

# Scaling Innovation Competition 2025/26 – Application Guidance

This document is to guide you through the application process for the ncat **Scaling Innovation programme**.

We've designed the process to be simple and supportive. That means using plain language and offering different ways to get help.

If you need this guide in another format, or if there's anything we can do to make the process easier, please email us at [scaling.innovation@cp.catapult.org.uk](mailto:scaling.innovation@cp.catapult.org.uk). Our team will be happy to help.

## A note on language

Throughout this guidance, we use the term **disabled people**. We do this intentionally, following the **social model of disability**.

This model recognises that people are disabled not by their impairment or difference, but by the barriers society creates. The Scaling Innovation programme welcomes innovators who tackle those barriers directly, rather than placing responsibility on the end user.

## Table of Contents

1. The Three-Phase Approach – How the competition works
2. Key dates – Timeline of applications, phases, and support
3. Who can apply – Eligibility and Requirements
4. Support along the way
5. Challenge areas – The three areas to focus your project on
6. Maturity levels – Where your idea fits, from early idea to trial stage
7. The application process – What's involved and tips for success
8. How applications are assessed – Who reviews them, how scoring works, and what we look for
9. Funding and costs – What's covered and how funding works
10. Equity, diversity & inclusion – Our values and how we support accessibility
11. Taking part in the programme – What to expect if you're selected
12. Terms & conditions – Key requirements you should know
13. Contact us – How to reach the team for support

## 1. The Three-Phase Approach

This Scaling Innovation competition runs in three **phases**. This structure gives you time to develop your ideas with support, before moving into delivery and then scaling further.

Progression through the phases is **not automatic**. Selection is based on:

- the strength of your outputs in each phase,
- your engagement with the programme, and
- your presentation and Q&A at the end of each phase.

### Phase 1 – Plan (April–May 2026)

- Up to 20 projects selected
- Each receives £10,000
- Focus: project plan, meaningful involvement plan, business needs analysis, and cost plan
- Includes workshops, hybrid events, and one-to-one support
- Time commitment: 2–3 days per week

Even if you don't move to Phase 2, you'll leave Phase 1 with stronger plans, insights, and connections to take forward.

### Phase 2 – Deliver (July 2026–January 2027)

- 12–15 projects progress from Phase 1
- Each receives £50,000–£150,000 (depending on the maturity of your solution)
- Focus: delivering your trial or project, with technical and business support throughout
- Time commitment: 2–3 days per week

### Phase 3 – Scale (April 2027 – July 2027)

- 8-10 projects from Phase 2
- Each receives £100,000 to £150,000 (depending on the maturity of your solution)
- Focus: further refinement of your project, with technical and business support throughout
- Time commitment: 2–3 days per week

## 2. Key dates

- **Application deadline:** 7<sup>th</sup> of November 2025 at 5pm
- **Interviews:** February–March 2026
- **Phase 1 (Plan):** April–May 2026
- **Phase 2 selection:** June 2026

- **Phase 2 (Deliver):** July 2026 –January 2027
- **Phase 3 (Scale):** Mar - Jul 2027

### 3. Who can apply

#### Eligibility

##### You must be

- A public, private, or third-sector organisation of any size
- A UK-registered lead applicant (consortia are welcome, but one organisation must act as lead)

##### You can also be

- An organisation that has previously received ncat funding, previous participation will not disadvantage you
- A trial applicant with a delivery partner
- A consortium that includes a ncat consortium member or board member.  
**Please note:** ncat consortium members and board members can support but not lead an application. **If a consortium partner is involved in a proposal - they will not be eligible to be any part of the assessment process.**

#### Essentials

- Proposals must show **meaningful involvement of disabled people**. Without this, applications will not progress. This carries the highest weighting in our scoring at 30% which is detailed more in section 8 of this document.
- Proposals must directly address one of the challenge areas. The focus should be on removing barriers at their source, rather than creating workarounds that place extra responsibility on disabled people.

### 4. Support along the way

We've built support help you throughout the competition:

- **Application webinar** – 8 October, 2pm (recorded, with subtitles and slower-play option)
- **Drop-in sessions** – 13 October (4pm) and 16 October (12pm)
- **1:1 support sessions** – available on request

The Scaling Innovation team is here to help you succeed. Whether you need clarity on the guidance, support with your application, or to discuss your accessibility needs, you can reach us at [scaling.innovation@cp.catapult.org.uk](mailto:scaling.innovation@cp.catapult.org.uk).

