Finding Funding Fast: Advice for Fundraising within iGEM

Finding sources of funding for an iGEM project is critical to its success, yet often proves to be a long and arduous process for teams. Here, we provide a guide to finding funding rapidly by exploring various funding routes. The key: showing the party sitting across from you why *they* would benefit from investing in *you*. Here are all the tips and tricks from the reGELerate team used firsthand and learned from fellow teams.

The main funding routes can be classified into the following categories:

Route	**Evaluation**
Degree departments	Route which has provided us with the highest-yield. The departments representing our degrees covered all Jamboree costs for twelve students.
Student societies and union funds	Small amounts may be provided, such as from the university's synthetic biology society. Watch out for application deadlines that tend to be early in the year and large paperwork required, such as risk assessments.
University alumni networks	Underused approach that can be done through the university's alumni online services.
In-kind sponsorship	Many companies are willing to provide in-kind sponsorships to iGEM teams, especially the sponsors of that year's competition. They will reach out to teams to offer reagents, but teams can also reach out to different biotechnology companies who may have a vested interest in supporting the project's goals.
Company sponsorship	Low likelihood of obtaining cash from companies, teams should prepare a deck and abstract before making a request.
Crowdfunding	Highly effective when working through people that know you directly.
Independent grants	Slowest process of all the options, and highly competitive. Grants may be rolling or have specific deadlines to pay close attention to.

Working out where funding is needed

Before approaching anyone, a budget should be built. The first question potential sponsors will ask is what the money is for, and knowing the specifics of which *part* of the competition this funds and what *expenses* the money will be spent on will give you the greatest chance to win over the stakeholder. A sponsor will find it easier to sponsor what they perceive to be a smaller part of the competition than a lump sum. Costs can be divided into the following categories:

1) **Competition fees** (team registration, individual participation tickets, Grand Jamboree fees). These are fixed and non-negotiable and cheaper if paid early. These are some of the first deadlines a team will have to meet (April and onwards), so we recommend to secure this cost first.
2) **Travel and accommodation at the Grand Jamboree** will scale with how many students are attending, and are likely to be the largest variable cost. Teams can anticipate these to be covered by the university, but not the costs of travelling within Paris or food and drinks.
3) **Wet lab** (cloning kits, protein purification kits, consumables, strains, sequencing) can mostly be covered by in-kind sponsorships.
4) **Other costs** (outreach materials, printing, merchandise, website building, filming, software) are all expenses that may be small individually but can add up if not accounted for. These tend to be the lowest-priority costs.

For example, when asking our departments to cover the expenses that would be required for their respective students to attend the Grand Jamboree, we listed out the specific costs and their deadlines to make sure that the departments knew exactly where their funds would be attributed.

Route	**Deadline**	**Cost for x members**
Team Registration Flat Fee	2 April	
Team Grand Jamboree Flat Fee	30 July	
Team Member Grand Jamboree Tickets	7 May	
Eurostar round trip	30 July	
Accommodation for five nights (Nov 12-17 as the competition is November 13-16)	16 August	

When receiving money from departments, we recommend creating a team bank account and designating a team member to receive bank transfers and then pay for the fees. The department was invoiced with evidence of the fees paid and returned the money.

Pitching materials required

Early on in the project development, pitching materials can be created and built upon and reused when seeking funding. It is crucial to email with a purpose: before sending emails, define who is involved in the project (students) and why this may be of appeal, the scale of

the iGEM competition and educational and coverage benefits, what problem the project aims to solve are and how this relates to the target sponsor, and what kind of sponsorship is best requested (in-kind, software, service, cash). We found it necessary to have both technical and non-technical pitch decks, as a prion-based hydrogel is a difficult technology to sell to a non-scientist. If you are unsure of where to start, begin by writing the non-technical version as the technical version can be improved as more of the wet and dry lab details progress. We therefore recommend preparing the following materials as soon as possible:

Material	**Purpose**
Email	Introduce team, competition, problem being solved, potential for collaboration and visibility offered in return. Suggest to organise a short call to speed the process up and create genuine human connection.
One-page summary	An attachment for cold emails that contains more of an explanation of the team, the competition and media coverage in outreach, posters, presentations and the Wiki. This can be followed up by a summary of the project idea and approach. A link to the team email and crowdfunding platforms can be very useful, as well as a testimony from the team PI!
Technical pitch deck	For academics, supervisors and biotech companies. Knowledge of molecular and synthetic biology is assumed.
Non-technical pitch deck	For alumni, general sponsors, marketing teams and crowdfunding. This explains the project **either in scientific or layman terms based on the target sponsor** but without niche jargon, led by the problem being solved.
Scientific abstract	This can accompany the technical deck for companies with scientists on staff. This may be questioned much more in depth during follow-up meetings.
Budget table	Itemised with deadlines - a single total should be avoided.
Fundraising video	A short video (1-2 minutes) that conveys the team spirit and is shareable across platforms.
Sponsorship tiers	More applicable when hosting conferences. A table showing what each level of support gets: assign benefits a sponsor will receive (eg: logo on merchandise, dedicated post

	and video feature) depending on the amount/in-kind materials they are willing to fund. Before making promises, check the iGEM rules on sponsorship and acknowledgment when it comes to using names and logos with commercial partners.

