

Immersive Customer Experience – call for ideas

Deep customer understanding as the basis of competitiveness – digital customer experience and business models.

1. Background

Business Finland has started a mission-based approach for supporting its strategic planning. The missions are intended to strengthen the potential of Finnish companies to benefit from more significant future market opportunities. Missions also aim to accelerate social, systemic changes and respond to global challenges. In the future, Business Finland's program activities will be strongly connected to the missions.

In 2023, Business Finland will be preparing the launch of the new Immersive Digital Life mission. According to the mission's main goal, Finland will be a forerunner in digital immersive life by 2035. One of the areas of immersive life is the strongly enhanced customer experience and new business models it enables.

Business Finland is launching a call for ideas for searching the R&D initiatives and Finnish expertise related to the topic. In this call, funding can also be granted for research projects (Co-Research). The amount of funding granted through the call depends on the quality of the proposals and the competitiveness of other applications for financing.

2. Scope of the call

Finland's strong technology expertise has not reached its full potential in creating successful commercial concepts. We have less global scale-up companies than other relevant countries with similar potential. Slow commercialization of our innovations is weakening our competitiveness and slowing down the growth of our economy.

(Source: Valtioneuvoston selonteko Suomen digitaalinen kompassi. <https://vm.fi/delegate/file/111539>)

In recent years, however, we have seen a few successful new growth companies of the 2020s. Those companies have been able to refine their deep customer understanding into winning customer experience. We want to continue and strengthen this development with targeted research activities. The goal is to find ways to combine our strong foundation in digital technologies with new research expertise and thus help Finnish companies to innovate genuinely customer-oriented and commercially successful business models of the digital age.

Themes for the funded projects

The scope of the call is related to the immersive business environment of the future. Aim is to increase Finnish know-how and companies' ability to create new business based on deep customer understanding.

The call seeks projects that creatively combine digital solution with a winning customer experience. Based on created knowledge, scalable concepts will be built for bringing added value for the customer in new and unique way. The goal of the projects should be to find ways to combine strong Finnish ICT competence with for example service design, behavioral and neuroscience, and utilization of data, thus helping Finnish companies to create new business.

The main target group of the call are consortiums researching and developing digital consumer business. However, B2B-related projects are not excluded if they are based on strongly customer centric approach.

The winning customer experience of the future can be created with combination of new innovations, related to, for example:

- Digital sales channel innovations (live, quick, social and seamless commerce, web 3.0 and metaverse, ...)
- Sustainability innovations (circular and sharing economy, activism, ...)
- Data-based innovations, data-driven management (AI, predictive models, ...)
- Business model innovations (Servitization, omnichannel concepts, value chain concepts, ...)

3. Schedule, process and selection criteria

Application form:

- Applicants must use the application form in Appendix 1. The scope of applications for proposals is a maximum of 3 pages.

Timetable and Selection Process:

- The application process opens on March 6, 2023. Applications of intent, i.e. short descriptions of the project idea, are requested to be submitted to Business Finland's registry office by April 19, 2023.
- Business Finland evaluates applications of intent, gives applicants feedback on the application and tells whether it is recommended to send the actual funding application or not
- The actual funding applications are requested to be sent by August 30, 2023 via Business Finland's electronic transaction service.

Selection criteria for applications:

- How does the solution to be developed or researched relate to the themes and goals presented above.

- What kind of business and export potential does the investigated solution have in the relevant time horizon.
- Credibility and feasibility of the applicant(s) and the preliminary plan.

4. Funding instruments of the actual funding application phase:

Business Finland's normal Co-Research and Co-Innovation funding instruments are used to fund the actual applications. From the beginning of 2023, Business Finland has reformed the funding aimed at research organizations and for joint projects between them and companies. Applicants who have made it through the proposal round are advised by Business Finland's contact persons, with whom the idea can be further refined together before the final funding application is submitted.

- **Research projects (Co-Research)**

Exceptionally, this call also funds joint research projects of individual research organizations or a few research organizations.

- o The project requires international networking and a vision of how the concept can be continued and expanded with EU funding.
- o The commitment of companies to fund the research project and work in the steering group is a necessary condition and an indication of the industrial interest and significance of the researched topic. Representatives of several companies are required to participate in project steering groups and project financing (min 3). In the actual application phase, the amount and quality of the commitment of companies and other users are key issues to consider.
- o <https://www.businessfinland.fi/en/for-finnish-customers/services/funding/cooperation-between-companies-and-research-organizations/co-research>

- **Co-Innovation joint project of research organizations and companies¹:**

- o The project involves one or more research organizations and at least three companies, of which at least two are applying for funding from Business Finland. Companies can also form a Co-Innovation project together without a research organization.
- o <https://www.businessfinland.fi/en/for-finnish-customers/services/funding/cooperation-between-companies-and-research-organizations/co-innovation>

¹ Co-Innovation applications can also be sent outside the application period. You can only apply for research projects within this call for ideas.

5. How to apply for funding

Idea/intention applications prepared according to the format and headings of Appendix 1, with a maximum length of 3 pages, must be sent by April 19, 2023 by e-mail to kirjaamo@businessfinland.fi or using a secure connection <https://asiointi.businessfinland.fi/suojaposti>.

By sending an idea to Business Finland, the applicant gives Business Finland permission to link together idea senders whose ideas are close to each other or could benefit from further development of the idea together. If the sender of the idea does not want such a link to take place for his own idea, the sender is asked to mention this clearly in his message to Business Finland.

Please take the following into account:

- In the subject field of the e-mail, the applicant and the case ID must be clearly indicate: "APPLICANT'S ORGANIZATION: Immersive call for ideas **BF/4/35/2023**"
- The **maximum size of an e-mail including attachments is 9 MB.**
- Files can be compressed (Winzip). The files should primarily be delivered as .pdf and .tif documents. It is also possible to deliver the files as .rtf files and Word .doc and .docx files, Excel .xls and .xlsx files and Powerpoint .ppt and .pptx files. When sending by e-mail, the proposal is considered to have been received by Business Finland when the message/messages and their attachments are available and readable in the e-mail of Business Finland's registry office.

In exceptional cases, applications can also be submitted by post or by bringing them to Business Finland's reception desk in a sealed envelope to the address:

Business Finland/Registry office
PO Box 69 (Porkkalankatu 1)
00101 Helsinki

The selected projects will continue to submit the actual funding applications through Business Finland's electronic transaction service. More detailed instructions will be sent to these applicants later.

Further information:

Juha Heinola and Aki Parviainen
E-mail addresses: `firstname.lastname (at) businessfinland.fi`

APPENDIX 1: The mandatory structure for the call of intention**COVER**

Project name:	
Name of the main applicant organization:	
Other participants (if joint project):	
Contact person (name, telephone, e-mail):	
Project budget (a preliminary estimate of the combined costs of all project participants):	
The funding applied from Business Finland (a preliminary estimate the Business Finland financial contribution, whether a loan or a grant is applied for):	

HEADLINES FOR THE CALL OF INTENTION, max 3 pages

1. What need does the idea fulfill/what problem does the idea solve?
2. What is the estimated export potential and market of the solution? For the research project: which are the companies that will potentially use the results??
 - In what time frame would the results be commercially usable?
 - Where is the best international expertise to solve the problem and how do we cooperate with them?
3. How will the issue be resolved, what issues will be researched/developed, by what means and in what time frame?
4. What competing solutions exist? What are the options today?
 - How does your research idea/innovation compare in terms of its novelty to international research and solutions on the market?
 - What kind of research has already been carried out in the matter before and by whom?