COVID-19 Rapid Response Funding Call
Science Foundation Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland

Frequently Asked Questions

Last updated: 15 April 2020

We encourage potential applicants to the COVID-19 Rapid Response Funding Call to read the frequently asked questions listed below before preparing application. If you have a query that is not answered below, or if you require any clarification on any of the information provided below, please contact us at covid19@sfi.ie.

Scope of the call

Q: I have a solution that is ready to be deployed, which I believe will be impactful within the current COVID-19 crisis, but I need financial support to do this. Can I apply for funding under this call to do this?

A: This funding call aims to support research, development, and innovation (RD&I) activities that will deliver significant and timely impact for Ireland within the context of the current emergency. If your proposal does not include any RD&I activities, it is not eligible to be funded under this call. In addition, any solution supported under this call must be operational and deployed within 6 months of project start.

SFI’s Five Point Plan, which represents SFI’s contribution to the Irish Government’s National Action Plan in response to Covid-19, includes a number of other supports such as providing information, making connections and collaborative engagement, and which may be interest to you. Please see our website for more information and contact covid19@sfi.ie if you have any queries.

You may also be interested in the Health Innovation Hub Ireland Solution Portal, which is collating a database of products, services, resources, expertise, research etc, that may provide support for Ireland during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, The Office of Government Procurement recently launched a webpage to facilitate offers of assistance from businesses and other organisations that are seeking to provide supplies or services in support of the national response to Covid-19. The webpage is available at: gov.ie/covidsupplies
Q: I have a research proposal that I believe can have rapid demonstrable impact on the current COVID-19 crisis in Ireland. However, I’m not sure if I should apply to this call or the Health Research Board.

We recognise that there is overlap between these two calls but we do encourage potential applicants to consider their eligibility and the suitability of their proposal and to consider the most appropriate mechanism. Some high-level information on the two calls is provided in the table below; however, we encourage potential applicants to read the call documents available on the websites for the SFI/EI/IDA Rapid Response Funding Call and the Health Research Board Rapid Response Call.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SFI/EI/IDA Rapid Response Call</th>
<th>HRB Rapid Response Call</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Scope</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>RD&amp;I activities that will impact positively on the current crisis. These activities include the development of innovative solutions based on new or alternative approaches and methodologies to address immediate national needs.</td>
<td>Focus on medical countermeasures, health service readiness, and social and policy countermeasures to COVID-19</td>
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<td><strong>Duration of awards</strong></td>
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<td>Projects may not extend beyond the end of 2020. Solutions should be deployed within 6 months of project commencement.</td>
<td>3-24 months</td>
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<td><strong>Funding</strong></td>
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<td>Funding requests will depend on the specific needs of the project.</td>
<td>Typically up to €200,000</td>
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<td><strong>Who can apply</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>RPOs / SMEs / MNCs / Government / Other Please see the call document for additional information</td>
<td>RPOs</td>
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<td><strong>Closing Date</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>The call is currently open and applications will be accepted at any time. At least one week’s notice will be given prior to call closure.</td>
<td>9 April 2020</td>
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Q. Can I submit applications to both the SFI/EI/IDA and HRB COVID-19 Rapid Response Calls?

You may apply to both calls but only if the projects are clearly distinct from one another. SFI and HRB will be coordinating with one another on these calls, so we would ask that applicants do not submit the same proposal to both calls. In deciding which call to apply to, or if applying to both, applicants should carefully consider the purpose and scope of the two calls.

Q. Are there other research calls in addition to the SFI/EI/IDA and HRB COVID-19 Rapid Response Calls that I can consider?
SFI is keeping an up-to-date list of Funding and Support Opportunities from around the world on our website. The information provided includes whether Irish higher education institutions or companies are eligible to apply, call closing dates, and budget available.

**Q:** I have research expertise that I believe could be relevant to the current crisis and would be willing to provide assistance, if needed. Who should I contact to do this?