## 5. Challenge areas

These challenges have been shaped by evidence from ncat research, conversations with experts, and alignment with other funders like Motability Foundation, DfT, and UKRI. We know there's already been significant work in these areas. In your application, we'd like you to reflect on that — showing how your idea learns from what's been done, and how it brings something new. Your application must address one of these three challenges.

More detail on your chosen challenge, what is in and out of scope is available on the opportunity page.

### **Challenge 1: Vehicle Stop Design**

How might we design future vehicle stops that are universally accessible, predictable and informative for people with diverse impairments so they can travel with autonomy, dignity, confidence – with minimal to no additional responsibility passed to the passenger?

### **Challenge 2: Travel Assistance Services**

How might we improve and expand travel assistance services to give disabled passengers greater autonomy, confidence, and real-time control over their journeys, from planning through to arrival?

### **Challenge 3: Access to Information**

How might we personalise and improve access to live travel information so that disabled passengers can travel with greater confidence, clarity, and control over their journeys?

You may apply for more than one challenge, and at different maturity levels, but each application must be submitted separately.

## 6. Maturity levels

Projects can be at different stages, and we allocate funding based on your maturity level which you will declare in your application.

- **Proof of Concept** – up to £50,000 (only provided in Phase 2)  
Exploring whether an idea could work in principle. This may involve background research, stakeholder input, early-stage modelling, or simple testing.  
*Key question: "Is this idea possible?"*
- **Pre-demonstrator** – up to £100,000  
Building and testing early prototypes in controlled or simulated environments to show potential.  
*Key question: "Can we make it work reliably in a test setting?"*

- **Trial** – up to £150,000  
Real-world testing with end users or in operational environments.  
*Key question: “Does it work in practice, and for the people it’s intended for?”*

## Funding progression:

- For all applicants, **Phase 1** provides £10,000 to plan your project design and development.
- **Phase 2** develops the maturity level of your solution
- By **Phase 3** all solutions will be pre-demonstrator or trial

## 7. The application process

You’ll complete **one application that covers the first two phases** of the programme. Projects progressing to phase 2 will receive further details on how to secure phase 3 funding.

- Expect 18–22 questions, depending on the maturity level of your idea.
- Each question has a word limit to keep answers clear and focused.
- You can save drafts as you go and return to them later.

Your application will cover:

- The challenge and maturity level you’ve chosen
- Your solution — what it is, why it matters, and how it fits with the chosen challenge
- How you will meaningfully involve disabled people in a mutually beneficial way
- Impact — who benefits, what improves, and how you’ll measure it
- Scalability — how your idea could grow while staying inclusive.
- Your team, project plan, risks, and costs

## Tips for applicants

- **Be clear.** Answer the question directly.
- **Be specific.** Use examples, evidence, or lived experience.
- **Stay concise.** The word limits are there to help.
- **Show meaningful involvement.** Who, when, how, and what difference it makes.
- **Plan realistically.** Be open about risks or gaps.

You will not be penalised if you haven’t yet worked with disabled people. What matters is that your plan for now doing so is intentional, specific, and embedded.

## How to apply

- Complete the application form via [CPC | Innovation Programme Platform](#)
- **Deadline:** 7<sup>th</sup> of November at 5pm
- If you need adjustments, please contact us as early as possible, and at least 10 days before the deadline, so we can support you.

## 8. How applications are assessed

### Scoring criteria

Applications are scored against five criteria. Each has a weighting that shows its importance to the programme.

#### 1. Meaningful involvement of disabled people – 30%

This is the highest-weighted criterion. We want strong, specific, and proactive plans to involve disabled people throughout your project. Engagement should be intentional, designed to create real impact and consistent throughout your project.

Tell us:

- Who you will involve — individuals with lived experience, Disabled People's Organisations, and community advocates.
- How they will be involved at each stage — for example, during design, development, testing or evaluation stages.
- How their input will shape your work — for example, will their input improve decisions, outcomes, or accessibility.
- How you will make collaboration inclusive and mutually beneficial — this may include accessible formats, flexible timings, fair compensation or safeguarding.

#### 2. Solution – 20%

We're looking for a clear, feasible idea that responds directly to one of the three challenges.

