

**STARSS –**

**Standalone or rooftop solar systems inclusive**

**of eCooking**

**Frequently Asked Questions**



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Competition organisation

1. When does the competition open and close?

The competition opens for applications on Wednesday 28th August 2024 and closes at 23:55 BST Sunday 6th October 2024.

1. How can I find out more information about the competition?

By attending the webinar planned for week commencing 9th September 2024. Details of the date and time will be made available on the website once the competition opens. The competition details will be reviewed and there will be an opportunity to ask questions.

1. If we do not attend the webinars does this put us at a disadvantage?

No. A recording of the webinar shall be available on the [MECS website](https://mecs.org.uk/). Any questions can be sent to mecs@lboro.ac.uk

1. Which documents do I need to enter the competition?

To enter the competition, you must submit your completed Grant Application Form. Do NOT add a password on the document as we will not be able to read it. If you cannot submit the application, please contact mecs@lboro.ac.uk for alternate document format options.

All documents must be completed in English.

You must have read the Guidance Document, Grant Specification and Grant Disbursement Agreement document prior to submission of your application.

1. **How do I submit the documents?**

The completed Grant Application Form should be submitted to mecs@lboro.ac.uk with the subject heading **‘STARSS – LOT (A-D) – Proposal’**

1. Are there any pre-registration requirements?

No. To ensure you receive all the relevant information about MECS Challenge Funds, it is recommended that you [Register Your Interest](http://www.mecs.org.uk/challenge)to the MECS online community to receive more information on future competitions.

1. When do I submit the Due Diligence form?

If your application is successful, you will be asked to submit your Due Diligence Questionnaire, along with all supporting documentation. This must be submitted within 10 working days of the email being sent requesting this information. Failure to do so will result in a disqualified application.

Please note that if the Due Diligence Assessment is failed, the application will be disqualified.

1. **Can an organisation submit more than one proposal?**

An organisation can only be named as the lead on one application (to one Lot). If two or more proposals are submitted with the same organisational lead, then all will be rejected without review.

A lead organisation can be named as a consortium member on one other project, but a clear indication of capability to participate in both projects with high-quality inputs must be made clear in both proposals.

A consortium member is defined as an organisation who is actively involved in the implementation of activities.

An organisation who is not a named lead on any project can be named as a consortium member on up to 2 projects. If they are named on more than two then all will be rejected without review.

Only suppliers of technologies can provide their services to multiple projects and be named in multiple applications.

1. My company is based in Europe, Canada or the USA, can I enter?

Yes. MECS would be happy to consider an application from a company based anywhere in the world. However, the beneficiary country must be a country supported by FCDO and of interest to the MECS programme.

1. What are the eligible countries?

The competition welcomes applications from organisations based in any part of the world, but project activities must take place in an eligible country. The research much take place in one of the eligible countries listed here:

Bangladesh, Benin, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Congo (Democratic Republic of the), Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Fiji, Gambia, Ghana, Haiti, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Swaziland, Tajikistan, Tanzania (United Republic of), Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Vietnam, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Other Asian and Pacific small island developing States (SIDS), can be considered on a case-by-case basis.

1. **Can we apply to work in multiple countries?**

Applications suggesting working in more than one country will be rejected.

1. Can I partner with an organisation in a country that is supported by FCDO?

Yes, entries from partnerships/consortiums are welcomed. Organisations working in partnerships should only submit a single application and a lead applicant needs to be specified.

1. Can an organisation be in a partnership with a university?

Yes, entries from partnerships of all types of organisations are welcome.

1. How big does an organisation have to be to apply?

Organisations of any size can apply. We welcome start-ups, small, medium enterprises (SMEs), research institutions, universities, not-for-profit organisations, and consultancies. Organisations who fund grant making schemes of their own are not eligible to apply.

1. Our organisation has an existing grant from MECS. Are we eligible to apply?

Organisations with active contracts under the SC2 and COSMO awards are not eligible.

1. Does an organisation applying for grant support need to have a trading history, or would a start-up company be eligible?

A start-up company is eligible to apply if it can meet the requirements of the due diligence process.

1. Is my personal data included in the application protected under GDPR?

Yes. Please see the Loughborough University [Data Privacy Policy](https://www.lboro.ac.uk/admin/ar/policy/dpact/ludpp/) for further information.