**A:** SFI’s Five Point Plan, which represents SFI’s contribution to the Irish Government’s National Action Plan in response to Covid-19, includes a number of supports such as providing information, making connections and collaborative engagement. Through our engagement with other organisations, we may identify areas of need where additional expertise is required. If you would like to be considered in such discussions, please see our website for more information and contact covid19@sfi.ie outlining your expertise and in what areas it might be impactful. Please note that we will not be seeking to find positions for all people that contact us, rather needs of organisations will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

You may also be interested in the HSE’s Be On Call for Ireland and the Irish Scientists on Call initiatives, which provide additional information and opportunities to help combat the current COVID-19 crisis.

If your research has a ready to deploy solution that is ready to help the HSE directly, you can provide details to the Health Innovation Hub Ireland Solution Portal, which is collating a database of products, services, resources, expertise, research etc, that may provide support for Ireland during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In addition, The Office of Government Procurement recently launched a webpage to facilitate offers of assistance from businesses and other organisations that are seeking to provide supplies or services in support of the national response to Covid-19. The webpage is available at: www.gov.ie/covidsupplies

**Generic queries**

**Q.** Can applications be submitted by consortia involving academic and enterprise partners, or must applications exclusively involve either academic or enterprise RD&I projects?

As this rapid response call is a collaborative initiative between SFI, Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland, applications will be accepted from enterprise only, academia only or collaborative applications involving both enterprise and academia. Collaborative projects will be assessed internationally as a whole. SFI will fund the activities of the academic partner directly, and Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland will fund company participation in line with normal RD&I support terms, conditions and rates of funding.

**Q.** What is the envisaged level of funding that may be requested under this call?

It is expected that award sizes will vary depending on justification of need provided in applications. All funding requests must be detailed and strongly justified. Applicants should note that solutions developed as part of projects supported under this call must be operational and fully deployed within 6
months of project start, and requested costs should be clearly aligned with milestones and deliverables to be completed within this timeframe.

SFI will fund the activities of the academic partner directly and Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland will fund company participation in line with normal RD&I support terms, conditions and rates of funding.

**Q. How many members can be included on a team/consortium?**

Applications are not limited to a defined number team or consortium members. A lead applicant as the main point of contact for the application should be nominated. Involvement or end-users / stakeholders is welcome to demonstrate / validate the need and feasibility of a specific solution within the context of the current crisis.

**Q. For collaborative academia / enterprise proposals, how should intellectual property (IP) be managed for awards made under this call?**

As for other SFI calls, IP should be governed according to the National IP Protocol.

**Q. I am based in a research performing organisation/company in Northern Ireland. Am I eligible to receive funding under this call?**

Currently, eligibility for funding is restricted to RPOs and companies in the Republic of Ireland. Companies/entities based in Northern Ireland could be part of a consortium but may not request funding through the rapid response call.

Exploratory discussions are ongoing with the Department for the Economy (DfE) in Northern Ireland to consider whether academics based in Northern Ireland may seek funding under this call. However, this opportunity is not yet confirmed. Updates to the status of these discussions, will be made here, when appropriate.

**Q. I am based in a research performing organisation/company outside of Ireland. Am I eligible to receive funding under this call?**

Currently, eligibility for funding is restricted to RPOs and companies in the Republic of Ireland. International companies/entities could, however, be part of a consortium but may not request funding through the rapid response call.
Q. I am in an organisation not listed in the eligibility requirements for the Rapid Response Call. Can I apply for funding?

Under this call, any Research Performing Organisation (RPO); a client company of one of the following government agencies Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Údarás Na Gaeltachta or Local Enterprise Office (LEO); or any combination of the preceding may submit a proposal for support.

Applications from other organisations, outside those referenced above, are also welcome. In order to confirm the eligibility of other organisations, we would ask that you contact us at covid19@sfi.ie as we will need to ascertain some additional information before confirming eligibility.