Route 1: Departmental Funding

iGEM is interdisciplinary by nature so teams can sit across multiple departments. For example, our team was sponsored by three departments covering degrees such as Biochemistry, Bioengineering, and Genomic Medicine. Departments possess discretionary budgets, an interest in their own students and motive to be associated with an international competition. Our most successful application for funding was through the departments. Emphasis the fact that 400+ teams compete each year and that the Grand Jamboree draws 5000+ attendees such as investors, policy experts and academics, as this will show the scale of visibility. We also recommend citing the institution record (for example, all of Imperial's previous teams won gold medals or were finalists/runners up) to show what an iGEM student can bring to the department's reputation. The departments will additionally require you to be specific about why the project aligns with their own research, so write a template email for which the specification can be amended based on the target department, and who the team PIs would be. They may also ask for proof of endorsement, so prepare to cc your supervisor in the email. Finally, a request can be closed with the itemised budget.

Route 2: Societies and Union Funds

Student societies often receive funds from the union for events, travel and projects that represent the institution. Working with other societies can be highly beneficial to run events together to lower outreach costs, for example. We applied for events and travel sponsorship through our student union under the synthetic biology society, which required lots of documentation such as risk assessments. Unfortunately, we did not hear back and some of the deadlines sat earlier in the year than expected. As soon as the iGEM team is founded, we recommend to find out key deadlines for such funding and talk to the outgoing committee to understand what types of applications are accepted.

Route 3: Alumni Networks

Alumni already care about the institution, may work in biotechnology or finance and may even be former iGEM participants themselves who might be willing to sponsor you without an explanation or pitch required. During our EU/UK Mini Jamboree, we found out that other university teams, such as Oxford's, have secured significant funding this way. We recommend the following approaches:

- **Speak to former iGEM teams at your institution**. If you are unaware of who they are, previous teams' Wikis list their members by name. Many of them may now be in research or industry and remember what the process was like and share tips of their own/refer you to someone else if they cannot sponsor you. Prepare a short paragraph you could to someone after speaking to them in real life if they suggest to refer you to someone else but need the details of your project written first.

- **Ask your department whether your team can feature in the newsletter**. These are often sent to alumni and other mailing lists and increase visibility.
- **Use social media platforms and LinkedIn** to advertise the team and its mission. This is how one of our current advisors, Dr. Amritpal Singh, found out about us. This is also a great way of finding alumni and contacting them to chat about their experience.

Route 4: Company Sponsorships

One of the most important steps here is to build a target list of companies and personalise each email/LinkedIn message. We recommend the following companies:

Company Type	**Reasoning**
Biotech and synbio companies	Have direct relevance and interest in recruiting graduates. The best targets are those that are connected to the project's application area.
Reagent suppliers	Student teams are future customers.
DNA synthesis and sequencing providers	Several run established programmes for iGEM teams specifically already, such as Integrated DNA Technologies.
Software and AI companies	Relevant for dry lab work and credits cost less than cash.
Institution spinouts	Understand the student-enterprise pipeline and may want to help.
Local companies	Will improve local visibility and the link to well-renowned institutions.

Make sure to:

- Build a tracker with the company name, contact name, date sent, follow-up date and outcome. This will prevent warm leads from going cold and teams from sending duplicate emails.
- Send the email or and wait for a response to ask for pitch deck/one-pager/abstract depending on who is asking for what.
- Follow up after 10 working days and every month.
- Instead of materials or cash, consider asking for a feature/mention/repost on communication channels, a jointly-produced video explaining the science behind the project (especially if contacting Youtubers) or a stall or slot at an event you are running. The idea is to build long relationships that can offer benefits of any kind for both parties involved.

Route 5: In-kind Sponsorships

In-kind support is one of the easiest sources to secure. A company may not sign off on £1,000 donation may approve the equivalent in product form. When asking for products, make sure to ask for the delivery timelines early as shipping can take weeks. Your team can ask for products such as:

Category	**Examples**
DNA synthesis and sequencing	Synthesised constructs, sequencing runs, oligonucleotides
Reagents and consumables	Cloning and purification kits, enzymes, competent cells, plasticware, media
Software and computing	Modelling, structure prediction, credits for dry lab work
Equipment loans	Instruments for a defined period
Services	Printing, design, video production, legal or IP services
Event support	A company stall, speakers or catering for an event you host. One of our in-kind sponsors, Twist Biosciences, took a stall at our EU/UK Mini Jamboree and reached an audience of students and researchers.

