The C-PIC Silicon Photonics Wallet

1. What is the Silicon Photonics Wallet?

The C-PIC Silicon Photonics Wallet has been created to accelerate innovation and entrepreneurship in silicon photonics. The Wallet provides flexible funding and tailored support to help early-stage innovators turn research into commercial reality. The wallet is a unique benefit for members of the Future Worlds Silicon Photonics Cohort and represents an opportunity to build momentum, secure early wins, and position projects for future growth.

2. Who are we?

The CORNERSTONE Photonics Innovation Centre (C-PIC) is based at the universities of Southampton and Glasgow, and STFC. We are partnering with Future Worlds, the University of Southampton's on-campus startup accelerator, to support founders, researchers, and innovators to launch and develop the next generation of silicon photonics startups and scaleups. C-PIC's mission is to build a pipeline of silicon photonics enabled companies serving multiple industry sectors by 2030, underpinned by our open-source foundry. With support from EPSRC and Innovate UK, the C-PIC Silicon Photonics Wallet provides funding to access the expertise and facilities needed to transform an idea into impact.

3. Summary

- **Number of Wallets available:** Five
- **Maximum funding per Wallet:** Up to £40,000 fEC (full economic cost)
- **As per EPSRC rules:** C-PIC will fund 80% of the fEC (your employing organisation must agree to find the 20% balance of fEC for the project from other resources, according to standard EPSRC costing)
- **Duration:** Wallet funds must be spent within 12 months of the award.
- **Flexibility:** You can decide how best to use the Wallet to accelerate your start up, within the eligibility criteria and scope set out in this document.
- **Decision:** You will hear the outcome approximately one month after the deadline.
- **Project start date:** Within 3 months of receipt of your award letter.
- **Applications open:** Monday 12 January 2026
- **Deadline for applications: Tuesday 10 February 2026, 16:00**

4. Who can apply?

You can apply for a Wallet if you meet **all three** of the eligibility criteria:

1. You have been accepted onto the Future Worlds Silicon Photonics Cohort
2. You are employed at a UK Research Organisation (University or UKRI eligible institute)
3. You one of the recognised UKRI (UK Research & Innovation)-eligible role types (e.g., Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Professor, Fellow, Researcher, Professional Enabling Staff) with a contract that runs beyond the end of the Wallet funding duration.

5. How much funding can I apply for?

Each Wallet offers up to £40,000 fEC (full economic cost). Applicants may apply for the full amount or a lower sum, depending on the needs of their project. We will be attracted to applications that are good value for money, so it is not essential to ask for the maximum amount.

6. Access to the CORNERSTONE Foundry

The CORNERSTONE Foundry offers a Multi-Project-Wafer (MPW) service on a variety of platforms. You are not required to use our foundry services in your proposal, but should you wish to do so, please visit our website for MPW costs or contact cornerstone@soton.ac.uk to receive a quote for a bespoke fabrication batch.

Deadline for requesting a quote

- Applicants intending to request a CORNERSTONE Foundry quote must begin this process **as soon as possible**. We strongly advise that you make contact (cornerstone@soton.ac.uk) to being quote discussions when you start your application.
- Given the short application window, **all quote requests should be initiated no later than 1 February 2026.**

7. Outcomes and expectations

Successful applicants are expected to:

- Demonstrate how the wallet will help them advance their innovation and entrepreneurial journey and contribute to C-PIC's mission to build a pipeline of silicon photonics enabled companies by 2030.
- Provide a final report at the end of the funding period to clearly articulate the outputs and impact of the funding.
- Contribute to the visibility and reputation of C-PIC and the Future Worlds Silicon Photonics Cohort by sharing progress and outcomes and contributing to case studies.

8. Eligible costs

What we will fund:

- Staff costs (including associated Indirect and Estates costs)
- Consumables
- Equipment up to £10k (standard UKRI equipment rules apply)
- Travel and subsistence
- Facilities access
- Subcontractor costs - we encourage the use of specialist subcontractors, e.g. prototype development, packaging companies, to support the UK supply chain. Use of subcontractors is subject to the procurement rules of the host organisation.

Example costs may include (but are not limited to):

- Prototype development and testing
- Market/customer validation activities
- Consultancy and professional services (e.g. IP advice, regulatory guidance)
- Travel costs to build partnerships and secure investment
- Software design, or data costs directly supporting project development (max. 20% of project value)

Please note:

- You must demonstrate how your costs support **silicon photonics-related innovation.**
- **Staff time** should be costed according to EPSRC rules and should have strong justification, especially when there are multiple co-investigators. The assessment panel will be looking to ensure that the majority of the Wallet resources are directed towards carrying out activities that accelerate the progress of your start up.
- **We cannot fund industry directly**, and any industry project partners are not eligible to receive funding.
- We expect you to have the resources required to **start the project within three months of receiving the award letter** (approx. 2 months from the deadline).

