

## COVID-19 Rapid Response Funding Call (Phase 2)

### Frequently Asked Questions

Last updated: 13 August 2020

We encourage potential applicants to the COVID-19 Rapid Response Funding Call (Phase 2) to read the frequently asked questions listed below before preparing application. If you have a query that is not answered below or in the call document, or if you require any clarification on any of the information provided below, please contact us at [covid19@sfi.ie](mailto:covid19@sfi.ie).

#### Scope of the call

**Q. Is the scope of this call the same as Phase 1 of the COVID-19 Rapid Response Funding Call?**

No. The scope of this call is limited to STEM-led proposals in the following three thematic areas:

1. Infection Prevention & Control
2. Understanding the Virus & Host Response
3. STEM-led Solutions for Stimulating and Sustaining Rapid Economic Recovery

Applicants are advised to read the descriptions of these areas in the call document to ensure that their application aligns with scope of the call. **Applicants should also review carefully those areas that have been deemed outside the scope of the call.**

**Q. My application could fit under more than one thematic area of the call. Which one should I choose?**

It is recognised that there may be overlap between aspects of these thematic areas, but applicants should select the area of primary alignment. Please note that for the purposes of the review process, SFI may elect to move an application to a different thematic area. In assigning a proposal to the most appropriate peer review panel, SFI will consider both the applicant-selected thematic alignment and the research area focus.

**Q. In the call document, contributions to guidelines and best practice are mentioned as a possible secondary outcome of proposals, beyond the primary STEM innovation being proposed. Can you provide more information on this?**

In submissions under this call, where relevant, applicants should consider national standards and regulations and ensure that any solutions being proposed appropriately align with these. Further, if the work being undertaken can contribute to the development or advancement of these standards nationally or internationally, this should also be considered. As a recent example, the National Standards Authority Ireland rapidly published its [SWIFT 19 Barrier masks for consumers requirements](#) in collaboration with a wide range of experts drawn from the Irish RD&I community.

### Generic queries

**Q. Can I submit applications to both the COVID-19 Rapid Response Call (Phase 2) and the Frontiers for the Future 2020 Call (FFP)?**

You may apply to both funding opportunities (subject to all eligibility criteria being met) but only if the projects are clearly distinct. SFI will not re-review an application to FFP that has already been evaluated under the COVID-19 Rapid Response Call (Phase 2). In deciding which call to apply to, potential applicants are advised to consider the suitability of their proposal and to consider the most appropriate mechanism.

**Q. Are there other SFI funding opportunities to support COVID-19 related research?**

Yes. The Frontiers for the Future Call 2020 is open for applications and welcomes projects related to COVID-19. Please see the [Frontiers for the Future website](#) for more information. Other funding opportunities such as the SFI Strategic Partnership Programme are also open for applications. Please see the [funding section of the SFI website](#) for more information.

**Q. Under Phase 1 of the COVID-19 Rapid Response Call, commercial organisations were permitted to seek funding. Are these organisations permitted to seek funding under Phase 2 of the call?**

No. Applications to this deadline call will be accepted from applicants in SFI Eligible Research Bodies only. Collaboration with industry is permitted and encouraged, where appropriate. Companies interested in potentially applying for R&D funding in areas outlined in the call or related topics should speak in the first instance to their normal agency contacts at Enterprise Ireland and IDA Ireland. An agency representative will advise whether your project idea is suitable for consideration and assist with how an application can proceed.

**Q. Can applications be submitted by consortia involving academic and enterprise partners?**

Yes. Collaborative applications involving both academia and enterprise are encouraged under this call. Please note, however, applications must be led by the academic partners and funding is only available to support research activities in SFI eligible research bodies.

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

Teams may consist of one lead applicant and one co-applicant. The lead applicant will be the main point of contact for the application and the award if funded. There are no limitations on the number of collaborators that may be included in an application. Involvement of 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 applications involving enterprise, 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](#). If successful, awardees will be required to ensure that appropriate collaborative research agreements are put in place with their industry collaborators.

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

The COVID-19 rapid response call (Phase 2) is not designed to support clinical trials involving investigational medicinal products (IMPs).

*The HRB has provided the following guidance in relation to clinical trials relevant to COVID-19 - 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. Is information available on ongoing efforts that could inform proposal development?**

The first phase of the SFI, EI and IDA stream of the COVID-19 Rapid Response Call sought applications for the development of innovative solutions based on new or alternative approaches to address the immediate needs arising from the crisis. Awards made in Phase 1 are [listed on the SFI website](#) in areas including, but not limited to, PPE manufacture, testing, contact tracing, sanitisation, viral surveillance, epidemiological modelling and host immune response. Applicants should review these awards to avoid duplication of already funded research and to identify potential opportunities for collaboration that may build on the funded research in Phase 1.