Show us:

- What your solution is and why it matters.
- How it fits the selected challenge.
- What makes it innovative, different, or valuable.
- Whether it's achievable within the time and funding available.

#### 3. Impact – 20%

We want to see a clear understanding of who benefits, how they benefit, and how you'll measure success. Impact should be user-centred and consider broader sustainability (economic, environmental, social).

Include:

- Insight into your target users, including disabled people and transport professionals.
- Real-world outcomes — for instance, confidence, independence, access, better experiences.
- Evidence of the problem and its impact
- A plan to measure success using both qualitative and quantitative methods.

#### **4. Scalability – 20%**

Be honest about your growth potential.

Explain:

- What makes your solution distinct or valuable in the wider market.
- How well you understand the ecosystem around your solution.
- Your plans to scale in an inclusive way, adaptable across contexts, accessible to different users.
- Any challenges you foresee and how you will address them

#### **5. Team & Project Delivery – 10%**

We want to see a clear, realistic plan for delivery, supported by the right people.

Show us:

- Relevant skills, expertise, and/or lived experience across your team.
- A practical project plan with achievable milestones.
- Awareness of risks, including ethical, safety, or access risks, and how you'll manage them.
- A budget template that shows funds will be used effectively and provide good value for money.

### **All applications go through five stages of review:**

#### **1. Eligibility check**

We confirm your application meets the eligibility requirements.

#### **2. Technical evaluation**

Three assessors will evaluate your application based on the scoring criteria. There will be at least one expert with a lived experience of disability. The experts will review how well your project involves disabled people and addresses their needs this is the highest scoring part of your application. Further assessment will evaluate impact, solution, scalability and your team and delivery.

#### **3. Panel deliberation**

All reviewers come together to review scores, balance perspectives, and create a shortlist for interviews.

#### **4. Interview**

Shortlisted applicants are invited to a virtual interview. You'll get the questions in advance, and we will ensure any access needs are discussed in advance.

#### **5. Final deliberation**

After interviews, the panel and Scaling Innovation team select the final cohort.

We take a portfolio approach to ensure a balance across challenges and maturity levels.

## 9. Funding and costs

Funding is provided as a **grant** and is considered outside the scope of Value Added Tax (VAT). In the event VAT is held to be chargeable, all grant payments made by you shall be deemed to be inclusive of any VAT. For full details, see the Grant Terms & Conditions on our opportunity page.

Your budget should include:

- **Direct costs** – staff time, materials, travel, external support
- **Overheads** – reasonable and proportionate organisational overheads
- **Programme participation** – we strongly recommend including between £500 – £1,500 per team (depending on size and location) for attending programme-related events, including around four in-person sessions across both phases. Events and in-person sessions usually take place in London.

## What we expect

- **Value for money** – all costs must be justified and demonstrate responsible use of funds
- **Fair rates** – labour costs should reflect reasonable, market-value day rates
- **Evidence** – keep receipts for all spend; these must be submitted to release funding
- **Timeframe** – only costs incurred during the delivery period are eligible

## Funding structure

- We will release 60% of the funding at the start of the programme and 40% at the end of the programme, when reporting is completed.
- **Match funding** is not required. If you wish to provide match funding record it in the budget template
- **Budget template:** the budget template in your application must be used for record. If an excel format is not accessible, please discuss with the scaling innovation team.

## 10. Equity, diversity & inclusion

Equity and accessibility are at the heart of ncat. We value:

- Inclusive teams
- Lived experience
- Accessible innovation



Our panels include disabled people and people from diverse backgrounds. We'll adapt our processes to meet your needs, please let us know how we can support you.

We also recognise that you may need to accommodate the needs of others in the cohort and consortium. We will provide guidance on this if required.

## 11. Taking part in the programme

Each phase of the programme will require:

- Commitment to our **code of conduct**.
- **Reporting** – monthly check-ins (short forms) and a final report, using provided templates.
- **Monitoring & evaluation** – light-touch activities to capture learning.
- **Engagement** – consistent participation is expected, but timing is flexible to suit your needs

## 12. Terms & conditions

By applying, you accept the terms on the Scaling Innovation Opportunity Page, including intellectual property requirements set by the Motability Foundation.

We would like to draw your attention to the provisions relating to intellectual property and to clause 8 of the terms and conditions. These terms are a requirement of the Motability Foundation and cannot be varied. Please note that you will be required to identify IP that you bring with you (background IP) at the start of the project.