

BIRAC supports small biotechs in India

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[Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council](#) (BIRAC), a not-for-profit company of Government of India, has been set up with the idea to serve as a single window for emerging biotech industries. The mandate is to take discovery forward and encourage product development by indigenous biotechnological companies. (Read: [Guide to BIRAC funding for businesses in India](#))

There are a number of initiatives that provide funding opportunities to small and medium sized companies in the country. The following are some of the initiatives introduced by the government to push the biotechnology industry:

Biotechnology Ignition Grant (BIG)

BIRAC offers Biotechnology Ignition Grant (BIG) to scientist entrepreneurs from research institutes, academic private sector and start-ups who have exciting ideas in nascent or planning stages. This scheme is designed to stimulate commercialization of research discoveries by providing very early stage grants for the development and maturation of those discoveries into marketable product or intellectual property (IP), in particular to help bridge the gap between discovery and invention.

The purpose of the BIG Scheme is to upscale and validate of proof of concept; encourage researchers to take technology closer to market through a start-up; and excite interest of potential licensees or investors.

Biotechnology Industry Partnership Programme (BIPP)

Biotechnology Industry Partnership Programme (BIPP) is a government partnership with Industries for support on a cost sharing basis for path-breaking research in frontier futuristic technology areas having major economic potential and making the Indian industry globally competitive. It is focused on IP creation with ownership retained by Indian industry and wherever relevant, by collaborating scientists.

BIPP supports the development of appropriate technologies in the context of recognized national priorities in the area of agriculture, health, bio-energy, green manufacturing, when the scale of the problem has serious consequences for social and economic development. BIPP is an advanced technology scheme only for high risk, transformational technology or process development. It is for high risk futuristic technologies and mainly for viability gap funding. The uniqueness of this scheme is that it is for "breakthrough research" that enables product and process development and is patentable, with IP ownership rights resting with industry.

Indian Biotech companies regulated under Indian Company Act 1956 with 51% Indian shareholding (including NRI's) who have DSIR recognized R&D are entitled for BIPP funding, either independently or in collaboration with companies, not for Profit organisation or academics partners.

So far 88 agreements have been signed with 72 companies involving approx. 50 startups and SMEs. Scheme provides for both soft loan and grant. A total of investment of US \$ 141m has been committed with US \$ 50m by Govt. of India with a matching contribution of US\$ 91m coming in as private sector contribution.

Small Business Innovation Research Initiative (SBIRI)

The Small Business Innovation Research Initiative (SBIRI), a scheme launched in September, 2005 by the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), aims to encourage small and medium scale industries to take up risk in innovative R&D in biotech sector. The main focus is on supporting proof of concept and early stage research in start-ups and SMEs. Over 100 projects from small and medium entrepreneurs have been supported. SBIRI has deployed \$36 million, of which \$5 million in grants and \$31 million in soft loans, with a debt-to-grant ratio of roughly 6 to 1. Public SBIRI funding has leveraged an additional \$33 million in private investment by recipient enterprises as their core contribution, for a total investment of \$69 million across approved projects.

Contract Research Scheme (CRS)

BIRAC extends support to academia in the form of grant-in aid for validation of the proof of concept by an industrial partner. It supports the academia-industry interaction between research institutes, universities, public funded research laboratories, governmental organizations, research foundations and companies or industries under the public-private partnership (PPP) mode.

Under this CRS Scheme, public sector research institutes, universities who have already generated or have pre-existing scientifically established proof of concept can seek support for specific research and validation process to be performed by a company partners within a defined time frame. The industry partner in turn would complete the validation phase in a contract research mode. The IP rights belong solely to the academic partner.

Bio-incubator Support Scheme (BISS)

In order to foster techno entrepreneurship in biotechnology, BIRAC has initiated a scheme for strengthening and upgradation of the existing bio-incubators and also to establish new world-class bio-incubators in certain strategic locations. These bio incubators will provide the incubation space and other required services to start-up companies for their initial growth.

The BIRAC Bio-incubator strengthening support is provided to those existing Incubators which have proven experience and competence to run successful incubators, have an existing network for mentoring and handholding of incubatees, and also

can provide the enabling services to promote innovation research. This apart, BIRAC is will set up a limited number of new world-class state-of-the-art national bio-incubators at strategic locations, especially in and around the DBT Bio-clusters.

Grand Challenges Programme

BIRAC will also shortly launch the Grand Challenges Programme, offering researchers and scientist opportunities to innovate and work on scientific and technological solutions for affordable product development to meet national needs. The program will have one common defined goal: "Create scientific and technological tools to overcome hurdles and find solutions for novel affordable products of national relevance". High level of innovation, new tools and transformative ideas would be supported. These could be in health care, agriculture and energy.

These Grand Challenges Programs could be implemented in an industry-academia partnership model to be co-funded with strategic partners through both national and global alliance. These could be self-governed consortia with clearly defined milestones, deliverables, management models and IP sharing contracts.