

THE UFS INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY COMMERCIALIZATION FUND

Background

The research process is powerful. It allows for literature and the state of the art to be reviewed, and for problems to be identified in a structured manner. It allows for competing theories to be tested and various solutions to be evaluated objectively. But unfortunately, when it comes to technology commercialization, the lab and library-based approach has its limitations. Such processes fail to provide the researcher with information on the complex environment of the factory floor and the multiple criteria that technology managers assess when implementing new technical solutions. It also fails to provide insight on rapidly changing trends in the marketplace. Without direct engagement with potential users of a technology, product or service, the researcher may not gain the depth and breadth of insight required to service a market need effectively. Thus, even if the technical solution is novel and elegant, it could still fail to reach the market.

This means that fantastic academic research and technologies that may have demonstrated a proof of concept, fail to reach those that need it. This phenomenon is often called the “innovation chasm”. The impact of good research is thus diluted. We wish to ensure that the intellectual property that is developed at the UFS is aligned to industry needs and can be commercialized with or by partners. The Intellectual Property Commercialization Fund is therefore being introduced to help close gaps that may exist in academic research projects. The funding can be used to round off work such that prototypes can be presented to industrial and commercial partners. Ultimately, we wish to ensure that good technologies and products based on UFS research reach the target audience and the intended impact of the work is realized.

Purpose of the Intellectual Property Commercialization

This fund is managed through the office of The Deputy Vice Chancellor: Research and Internationalisation, Prof. Corli Witthuhn. This fund can be used to close any gaps for the commercialization of UFS IP or technologies. Often during research, certain concepts may have been tested or proven in laboratory environments, however there is more work that needs to be done for the technology to enter the commercialization phase. In some cases, market research is required to understand who the potential commercialization partners may be. Sometimes prototypes may need to be built, or user interfaces may need to be built and tested. In some cases, social innovations may have been developed, but the business model to make it a sustainable enterprise is yet to be conceptualized. The fund could support activities to close such gaps.

This fund may be used to help move the technology along the path towards commercialization. Please see below the table describing the “Technology Readiness Levels”. The application must clearly state what the current stage of development is and evidence should be supplied to justify that selection. Explain how the funds will be used to move the project along the road to commercialization. Even if the end point of commercialization is not reached within the duration of the funding (which is limited to one year), the team should have a clear process outlined, and potential funding sources in mind to engage the follow up processes. The source of the IP should be from UFS research and must be clearly stated (doctoral or master’s project or other grant funded research).

Who can apply?

Permanent and contract UFS academic and research staff, UFS post graduate students and UFS post-doctoral research fellows may apply for this fund. If this is a collaborative project the partners and their affiliations should be stated.

Budget

There is no maximum or minimum budget that is prescribed. The research team needs to develop an accurate budget for only one year with clear activities, deliverables/outputs, and costs. The budget should be realistic and consider availability of key members of the team and the activities to be achieved. Funds will be transferred in two tranches. An upfront payment of 50% will be done. A mid-term review of the project will be conducted, and the remainder of the funds will only be transferred if significant progress has been achieved. The project may be terminated at the mid-point if adequate progress is not achieved.

This one-year project should be seen as part of a larger project. Whilst it is not necessary to present all the follow up activities, the application should give the reviewer some insight to the future work and potential impact.

Application Process and Timeframes

Please use the Intellectual Property Commercialization Fund Application Form on RIMS.

<https://rims.ufs.ac.za/Proposal/PD/ProposalCustomCreate.asp?System=PD>

Applications must be submitted by the 1st of August 2022.

- Projects will be screened and follow up questions may be sent to applicants during August 2022.
- The evaluation panel will make a decision by the end of September 2022.
- Project plans will be finalized by October 2022.
- Projects will be implemented from 1 November 2022 – 31 October 2023.
- A mid-term review will take place in April 2023.
- A final report will be due in November 2023.

Eligible activities for the Intellectual Property Commercialization Fund

- Development of initial product, process (comprehensive technology package) and prototype development.
- Sourcing of intellectual property opinions.
- Production of market samples and/or associated testing.
- Refining and implementing designs.
- Development of user interfaces and user testing for software solutions.
- Conducting field studies to test the assumptions made about the technology market and/ or customer needs.
- Supporting of certification activities and specification sheet development.
- Piloting, and technology scale-up.
- Techno-economic evaluation studies.
- Detailed primary market research.

- Business plan development.

Activities that will not be funded

- Early-stage research projects.
- Equipment.
- Attendance of academic conferences.

Evaluation Criteria

Applications will be evaluated on:

- Overall quality of the content and presentation of the submission.
- Skills available within the proposed team to implement the proposed activities.
- Feasibility of the proposed activities within the available timeframes.
- The long-term vision and potential impact of the project.
- Clarity and alignment of the budget to the objectives of the project.

All inquiries are welcomed and should be addressed to Ravini Moodley Moodleyr5@ufs.ac.za.

A briefing session will be held on **19 July 12:00-13:00** on MS Teams

https://teams.microsoft.com/l/meetup-join/19%3ameeting_Nzg0NjUxZDctZGYyMS00YTg5LWJjMDItOWVlYzQ1MmExZThi%40thread.v2/0?content=%7b%22id%22%3a%228efc1bb9-b90f-4a48-bf6c-ba0686193b80%22%2c%22oid%22%3a%221c2ece07-4be1-4196-b5af-09f0af906626%22%7d

RSVP to Thabi Mosoetsa - MosoetsaT@ufs.ac.za by 15 July 2022.

TABLE 1: TECHNOLOGY READINESS LEVELS

Technology Readiness Level		Description
1	Basic Technology research	Basic science. Not application focused. Principles are observed and reported on.
2	Concept formulation	Some practical applications identified materials or processes required and confirmed. Technology and hypothesis formulated. Research plans and protocols are developed, peer reviewed and approved.
3	Analytical and experimental critical function or research proof of concept established	Laboratory measurements validate analytical predictions of separate technology elements. Hypothesis tested.
4	Validation in laboratory environment	Test results confirm design and meet technical performance. Hypothesis refined. Formulations tested.
5	Laboratory scale validation in relevant environment	Validation under relevant operational conditions, mimicked in the laboratory.
6	Integrated prototype system verified in relevant environment	Prototype demonstration in the operational environment. E.g., Phase 1 trials

7	Integrated pilot system demonstrated in operational environment	Integrated full scale pilot systems demonstrated in an operational environment or site.
8	Actual system completed and validated through test and demonstration	Actual product completed and qualified through certification, tests and demonstrations.
9	Proven system and ready for full commercial deployment	Product proven ready through successful operations in operating environment.