For both company and in-kind sponsorships, as well as media channels you may be seeking to partner with, we recommend adapting the following email template to your project needs:

Subject: Partnership Opportunity with [Institution Name] 2026 iGEM Team

Dear [insert recipient name],

I am writing on behalf of the [institution name] iGEM 2026 team to propose a partnership that may be of interest to your company. We believe that this collaboration – at the intersection of youth, science, and innovation in sustainability and health – would align with your educational mission and strongly resonate with your audience.

iGEM (International Genetically Engineered Machine) is the world's largest synthetic biology competition. Each year, hundreds of teams from universities and startups around the world develop innovative scientific projects aimed at addressing major societal challenges. The competition culminates in the international grand final, the Grand Jamboree, in Paris in November 2026, gathering 5000+ visiting scientists, investors and students.

Our team is currently developing a research project to create [insert product]. The goal is to design a material capable of [insert function] that could allow [insert application] in [insert industries].

To support the development of this project and our participation in the iGEM Grand Jamboree, we are currently seeking sponsorship and partnerships from organisations interested in supporting

student research and synthetic biology innovation.

In addition to the research project, our team actively engages in science communication and outreach activities throughout the year. Working under the supervision of researchers and professors at [insert institution name[, and in collaboration with several Imperial societies including [insert names], we present our work to a broad audience of students interested in biotechnology and research.

As such, we were wondering whether your team might be interested in a collaboration in various forms, such as:

- A sponsorship to support our entirely student-led project
- In-kind sponsorship with our reagents, which include: [insert]
- Free premium account or credits for your software
- A feature or mention of the project on your communication channels

In return, we would be pleased to acknowledge your support through:

- Visibility at outreach events and presentations
- Promotion through our team's communication channels
- Acknowledgement on team materials and merchandise
- Recognition during the international iGEM Grand Jamboree

We would be happy to provide further information about the project and discuss potential collaboration opportunities if this may be of interest to your company. Please find below a link to the official iGEM website for your reference: https://igem.org/.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Whoever sent the email
Degree
Imperial College London
iGEM 2026 Team and role within team