1. Will unsuccessful applicants receive feedback?

We will provide high-level feedback and an overall score to all applicants.

Funding and costs

1. How much funding is available?

The total budget requested can be up to £58,000, including all project costs and any applicable local taxes or charges.

1. When will funding be disbursed?

Fifty percent of the grant payment will be made after contract signing, a ten percent grant payment made in month 3 after providing a satisfactory progress update, with a further twenty precent grant payment at month 6, on submission and approval of an interim report and completed Statement of Grant Usage Form. The final twenty percent payment will be made on the submission and approval of the final report and completed Statement of Grant Usage Form at month 10.

Funding will be disbursed subject to the submission and approval of deliverables as set out in the Grant Disbursement Agreement. If the Grant Recipient fails to comply with any of the conditions of the Grant Disbursement Agreement Loughborough University may reduce, suspend, or withhold Grant payments.

1. Can a profit margin be added to costs?

No. The grant is provided to support research into supply chain development, not provide profit. Only costs incurred through the research can be claimed.

1. What can be included in the costs?

Please use the following categories of costs in your application (as noted in Q6 of the application form):

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| **Cost Items**  |
| Staff: Broken down by name of employee, number of days and a date rate. (e.g. John Smith, 10 days, £150/day)  |
| Consultancy/Sub-contracting charges |
| Partners and grant recipients |
| Equipment and Materials costs |
| Laboratory/testing costs |
| Travel and subsistence costs |
| Communication and events costs  |
| Research costs (e.g. enumerators, data collection software) |
| Other Expenses (please specify) |

1. What are the rules on VAT?

VAT should not be added to any invoices for Grant payments.

Grant payments fall outside the scope of VAT as this is deemed as income from non-business activities and you do not return anything for this funding.

If you expect to pay VAT during the delivery of the research, (e.g. for consultancy/sub-contracting charges, material costs and other expenses), and you are unable to recover VAT from HMRC or other national revenue authority, you must ensure that the cost of these VAT payments is included in question 6 of your Grant Application Form (i.e. they must be costed into the project at the start).

Any VAT payment during delivery of research that is not recoverable from HMRC or other national revenue authority and not identified in question 6 of the Grant Application Form will not be paid by Loughborough University.

1. Should overheads be included in the salary rates or shown separately?

Salary rates should already include some reasonable/proportionate overhead costs and therefore there should be no need to add further overheads.

1. What salary rates should be used?

The salary rates must be appropriate and not higher than market values. Rates applied will be judged on a value for money basis considering the level of expertise, where staff are located, and market rates. The evaluation panel will assess whether the number of staff days on offer will deliver the proposed project and whether the number of total staff days offered signifies value for money.

1. Do we need to keep receipts of expenses?

Yes, you will need to submit relevant receipts/ invoices for expenses as evidence of project costs throughout the duration of your project when a Statement of Grant Usage is submitted. You should retain all originals in case of an audit.

**Implementation and Grant Management**

1. What are the expectations on the deliverables?

All progress reports, deliverables, and final reports should be of a standard suitable for external publication. All reports must be submitted in English.

All deliverables should be suitable for non-specialists with all acronyms and unavoidable technical language clearly explained.

All deliverables will be reviewed and where necessary, improvements will be requested before final sign-off.

1. What is the position on IPR? How do I deliver a quality report to the MECS team for publishing and protect the IPR on my research?

Excerpt from the Grant Disbursement Agreement ***(paragraphs 61-62)***.

Intellectual property in all material (including, but not limited to, reports, data and designs, whether or not electronically stored) produced by the Partner or its personnel, members or representatives in the course of this Arrangement (“the Material”) will be the property of the Partner.

In signing this Arrangement, the Partner hereby grants to DFID a worldwide, non-exclusive irrevocable and royalty-free licence to use all the Material, where “use” shall mean, without limitation, the reproduction, publication and sub-licence of all the Material and the intellectual property therein, including the reproduction and sale of the Material and products incorporating the same, for use by any person or for sale or other dealing anywhere in the world.

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1. When should the project start?

The project will start on 1st December 2024. Project kick off meetings are expected to take place shortly after the project starts.

1. When does the project work have to be completed by?

The final report is due by 30th September 2025.