For further details on costings and overheads, please see EPSRC's Full Economic Costing (FEC) Guides.

9. Responsible Research

All funded activities must align with the principles of responsible research and innovation (RRI). Applicants should show awareness of ethical, societal, and regulatory considerations connected to their work. You can read a summary of C-PIC's RRI strategy here.

10. Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI)

We are committed to ensuring that the Silicon Photonics Wallet supports a diverse range of founders. Applicants are encouraged to demonstrate how their projects, teams, or approaches advance EDI principles in research and innovation. You can read a summary of C-PIC's EDI strategy here.

11. Environmental Sustainability

Proposals should show consideration of environmental impact and outline steps to reduce or mitigate potential negative effects where possible.

12. Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The use of generative AI tools in funded projects is permitted, provided applicants demonstrate:

- Transparency in its use
- Compliance with data and IP considerations
- Responsible and ethical deployment

13. How to apply

Complete the online Silicon Photonics Wallet Application Form and submit by the deadline:
Tuesday 10 February 2026, 16:00

APPLICATION FORM LINK:
https://southampton.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_51jru3ojqmZRKmy

Guidance on completing the application form:

Part 1: Project Lead details

- Your full name, email address and name of your host institution.

Part 2: About your start up (not scored)

1. **What is the technology focus and key application area(s) of your start up? (not scored)**

   Briefly describe your primary technology (/technologies) and its main function(s). Examples include but are not limited to optical waveguides, Integrated Photonics Circuits (PICs), data communications, LiDAR, foundry processes & fabrication technologies etc.

2. **Do you have any updates to report since you submitted your Bootcamp application? (max. 200 words) (not scored)**

   Members of the assessment panel will be given a copy of your Future Worlds Bootcamp application to provide background information on your start up. If you have any developments or amendments since you submitted your Bootcamp application that you wish to bring to the attention of the panel, please report them here. Please contact Annette Daley (a.p.daley@soton.ac.uk) if you need a copy of your Bootcamp application to refer to.

Part 3: Your Silicon Photonics Wallet proposal (scored)

1. **How much funding are you applying for?**

   Please state the total value at fEC. Request only what you genuinely need. You are not expected to request the maximum amount. Smaller, well-justified requests that clearly unlock technical or commercial progress are encouraged.

2. **Summarise how you plan to use the Wallet (max. 100 words)**

   We are looking for a summary that can be understood by a non-scientist, that explains:
   - **Why now?** Explain why this is the right stage for funding, and what it allows you to do that would otherwise not be possible.
   - **Specificity**: Be concrete about what will be achieved and how the Wallet bridges a critical gap. Tip: Avoid generic answers (e.g., "it will help us grow"). Instead, describe measurable progress.

3. **Outline how your use of the funding will support C-PIC to achieve its mission of building a pipeline of silicon photonics enabled companies serving multiple industry sectors by 2030 (max. 200 words)**

   We want to know how your proposal aligns to C-PIC's strategy and how you will use the funding to advance the adoption of silicon photonics, accelerate the commercial exploitation of silicon photonics and/or grow the UK silicon photonics ecosystem.

4. **Provide a breakdown of costs, as per EPSRC eligible costing (max. 250 words)**

   Please provide a clear, itemised breakdown of how the requested funding will be spent. Be specific and avoid vague totals. All costs must align with EPSRC eligibility and standard costing headings e.g. directly allocated, directly incurred, indirect etc. Cost should be clearly justified to support a technical or commercial objective.

   Your university finance team or research office will be able to help with your costings. Make sure you contact them well in advance of the deadline to allow for any internal approval processes.

5. **How will this funding accelerate the progress of your start up over the next 12 months? (max. 200 words)**

   Explain how the Wallet will materially accelerate your technical and/or commercial progress over the next 12 months. Strong answers typically include:
   - Clear acceleration beyond 'business as usual': Explain what would be delayed, reduced or not possible at all without this funding.
   - Specific technical progress: advancing your technology (e.g. TRL progression, prototype build, performance validation, manufacturability, reliability testing).

