Smart Dublin Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) Programme

Innovation Procurement for a Smart City

Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) is a Pre- Commercial Procurement (PCP) initiative supported by Enterprise Ireland. The aim of SBIR is to use competitive challenges to drive innovation via technology companies.

Smart Dublin has embraced the national SBIR programme and since 2016 has delivered four PCP challenges with another 5 challenges to launch. Over €1M of funding has been committed to source innovative, low cost solutions to scale up cycling, address illegal waste, and monitor flood risk and to deliver wayfinding solutions. To date 23 companies have benefitted from funding and the opportunity to work alongside city teams.

Aim
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SBIR is a mechanism that enables public sector bodies to connect with technology businesses and provide innovative solutions. SBIR falls under the category of Pre-Commercial Procurement (PCP) with the objective of stimulating innovation for the benefit of the contracting body or another party. At Smart Dublin the aim is to take city challenges and turn them into opportunities for innovation.   The programme offers subject experts from the city the chance to test out new ideas and work with entrepeneurs and small businesses. This creates opportunities for entrepeneurs to build new products and services and exposes the organisation to new innovative thinking and the application of Smart technologies.

Process
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SBIR is a competitive programme, industry prepared and published by public sector organisations through an open call. It is a two-phased development approach. It starts with an initial feasibility, followed by a development stage. For example, Dublin's first call in 2016 asked for Smart technology solutions to improve cycling. There were 98 expressions of interest and 23 proposals. 5 were selected to receive funding of up to €12.5K for a three month viability study. Four companies were selected for further funding €25K each) to complete their prototypes:

• Bikelook – low cost bike theft sensors.

• Liberty Bell – a smart cycle bell to record obstacles and issues.

• See.Sense - piloting connected bike light pilots.

Success factors

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• It gives cities the chance to engage with industry to explore and test technologies when addressing city challenges.

• 50% funding is available to the city.

• It provides a reference site to showcase solutions.

• It funds SME's to undertake research and testing.

• It offers the potential to create employment and make international links.

• It mitigates risk to both cities and companies.

• It gives cities a better understanding of their challenges and improves the decision process.

• The intellectual rights remain the suppliers and reporting is light touch.

Stakeholders

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• Dublin local authorities as project owners.

• Enterprise Ireland providing funding, advice and support.

• Smart Dublin Team in a facilitation and administration role.

• City departments as mentors, problem owners and champions.

• The start-up ecosystem promoting the challenges, giving access to start-up space, mentoring and support programmes.

Challenges & solutions

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• Gaining high level support .

• Identifying challenges and sourcing high quality proposals and ideas.

• Internal management of the process e.g. procurement, selection process.

• Engaging the local procurement team.

• Identifying departmental champions willing to support the process and mentor the companies.

• Engaging the wider innovation and technology ecosystem.

• Not underestimating the importance of high-level buy-in, engagement and support.

• The investment of time and resources to formulate appropriate challenges.

• Celebrating success and create exposure for participants .
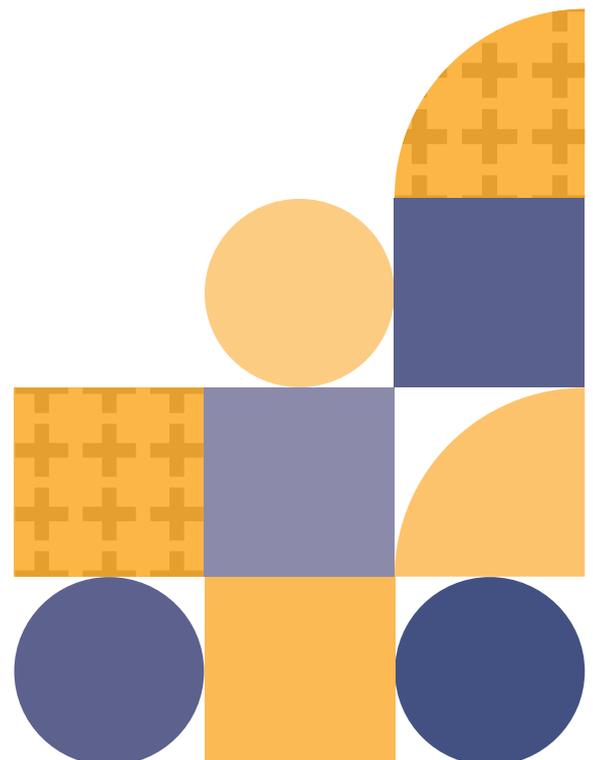
Achievements