Q. Will funding awarded under this call be subject to modified Terms and Conditions for the agencies involved?

Science Foundation Ireland will fund the activities of the academic partner directly and Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland will fund company participation in line with normal RD&I support terms, conditions and rates of funding.

Science Foundation Ireland Grant General Terms and Conditions shall govern the administration of SFI grants and awards. Similarly, grants or funding offered by Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland will apply their stated terms and conditions. Any exceptions to this will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

Q. Will Clinical Trials be supported through this Rapid Response Call?

The SFI/EI/IDA and HRB/IRC rapid response calls are not designed to support clinical trials involving investigational medicinal products (IMPs).

*The HRB has provided the following guidance* - The HRB recognise the importance of high-quality clinical trials to inform our understanding of the treatment, diagnosis and prevention of COVID-19. In addition, considering availability of IMP and pressures on clinical staff time, it is important that Ireland takes a strategic, national approach to the selection of trials. For this reason, the Expert Advisory Group (EAG) to the National Public Health Emergency Team (NPHET) has established a Research Subgroup to take a more coordinated, national approach to COVID-19 trials.

The Research Subgroup is currently considering the criteria against which to assess the appropriateness of clinical trials. These criteria may include:

- Potential for equitable establishment of the trial nationally
- Availability of the medications (nationally and/or centrally provided by an international trial)
- Whether the trial is a platform study and capable of adopting new interventions in response to emerging evidence
- The degree to which the trial has the potential to impact on clinical care in the context of the pandemic
- The degree to which the trial can add to or extend the evidence base
- The degree to which Irish investigators are believed to be in equipoise regarding the therapeutic alternatives within the trial
• For placebo or untreated trial arms, the extent to which the standard of clinical care proposed by the trial conforms with current best practice in clinical care of COVID-19 in Ireland.

Q. Do I need to submit ethical/regulatory approval as part of my application?

Applicants are required to consider and adhere where relevant to SFI’s requirements in relation to all ethical and regulatory issues. All applicants should complete the ethical issues table in the application form before submission.

As SFI is committed to integrating a gender perspective into research that we fund, applicants are requested to provide a statement on how the project integrates a gender perspective in the research proposed, outputs and impacts of the project. Guidance for applicants on these issues can be found here.

In addition, under the feasibility section of the application form, applicants are requested to include any ethical or regulatory considerations relevant to the successful execution of the proposed project.

Q. Are there any different procedures for seeking ethical approvals needed for research funded under this call?

As mentioned above, applicants are requested to consider SFI’s requirements in relation to all ethical and regulatory issues and should complete the table in the application forms. Applicants are also advised that a temporary National Research Ethics Committee (NREC) for COVID-19 to deliver an expedited process for review has been established for all COVID-19-related research studies. Please refer to the following website for more details on this: https://www.hrb.ie/covid-19-ethical-review/nrec-covid-19-overview/

Q. We are a non-commercial organisation interested in applying for funding under this call. Our organisation is not included in the eligibility criteria, does this mean we cannot apply to this call?

Some non-commercial organisations may be eligible to receive funding under this call. To confirm eligibility, we request that you contact us at covid19@sfi.ie and we will deal with these enquiries on a case-by-case basis.

In addition, you may wish to refer to the list of other Funding and Support Opportunities from around the world on our website.

Q. Is information available on ongoing efforts that could inform proposal development?

SFI is providing a list of Ongoing Research on COVID-19 from around the world. This list of projects is searchable by research domain, and whether Irish partners are involved. This list is being regularly updated as more projects are started, and more information becomes available.
In addition, SFI also provides Links to repositories that have been specifically developed to inform and support COVID-19 research. These links include computing and modelling resources, publication repositories, clinical study supports, social science resources, and numerous research infrastructures that are offering their services to combat COVID-19.