- Commercial traction and validation: supporting customer discovery, pilot users, early revenue, or engagement with industry partners.
- Defined milestones and outcomes: 2–4 clear milestones you expect to achieve.
- Measurable impact: Wherever possible, include measurable targets.

6. What outputs do you expect to achieve with this funding e.g. prototype developed, IP filed, customer traction, investment readiness etc.? (max. 200 words)

We are looking for clear, tangible outputs from the funding period. Possible examples include (but are not limited to):

- A prototype or demonstrator ready for testing.
- An IP filing (patent, trademark) that secures your innovation.
- Customer traction through pilots, letters of intent, or early sales.
- Investment readiness: refining your business case, securing introductions, or preparing for investor engagement.
- Evidence of market validation (customer interviews, contracts, partnerships).

7. Are there any risks that might impact your ability to deliver the proposed outcomes? (max. 200 words)

We expect you to identify risks realistically. Acknowledging them shows maturity, not weakness. Consider:

- Technical risks: uncertainties in R&D or prototype development.
- Market risks: customer adoption, competitor activity, or regulatory barriers.
- Operational risks: access to facilities, manufacturing delays, supplier dependency.
- Team capacity: balancing time, skills, or need for external expertise.

For each risk, indicate the likelihood and impact (e.g., low, medium, high) and your mitigation strategy.

8. Explain how you (and your team) have the right balance of experience, skills and backgrounds to work on the project (max. 200 words)

Here, we want to understand the capability of you and your team and why you are best placed to deliver this project now:

- Founders: Relevant technical, commercial, or sector expertise.
- Team balance: Complementary skills (e.g., technical lead, business development, operations). If you lack in-house expertise, highlight external mentors, advisors, networks, or partners who strengthen your team.
- Diversity: Highlight diverse perspectives, backgrounds, or lived experiences that strengthen your approach.

9. **Define what success looks like for your intended use of the Wallet, including its impact. Propose one primary success measure (max. 150 words)**

   Explain the transformational effect of the Wallet. Link the £40k (fEC) to your broader ambition, for example, achieving economic (jobs, revenue, growth), environmental (sustainability benefits), social (healthcare, inclusion, accessibility) impact. Frame the funding as strategic and catalytic, not just 'useful cash'. Show that the Wallet makes a *meaningful* difference to your ability to scale impact.

10. **Additional information – optional (max. 100 words – this question is not scored):**

   This section is optional. You may use this to describe any factors, for example career breaks or personal characteristics that you wish to disclose, which may give context to your application.

11. **Any other considerations – optional (max. 100 words – this question is not marked)**

   This section is optional. You can use this space for anything else you think we need to know in relation to your application. Examples may include declarations of interest, conflicts of interest, or additional information about eligibility to apply that would not be appropriately shared in the proposal.

14. How we will assess your application

We will carry out an initial eligibility check on all applications, to screen for compliance with our eligibility criteria and scope. It's important that you answer each part of the application form fully and within the word count.

We will score proposals from 1-6 against each of the following eight criteria:

1. **Quality of the proposal as per summary:** Does the proposal adequately align with the aim and scope of the call? Is the proposed approach credible?
2. **Alignment to C-PIC:** Is the proposal adequately aligned to the C-PIC mission of creating a pipeline of silicon photonics enabled companies across multiple industry sectors?
3. **Resources**
   Is there a financial breakdown of costs? Does the project represent value for money? Are the resources appropriate to achieve the outcomes within the timeframe?
4. **Enabling progress**: To what extent will the funding realistically accelerate technical or commercial progress? To what extent does the wallet help in taking advantage of the market opportunity?
5. **Outputs:** Do the proposed outputs credibly help advance the commercial potential of the startup?
6. **Risks**: Do the risks identified take adequate account of risks impacting the outcomes of the project?

7. **Capability to deliver**: Is the team suitably placed with the right balance of skills, experience and backgrounds to carry out the planned work?
8. **Defining success**: Is there evidence of strategic thought in how the wallet will be used? To what extent could the wallet facilitate a positive effect on society, the economy and/or the environment.

Funding decisions will be made based on the ranking of the overall score for each proposal and agreed by the C-PIC Silicon Photonics Wallet award panel. The panel comprises commercial and scientific experts drawn from C-PIC and Future Worlds, and at least two independent members, including a representative from the C-PIC Compliance Board. A member of C-PIC's EDI Expert Working Group and a EPSRC representative will be invited to observe the panel meeting.

15. Contact us

If you have any questions about the Silicon Photonics Wallet, please contact Annette Daley, Photonics Tech Acceleration Manager: a.p.daley@soton.ac.uk

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