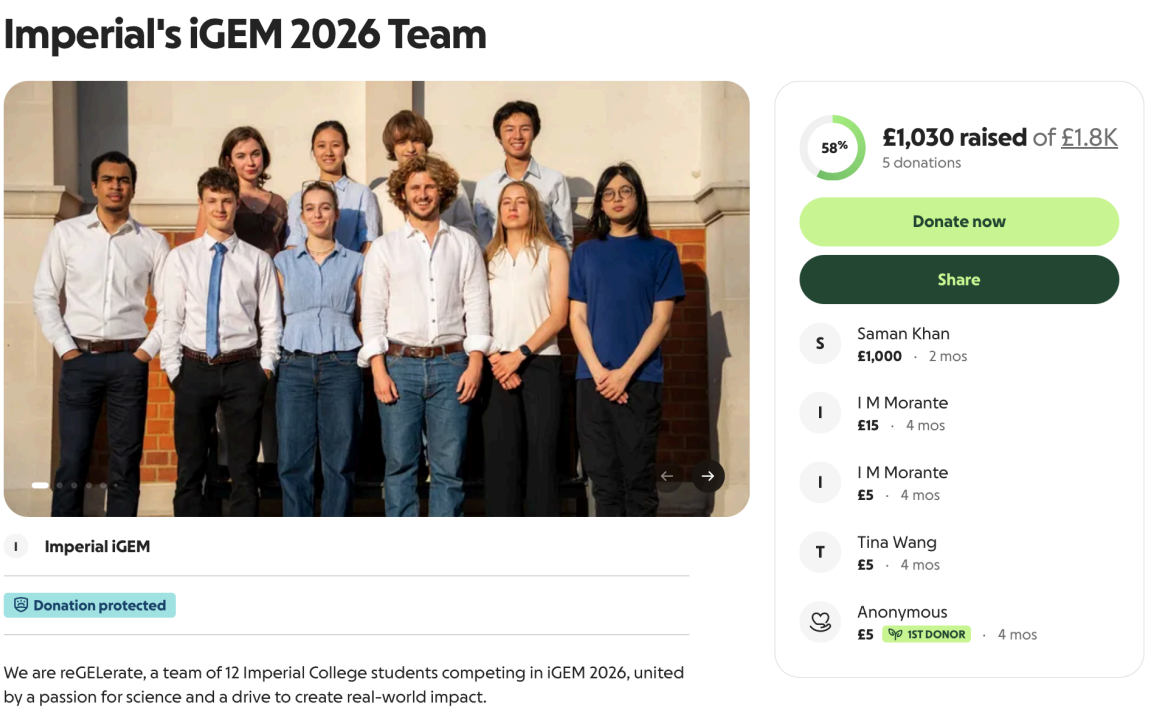
Route 6: Crowdfunding

Crowdfunding involves setting up a funding page, done through websites such as GoFundMe or science-specific platforms such as Experiment. Select one platform not to confuse others and begin by sharing the page to people you know, such as friends and family members, and on social media. This page can then be shared (as a QR code or link) via their own socials too, and then to sponsors once some money has been donated, as this largely increases credibility. We set up a GoFundME page and received a £1,000 donation from a contact made through our outreach programme. The donation therefore stemmed from a relationship and trust that was built by working with the larger educational community. When running workshops, it can be particularly useful to mention that the team is self-funded

and let others approach to ask about the project. Be prepared to share the details and organise a call!

To set up a crowdfunding page, we recommend the following:

1) Indicate that your team would be grateful for any amount of money donated
2) Lead with the problem that the project is addressing rather than the biology, as this audience will likely be non-technical
3) Attach the fundraising video and any team photos to the page. Faces make the team feel more familiar
4) Post major updates as the project progresses as donors may be happy to give again and share the page
5) Thank every donor individually and publicly where they are happy with it
6) Check whether your institution has an official crowdfunding platform as it may offer matched funding and other benefits



As part of crowd-funding initiatives, promoting your page at different events can increase your visibility. For example, we hosted an iGEM Fun Run, inviting and involving other Imperial students with reGELerate. And promoting a healthy lifestyle! After all, Imperial is conveniently placed next-door to Hyde Park, a perfect running ground. Our team members wore QR codes with a link to the team's gofundme page. Though we did not manage to raise any funds with this particular event, we still had a great time and enjoyed involving our peers in the infinitely diverse cloud of activities that is iGEM.



Route 7: Independent Grants

There exist foundations and funds that support early-career researchers and student-led science. These sums can be transformative, although the application process requires lengthy writing, the turnaround may be slow (highly depends on the foundation) and the competition is large - so avoid building your team budget around this source and ensure you have other options. Some have rolling acceptances, whereas others have fixed deadlines in the year so it is important to identify those first and start applying early. Look at small and fastly-moving venture-foundry-like foundations such as Emergent Ventures and Primordia, which we applied for as they target early-stage innovative projects specifically. We personally applied to these as they are known to fund young researchers, and these grants typically ask a mix of personal ambition and technical questions. You can also look at local and regional innovation funds that work through universities or entrepreneurship schemes - speaking to the Entrepreneurship hub in your institution is a great place to start. Throughout this process, consider which grants look to fund single innovators rather than teams - this will ensure that you have the greatest chance at securing the funding.

Like with securing departmental funding, a strong application understands what the foundation's aims are and how your research aligns with their ambitions. Make sure to highlight the novel aspect of your project and any unprecedented milestones you wish to reach, and detail how the money would be utilised. Sponsors will want to know which experts support you, so make sure to state who your supervisors are. Lastly, propose what would happen after the competition and how the project would be continued to sustain its impact over time so that the grant money has long-term implications.

Successfully running a fundraising campaign

To successfully run this campaign, we suggest appointing a head of fundraising, but approach it through the wet-lab, dry-lab and engagement elements, as outlined in this

document. Every sub-team has a role to play in securing funding, and convincing a potential sponsor often takes trust-building, good people skills and strong technical backing. We also recommend keeping a tracker and use a shared email address so that replies are not missed. Finally, multiple team members should come to an agreement before signing any agreement with another party. Finally, before the project ends, make sure to check that every sponsor is acknowledged according to the stated agreement, and you can send them a short message to tell them how your project went.

Overall, regardless of whether your team is fundraising or conceptualising a wet-lab design, it is important to lay out key deadlines early and establish dedicated roles to facilitate efficiency and coherence.

Fundraising Video

Sponsors love to see the faces behind an innovation. So, before filming any other videos for our project, we decided to film a fundraising video that we would send or show sponsors when pitching our idea. We first arranged for someone to film it and planned a final length of 1-2 minutes to keep sponsors engaged and at a dynamic pace. A central aim was to showcase our identity as university students, so we shot the video at landmark sites across our main campus. We obtained footage from inside classrooms, labs, used varied architecture highlighting the Imperial logo and drew the iGEM logo on a whiteboard to visually familiarise potential sponsors with the competition. Each of these locations had been planned within a script that we prepared to make sure that the images communicated our message clearly and concisely. A few of our members then headed to UAL to take part in the editing process, which involved playing with lighting, sound and choosing different camera angles to convey our team spirit and drive. We then premiered this video during an iGEM presentation we ran in the Spring Term to Imperial students.