



Water Discovery Challenge

Launch Webinar
29 January 2026

Welcome – who you'll hear from today



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Q&A

Ask your questions on Slido
#Discovery2



What we'll cover today

1

The Water Innovation Fund

2

The Water
Discovery Challenge

3

What we're looking for and
what you can win

4

How to enter and
the support available

5

Next steps and Q&A



Water
Discovery
Challenge

The Water Innovation Fund

An overview

Water Innovation Fund



£600 million Innovation Fund to grow the water sector's capacity to innovate, enabling it to better meet the evolving needs of customers, communities and the environment.



109

winning entries
across all
competitions, with

>300

organisations involved
collaboratively in these entries.



Over £190 million has been awarded to **109 initiatives**, all pursuing innovative solutions to some of the most pressing challenges facing the water sector.

The Water Innovation Fund has doubled and so has the scope and ambition of the programme



Annual competitions between 2025-2030, ~£250m funding



At least two competitions between 2025-2030, ~£15m funding

NEW

Water Innovation Missions

Water companies coming together to collaborate on solutions to specific sector-wide 'strategic challenges' (£40m over 5 years)

NEW

Implementation Fund

Accelerating the scaling of projects to deliver impact and addressing barriers to this scaling (£40m over 5 years)

NEW

Cross-sector Programme

Exploring joint working/funding approaches with other sectors for solutions requiring cross-sector effort (£40m over 5 years)

NEW

Water Efficiency Lab

Competition to unlock progress on water efficient technology, processes and approaches (£25m over 5 years, part of the Water Efficiency Fund)

Evaluation: Impact and VfM study of 2020-2025 Fund that will inform future approach

Why Discovery?

We created Discovery because:

- We need a water system that **works for everyone**
- We are looking for **fresh solutions** to **urgent challenges**
- We want to draw on the **knowledge and ingenuity** from other sectors



Some key successes from Discovery 1:

- **Fresh perspectives** and novel approaches from **outside** the water sector.
- Pathway for innovators to secure **water company partnerships** – with some going on to enter the **Breakthrough Challenge**
- Thanks to the funding and training, programme was a **powerful accelerator** for small organisations



“The Water Discovery Challenge gave us access to funding and expert industry support to help us implement our technology for water reuse and desalination. Taking part raised our company profile, helping to establish important connections in the water sector that have been invaluable as we scale. Two years since taking part, we are now working with Northumbrian Water, Anglian Water, SSE Thermal, and AtkinsRéalis to demonstrate our technology at 740 cubic metres per day in a live environment, transforming the sustainability of water used by industry.”

Aims of the Challenge

**Accelerate
the discovery,
development and
adoption of
promising innovations
by the water sector in
England and Wales.**

**Deliver benefits
to customers,
communities and
the environment**

**Directly support
organisations with
innovative propositions
and facilitate their
engagement with
water companies in
England and Wales**



Innovator Journey

20-month Challenge

Entry Period

20 January 2026 to 8 April 2026

Entries will be open for ten weeks, with a range of webinars available to support you to learn about the water sector and enter.

Finalist Selection

April to July 2026

Finalists Stage

July to February 2027

Up to 20 Finalists will be announced by mid-July 2026. Finalists are awarded with funding of up to £100,000 and a 7-month package of support, including mentoring from water companies.

Winner Selection

February 2027 to April 2027

Winners Stage

April 2027 to October 2027

Up to 10 Winners will be announced in April 2027. Winners are awarded funding of up to £550,000 and a 6-month package of support, including mentoring from water companies.

Why enter?

What we're looking for, assessment and what you can win

What we're looking for

To be eligible you must:

- Be a UK incorporated entity
- Hold a UK business bank account
- Comply with the challenge's ts&cs
- Not be a water or waste-water company in England and Wales

Innovation that will benefit water customers, communities and the environment across England and Wales.

Bold, early-stage solutions - targeting TRL level 3-6 (or IML 2-3)

We're particularly looking for 'outside sector' innovations

**We are looking for bold
and innovative solutions
from any sector,
domestic or international**

**Relevant sectors may
include
energy, construction,
aerospace
& defence, agri-tech,
chemical processing
and digital, data and AI**

**Drawing on
the knowledge and
ingenuity from other
sectors will help
transform the water
system and help it
overcome critical
challenges**



What We're Looking For – The Assessment Criteria

1

Positive impact for water customers, communities, and the environment (40%)

2

Innovation enablers and innovative solutions (25%)

3

Capacity, capability, and commitment to deliver (15%)

4

Ability to succeed, to be sustainable and/or gain adoption across the water sector (20%)

What you can win

Up to 20 teams of the most promising innovators will be awarded £100,000 to develop their innovation, with a range of expert support and access to mentoring from water companies.

Finalist Award
up to
£100,000

Winners Award
up to
£550,000

Up to 10 teams will go on to win £550,000 to further grow their innovation, receiving more support to further accelerate their progress.

Next steps

How to enter and the support available

How to enter

- ✓ Entries must be submitted using the online entry form in **Submittable**
- ✓ There are three types of entry questions in the entry form:
 - Eligibility criteria
 - Unassessed questions
 - Assessed questions
- ✓ The entry form can be saved as a draft before submitting
- ✓ All entries must be submitted by 8 April 2026 at 1pm (GMT)

Support for entrants



Webinar 12 February

Discover the water sector and find out about current challenges and innovation opportunities



Discovery Content Series

Content series covering detailed topics such as water and sewage treatment and distribution, reusing resources, chemicals of concern and the climate change challenge.



Online and downloadable materials

Entrant Handbook, Entry templates, FAQs, T's&C's...



Entry clinic 18 March

Support for your entry, the entry process and innovator journey



Entry period closes 8 April 2026 at 1pm (BST)



~£7.5 million available



Up to £100k seed funding for Finalists



Up to £550k development funding for Winners



Download the Innovator Handbook

Thank you!

Q&A

Ask your questions on Slido
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Thank you!