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- The process has been a success for Smart Dublin, both for the companies involved and the supporting departments - 4 challenges, over 200 expressions of interest and 23 contracts.

- Companies have gone on to win international contracts.

- It offers a low risk mechanism for the city to test new concepts.

- It gives a credible route to market for the companies.

- It exposes departments and champions to disruptive innovation and emerging market opportunities.

- A number of new companies have been created.

- Companies have attracted further funding and have been accepted on to accelerator programmes.
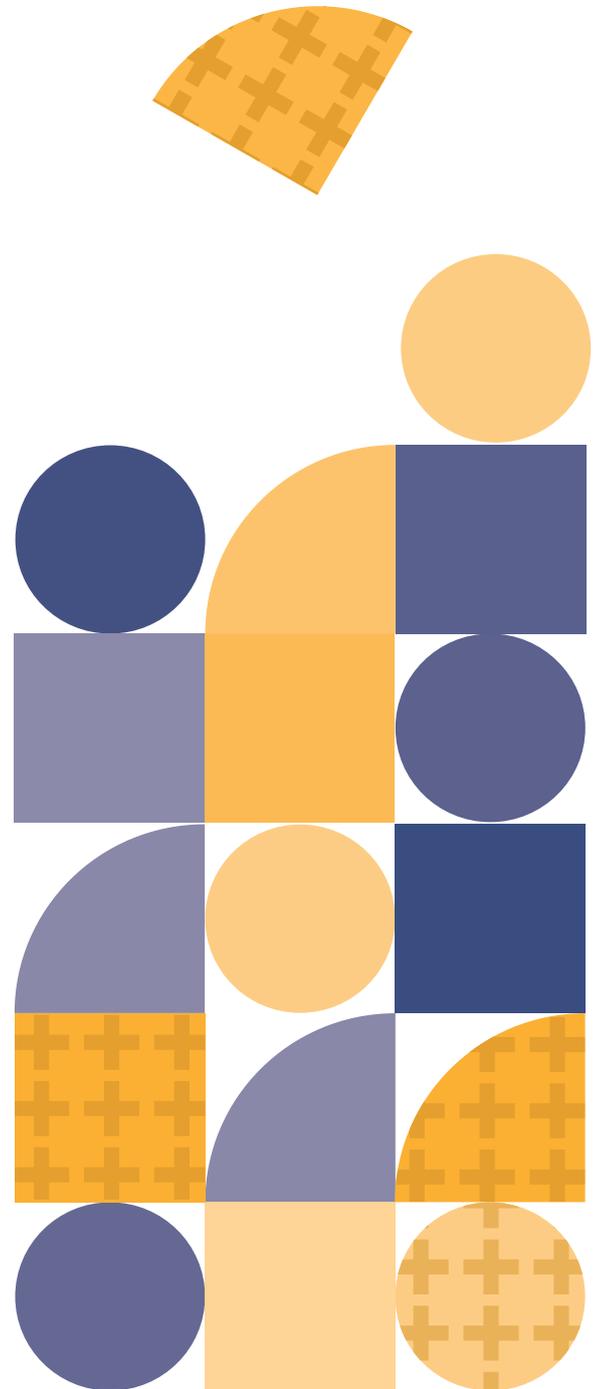
More information

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