IDEA lab: Call for POPP Proposals

Background IDEA[1] lab is a virtual laboratory that will facilitate prototyping of novel applications of state-of-art informatic technologies. IDEA lab will enable and support multidisciplinary "proof-of-principle prototyping" (POPP) projects that develop and use informatic tools and techniques to:

- collect and manage data,
- discover and visualise structures and relationships;
- model, simulate and analyse processes,
- facilitate collaboration and create communities.

- Funding of £300k has been earmarked by the College of Science and Engineering for POPP projects that will explore and assess new opportunities and pave the way for future funded research. The bidding process for this CSE POPP Fund, open to researchers from any School in the College, is described overleaf.

POPP projects will generate new collaborations across a range of interdisciplinary areas, as a key stimulus to an entrepreneurial e-research culture.

- IDEA lab is an open community of developers and innovators from within and outwith the university, with wide-ranging interests, skills and know-how.

- It provides a expert pool from which we can rapidly bring together agile teams for POPP projects making novel use of informatic applications and technologies.

- It supports matchmaking, provides advice, and maintains a repositories of code, data, and expertise – open source, open data, open innovation.

- It will help researchers to refine proposals, to identify appropriate software, data, and expertise, and to manage POPP projects that will open up new opportunities.

- IDEA lab will administer POPP funds for specific groups: in particular, it will stimulate proposals, allocate funding, support and monitor POPP projects.

Proposals are invited for proof-of-principle prototyping projects that will draw on the CSE POPP Fund to investigate and demonstrate a novel application of technology. This could include applying technology to a new area or problem, exploring the development of a new direction in informatics technology, extending an existing application to achieve novel results, investigating a novel way to commercialise technology, experimenting with collection or analysis of data from a new source, etc. Projects should be proving a principle, with the intention of facilitating applications for external funding for follow-on research or development.

POPP will fund 3-12 person-month projects over a 3-6 month timescale. Applicants may include entirely academic participants, or be structured to engage with external bodies (industry, charities, government, etc.) IDEA lab will support all stages of the project lifecycle, in an open collaboration model: open source, open data, open innovation, with appropriate recognition and protection for background IP.

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[1] Informatics Development, Experimentation and Applications.

POPP Project lifecycle

Stage 1: Proposal development and identification of expertise. IDEA lab supports open development of proposals. Online collaboration tools will support community development and and refinement of proposals, and contribute to the identification of appropriate methods and skills. Community comment will be encouraged, to generate ideas and suggestions. Proposals should briefly address the following questions:

1. Who are you? The names and affiliations of all applicants.
2. What will you do? A brief outline of the project and its background, including the objectives and methods to be employed.
3. How is it novel? What is exciting about it?
4. What will you do next? What opportunities will it open up?
5. What constitutes success? How risky is it?
6. What resources do you bring to the project?
7. What resources and expertise do you need? Have you already identified sources for these, e.g. suitable staff available for short-term employment?
8. What shared resources, if any, will the project create?
9. What is the timescale?

Stage 2: Resource planning and school approval. Spending from the CSE POPP fund will be tracked by school. Proposals must specify the proposed allocation of expenditure to schools, which must be approved by the head(s) of the relevant school(s) in the College of Science and Engineering. Subject to these approvals, any member of academic teaching or research staff in the College may apply for CSE POPP funding.

Projected costings should include figures in the following categories, where applicable: staff; equipment and software; travel and subsistence; other (including, for example, corpus annotators and experimental subjects); consumables. Staff employed on projects may be employed directly in the University or work within a collaborating institution or company.

Stage 3: Formal review and funding decision. Once proposed for formal review, proposals will be assessed by a review group appointed by College Research Committee. Proposers may be invited to a "dragon's den" interview. A response should be expected within 2 weeks.

Stage 4: Mentoring and monitoring. Projects will be expected to blog regularly, on the IDEA Lab site, to allow the community to learn from and contribute to the project. Projects will be expected to update a brief progress report at least monthly.

Stage 5: Assessment and follow-on. All projects are required to provide a brief final report, with a summary of outcomes, expected or otherwise, and lessons learned. The report on a successful project should outline a strategy for follow-on funding, and include a synopsis of the project's contribution to this strategy.

It is recognised that these projects will often be risky: suitably ambitious goals may not always be achieved. In such cases, there are often valuable lessons that should not be overlooked. Reports should be composed with this in mind, and will be published on the IDEA lab web site.