**Academic applicants**

**Q: Many SFI funding calls are limited to supporting only STEM research. Is that also the case for the COVID-19 Rapid Response funding call?**

A: No. This funding call has a broad remit and aims to support development of innovative solutions (including STEM-based, social/behavioural science) that can have rapid demonstrable impact on the current COVID-19 crisis in Ireland. Applications should propose a solution to a significant specific problem associated with the current COVID-19 crisis in Ireland, and any RD&I solution supported under this call must be operational and fully deployed within 6 months of project start.

**Q. What eligibility criteria must an academic applicant satisfy to apply for this call?**

A. This call is open to any researcher based in an eligible research body. If you are unsure of the eligibility of the institution you are based in, please contact us at covid19@sfi.ie. When applications are submitted, no letter of support is required from the host research body. However, if an application is recommended for funding, SFI will require confirmation from the research body that the necessary supports are in place to conduct the research project, in advance of issuing a letter of offer. These supports would include, but are not limited to, appropriate access to office space and equipment, and confirmation of appropriate contract of employment (permanent or temporary) and any other necessary supports. In the case that the applicant is a postdoctoral researcher, the research body should confirm that they have appropriate mentorship, in addition to the other supports mentioned here.

**Q. Do I need to hold a permanent academic position to apply to this call?**

No. Contract researchers are eligible to apply for funding under the Rapid Response Call. If an application is recommended for funding, SFI will require confirmation from the research body that the necessary supports are in place to conduct the research project, in advance of issuing a letter of offer. These supports would include, but are not limited to, appropriate access to office space and equipment, and confirmation of appropriate contract of employment.
Q. I am a postdoctoral researcher. Am I eligible to apply for this call?

Yes. Postdoctoral researchers may apply to this call. If you are successful in securing funding, your research body will be required to confirm that all necessary supports are in place for you to conduct the planned research, including access to facilities and appropriate contractual arrangement. As a postdoctoral researcher, you will also need to ensure that appropriate mentorship is in place. We would encourage applicants to confirm these points with their host research body in advance of a submission.

For postdoctoral researchers applying to this call, it is permitted for you to request your salary as part of the budget request. If you are currently being funded under and SFI or other award, this would require that you are moved off this award for the duration of the COVID-19 rapid response grant.

Q. Are PhD stipends an eligible cost under this call?

Given the short duration of the awards permitted under this call, PhD studentships may not be requested. PhD fees may also not be requested. However, where a PhD student’s project activities cannot be continued due to restrictions associated with the current crisis, and where this student’s expertise could be used in a project funded under this call, costs may be requested to second a PhD student onto a grant made under the Rapid Response Call. For the duration of this secondment, the PhD student should not be in receipt of funding from another grant. Applicants should discuss any such requests with their host research bodies in advance of submission.

Q. What costs are eligible to be requested by RPOs under the Rapid Response Call?

Applicants may request costs associated with staff, equipment, materials and consumables and travel. All costs must be justified, and in line with SFI’s Grant Budget Policy. Overheads will be payable at the usual rate for SFI research grants.

Q. We are an academic research group planning a collaborative proposal with an enterprise partner. Our partner does not intend to request any support under the rapid response call. Do they need to satisfy the eligibility criteria set out in the call document?

Companies who are contributing to collaborations, but are not seeking state funding do not need to satisfy the eligibility criteria set out in the call document. In this case, the RPO should lead the application, including the company as a collaborator in the application (as would be standard in SFI funding calls).

Enterprise applicants

Q. I am an Enterprise Ireland Client, but my company is more than 3 years old. Am I eligible to receive support through this call?
For companies that are more than 3 years old, in order to receive state support, they must satisfy the condition that they are not an “Undertaking in Difficulty (UID)” in EU state aid terms. The definition of a UID as follows:

*In the case of a limited liability company, where more than half of its subscribed share capital has disappeared as a result of accumulated losses. This is the case when deduction of accumulated losses from reserves (and all other elements generally considered as part of the own funds of the company) leads to a negative cumulative amount that exceeds half of the subscribed share capital.*

Q. As a company applying to this call, what proportion of the costs needed to complete the proposed project can be requested?