SFI is also 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.

[Joint applications with Northern Ireland](#)

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

Yes. Under an agreement with the Department for the Economy (Northern Ireland), collaborative proposals including applicants from the Republic of Ireland and from Northern Ireland may be submitted to this call. Pre-approval for the involvement of the Northern Irish applicant is required and must have been requested by the deadline of 24 July, as detailed in the additional guidance for NI applications available on the call webpage.

**Q. I am submitting a joint application with a researcher from Northern Ireland, how should I include this in my application?**

Please read in detail the additional guidance for Northern Irish applicants available on the call website to ensure that all required documentation is included in your application. For joint applications, the lead researcher in Northern Ireland must be included as the co-applicant. In these cases, the lead and co-applicant will be deemed as contributing equally in the context of the review process.

**Q. I am a researcher in Northern Ireland and am submitting a joint application with a researcher from the Republic of Ireland. Do I need a SESAME profile to be involved in an application?**

Yes. The co-applicant from Northern Ireland must have a SESAME profile. If you do not already have a SESAME profile, for example from previous joint applications, please contact [covid19@sfi.ie](mailto:covid19@sfi.ie) to request that one be created for you. Please copy your research office on these requests. Please also note the requirement that any Northern Irish applicant requesting funding under this call must receive pre-approval in advance of submitting an application, as detailed in the additional guidance for Northern Irish applicants available on the call website.

**Q. I am a researcher in Northern Ireland and will be included as a collaborator in a joint application with researchers from the Republic of Ireland. Am I eligible to request costs under this call?**

Yes. The NI applicant may apply for funding whether classed as a 'co-applicant' or a 'collaborator' on a joint application. The same costs will be eligible in each case. Please note that, per the published guidance, only staff costs for additional team members are eligible, e.g., postdoctoral researchers specifically hired to carry out work on the project or whose contract under another project has finished or been temporarily suspended. Costs for permanent staff employed by the university will not be funded.

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

Wider international collaboration is strongly encouraged under this call, where appropriate. However, funding under this call may only be sought by researchers based in eligible research bodies in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

International research institutions/companies may be included as collaborators within a consortium but not request funding through this call.

It also is noted that similar schemes to support research relevant to COVID-19 may be available to collaborating researchers in other countries.

## Eligibility requirements and budget requests

### **Q. What eligibility criteria must an applicant from the Republic of Ireland satisfy to apply for this call?**

Under this call, applications must be led by a researcher from an SFI Eligible Research Body. Applicants must hold a PhD (or equivalent according to the [associated SFI Policy](#)) and be capable of demonstrating the required technical skills, resources and network to complete the proposed project and to deliver impact in the timeframe of the award.

Applicants must be members of the academic staff of an [eligible Research Body](#) (permanent or with a contract that covers the period of the grant), or, a contract researcher with a contract that covers the period of the grant, who is recognised by the Research Body as an independent investigator. Research Bodies will be required to confirm in their Letter of Support that applicants will have appropriate access to facilities and contractual arrangements for the duration of the award. Postdoctoral researchers are not permitted to apply to this call.

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

No. A contract researcher with a contract that covers the period of the grant and who is recognised by the Research Body as an independent investigator may apply to this call. Research Bodies will be required to confirm in their Letter of Support that applicants will have appropriate access to facilities and contractual arrangements for the duration of the award. Postdoctoral researchers are not permitted to apply to this call.

### **Q. I am a postdoctoral researcher. Am I eligible to apply for this call?**

No. Postdoctoral researchers are not permitted to apply as a lead or co-applicant under this call. However, they may be named as collaborators on an application.

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

Given the short duration of the awards to be made under this call, PhD stipends or fees may not be requested.

### **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. 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. The minimum funding amount that may be requested is €200k. Please note, however, where an application is recommended but insufficient justification is provided for the requested costs, this may result in an award amount of less than €200k being issued.

**Q. It states in the call document that large requests for equipment are not envisaged. What is the maximum request permitted for equipment?**

The level of requests for equipment that may be permitted may vary greatly depending on the nature of the request and the research programme. All requests must be strongly justified as being necessary to deliver the proposed research programme. Given the short timeframe of these awards, consideration should be given to the ability procure the equipment within the 12-14 month award duration. For larger pieces of equipment, we would also encourage applicants to consider the availability of infrastructure within other research groups or institutions. Reviewers will be asked to comment on the appropriateness of all budget requests in the context of delivering the research programme.