

Case Study

Name of project:	Small business research initiative (SBRI) – East
Project proposer/sponsor:	Health Enterprise East Limited
Project/case study beneficiary:	regional
ERDF grant amount:	£992,942
Total investment:	£2.482 million
Date of grant:	October 2009
Partners involved:	
Duration of project:	3 years
Key contact(s):	Dilys Wilkinson PA to Dr Anne Blackwood, NHS Innovations East Tel: 01480 364925 Dilys.wilkinson@nhsinnovationseast.org.uk
Description of project success	
<p>SMEs rarely bid – or rarely bid successfully – for public service contracts, because the process is considered too difficult, time consuming and risky. SBRI East aims to challenge this situation, both to redress a clear economic imbalance (as the majority of public service contracts go to multinationals) and to help the public sector access the wealth of innovative thinking and cutting edge research ongoing in the East of England. Dr Anne Blackwood, CEO of NHS Innovations East, explains: 'SBRI East provides an interface between SMEs and the NHS. The NHS has a raft of unmet needs but SMEs often create healthcare products without really understanding these needs. By bringing the two sides together, we can help SMEs understand what drives NHS procurement, enabling them to develop needs driven products and technologies with a greater chance of commercial success.'</p> <p>SBRI East focuses on three areas of healthcare, relevant both to the region and to national NHS policy; managing long term conditions closer to home; patient safety; and staying healthy. The programme is enabling SME's to learn about healthcare economics and carbon accounting to help make their efforts to win R & D work from the NHS and others more effective.' By citing these areas, we can give SMEs a focus for their development work,' explains Dr Blackwood. 'Under the programme, SMEs need to deliver products that not only improve patient care but also deliver cost savings and reductions in carbon emissions.'</p> <p>As well as bringing innovation to the NHS, and giving innovators a better understanding of a key customer, SBRI East has a wider remit - to encourage more sustained growth within the med tech sector. This sector is of vital importance to the Eastern region, but is</p>	



characterised by small start ups and a few major multinationals, with little in between. 'The business plan for many start ups is to sell out to a bigger company as soon as possible,' explains Dr Blackwood. 'Although this is a perfectly valid exit strategy, it drains the region of key talent as many of these big companies are based in the US or Europe. We want to encourage technology start ups to stay in the region and to grow here, anchoring our talent within the UK, essential if we are to compete in the global economy.'

SBRI East, already supported by NHS East of England, ERDF and the Technology Strategy Board, identified ERDF as a potential funding source because it was designed to support strategic regional business development, and was focused on low carbon solutions. 'The NHS has a huge carbon footprint and has a target for a 10 per cent reduction by 2015,' explains Dr Blackwood. 'As a result, SBRI East only encourages low carbon solutions, such as technologies enabling improved care at home or shorter hospital stays, as these use less energy whilst reducing bed use and patient travel.'

Following an initial research phase, SBRI East is currently helping 11 companies respond to specific NHS tenders. After presenting feasibility studies in May 2010, four of these 11 companies will be selected for a higher level of support, enabling them to undertake the clinical trials necessary to bring products to market. 'ERDF funding is helping SMEs accelerate their development process,' explains Dr Blackwood. 'Our remit is to enable SMEs to get their products to market faster, while still guaranteeing patient safety.'

Although still in the early stages, Dr Blackwood sees SBRI East as an enabler for radical change within the SME / NHS relationship: 'We are helping SMEs enter into a real dialogue with the NHS which will deliver sustained development of better solutions in the shorter and longer term, thereby supporting local SMEs and the high tech cluster. But the NHS is also known as a relatively poor, and slow, adopter of new technology. By speeding up innovation, and making it more relevant, we can encourage the NHS to adopt new technology earlier, for the benefit of both patients and regional business.'

Description of key benefits/outcomes:

- ERDF funding enables project to help more SMEs bid successfully for NHS/healthcare contracts
- Focus on low carbon solutions to help NHS meet carbon reduction targets
- Up to 100 SMEs to benefit from insight on healthcare economics and carbon accounting – to inform stronger bids
- Improving the dialogue between NHS and regional technology cluster

SBRI East is working specifically to help SMEs (Small and Medium-sized enterprises) in the East of England win more business from the NHS. SBRI is a national programme that is being piloted in the East of England using a combination of funds from the regional Strategic Health Authority (SHA) and ERDF (£800,000). It is run by NHS Innovations East.