For IDA Client companies, the following guidance applies: Companies may be funded up to existing support levels, which have been determined on a case by case basis with their agency. An exception to this would be for projects that are experimental and intend to engage in pilot or prototype development. In this case, a proposal may be considered as a feasibility project, and could be eligible for funding up to 50% or up to €250k, whichever is reached first.

For Enterprise Ireland Client Companies, the following guidance applies: If in compliance with state aid rules, applications from eligible Enterprise Ireland client companies will be taken through an accelerated Agile Innovation application process. [https://www.enterprise-ireland.com/en/funding-supports/Company/Esetablish-SME-Funding/Agile-Innovation.html](https://www.enterprise-ireland.com/en/funding-supports/Company/Esetablish-SME-Funding/Agile-Innovation.html). Funding rates, process and grant rates can be found on this link.

Q. We are a company planning a collaborative proposal with an academic research group. We do not intend to request any support under the rapid response call. Do we need to satisfy the eligibility criteria set out in the call document?

Companies who are contributing to collaborations, but are not seeking state funding do not need to satisfy the eligibility criteria set out in the call document. In this case, the RPO should lead the application, including the company as a collaborator in the application (as is standard in SFI funding calls).

Q. As a result of the current crisis, have any changes been made to State Aid legislation that are relevant to requests made under the Rapid Response Call?

Currently, no exceptional measures for RD&I activities have been announced, beyond the direct support activities which are available on the DBEI website. The EU Temporary Framework for COVID-19 covers business continuity supports and soft loan facilitation, but in other situations standard GBER applies.
Q. We are planning a collaborative project involving academic and enterprise partners. Are there specific requirements about the proportion of funded costs that may be requested by the respective partners (e.g., such as in DTIF)?

No. Partners involved in collaborative projects should request the specific costs that they require to undertake the research project, subject to any other limitations specified in the call document or in this document regarding state support.

Q. For collaborative projects involving academic research groups / SMEs / MNCs, which of the agencies involved in this call will be responsible for evaluating and funding these projects?

Funding for all projects, including collaborative projects, should be submitted to the SFI Rapid Response call as detailed in the call document. The project will be assessed internationally as a whole, and the outputs of this review will be used to fund the entities involved by the respective agency. SFI will fund the activities of the academic partner directly and Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland will fund company participation in line with normal RD&I support terms, conditions and rates of funding. Terms and Conditions for each agency will apply, as stated in the call document.

Q. We are a company that would like to apply for funding to conduct an RD&I that could be impactful in addressing the current crisis associated with COVID-19. We are, however, not a client company of any of the agencies listed in the call document. Might we still be eligible to apply for funding?

No. Only companies that satisfy the eligibility requirements in the call document are eligible to apply for funding under this call, namely companies that are a client company of one of the following government agencies Enterprise Ireland, IDA Ireland, Údaras Na Gaeltachta or Local Enterprise Office (LEO); or any combination of the preceding.

It is noted that companies who are contributing to collaborations, but are not seeking state funding do not need to satisfy the eligibility criteria set out in the call document. In this case, the RPO should lead the application, including the company as a collaborator in the application.

Q. Our company is not based in Ireland, but we would like to apply for funding under this call to develop our solution. Are we eligible to apply?

Only companies that are registered in Ireland and satisfy the eligibility requirements set out in the call document (see questions above) may apply to be funded under this call. As mentioned above, international companies may be included as collaborators on academic-led applications but may not request funding.
Q. We are a non-commercial organisation interested in applying for funding under this call. Our organisation is not included in the eligibility criteria, does this mean we cannot apply to this call?

Some non-commercial organisations may be eligible to receive funding under this call. To confirm eligibility, we request that you contact us at covid19@sfi.ie and we will deal with these enquiries on a case-by-case basis.