Dias: Thank you,

245

00:43:12.720 --> 00:43:23.579

Pranoy Dias: We've got time for just one more question. So, what are the reporting requirements to claim the initial 100K funding? Is it paid in arrears or upfront? Ali, if you can take that, Ali?

246

00:43:25.200 --> 00:43:40.470

Oli Raud: Yeah, so my understanding is paid up front. There will be a monitoring process throughout, but it's maybe not quite like others, that, that maybe applicants are used to, and it is slightly different also to the...

247

00:43:41.280 --> 00:43:58.000

Oli Raud: breakthrough programs as well, if you've been, involved, or you're au fait with those. So, there is monitoring, naturally, to make sure that we're, you know, you spending that money, and you're spending that money in the way which was intended. But yeah, I think more necessary to add than that.

248

00:44:00.700 --> 00:44:14.539

Pranoy Dias: Thank you. I think we are nearing the end anyways. I think... so I think there's a few questions we haven't answered. So what we'll do is we'll compile a list of all the questions and provide you with answers, so we will be providing an email

249

00:44:14.540 --> 00:44:22.920

Pranoy Dias: After... when we've compiled all the answers for all the questions, shortly. And if there's any additional questions, you can always send us an email,

250

00:44:24.000 --> 00:44:25.070

Pranoy Dias: Separately.

251

00:44:25.360 --> 00:44:27.439

Pranoy Dias: I'll hand over to Gabby again.

252

00:44:27.530 --> 00:44:33.539

Gabriella Frankl: Great. Thank you, Pranoy, and thank you to everyone who answered, and also asked those questions.

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00:44:33.540 --> 00:44:50.149

Gabriella Frankl: So yes, as Pranoy said, we will take some of those questions that we haven't answered away, and we'll post the responses online on the Discovery website, and we'll also post a recording of this if you wish to rewatch, or for anyone who wasn't able to make this session.

254

00:44:50.150 --> 00:45:07.159

Gabriella Frankl: So, thank you so much for joining us. We hope that that was informative. Do please have a look at all of the information online and the handbook. If you do have any questions that you feel still haven't been answered, then please do reach out to us.

255

00:45:09.170 --> 00:45:12.019

Gabriella Frankl: And please also complete the Zoom poll with any feedback.

256

00:45:12.900 --> 00:45:13.990

Gabriella Frankl: Thanks, everyone.

257

00:45:14.750 --> 00:45:15.829

Oli Raud: Thanks a lot, good luck.