SCIENCE FOUNDATION IRELAND

Starting Investigator Research Grant Programme 2015

Call for Submission of Proposals

Version 1.6: 12th June 2015

KEY DATES

Call announcement	**12th June 2015**
Research Body notification of approved candidates	**25th September 2015, 13:00 Dublin Local Time**
Deadline for submission of proposals	**26th November 2015, 13:00 Dublin Local Time**

Terms of Reference

While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy and reliability of this document, it is provided for information purposes only and as a guide to expected developments. It is not intended, and should not be relied upon, as any form of warranty, representation, undertaking, contractual, or other commitment binding in law upon Science Foundation Ireland, the Government of Ireland, or any of their respective servants or agents. SFI Terms and Conditions of Research Grants shall govern the administration of SFI grants and awards to the exclusion of this and any other oral, written, or recorded statement.

All responses to this Call for Submission of Proposals will be treated in confidence and no information contained therein will be communicated to any third party without the written permission of the applicant except insofar as is specifically required for the consideration and evaluation of the proposal or as may be required under law, including the Industrial Development (Science Foundation Ireland) Act, 2003, the Industrial Development (Science Foundation Ireland) (Amendment) Act 2013 and the Freedom of Information Acts 1997 and 2003.

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1. Introduction

SFI is committed to supporting and developing early- and mid-career researchers to become excellent, fully independent research leaders and offers a suite of funding opportunities to help facilitate this transition, including support for those who are transitioning to independence, transitioning to leadership as well supporting more established researcher leaders. The purpose of these schemes is to fund scientific research projects of excellence with impact.

Current SFI schemes include the **SFI Starting Investigator Research Grant (SIRG)** which aims to support excellent postdoctoral researchers who wish to take steps towards a fully independent research career; the **SFI Career Development Award (CDA)** which aims to support early- and mid-career researchers who already hold a salaried, independent research post and who are looking to expand their research activities and the **SFI President of Ireland Young Researcher Award (PIYRA)** recognises outstanding engineers and scientists who, early in their careers, have already demonstrated or shown exceptional potential for leadership at the frontiers of knowledge.

In addition to SFI-led schemes, the Foundation provides funding opportunities for early- and mid-career researchers through the SFI-HRB-Wellcome Trust funded Research Career Development Fellowship and the Senior Research Fellowship in Basic Biomedical Science[1] and the Royal Society-Science Foundation Ireland University Research Fellowship (RS-SFI URF)[2].

SFI is pleased to launch the **2015 Starting Investigator Research Grant (SIRG)** programme to support excellent early-career-stage investigators to carry out independent research for a four-year period. The award also provides funding for a postgraduate student, who will be primarily supervised by the Starting Investigator (SI).

The legal remit of SFI is to promote, develop and assist the carrying out of oriented basic and applied research in strategic areas of scientific endeavour that concern the future development and competitiveness of industry and enterprise in the State. SFI funds in the research areas of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). As outlined in Agenda 2020, the Foundation is committed to continuing its focus on funding excellent science that will deliver strongly on impact, thus realising significant benefits for the Irish economy and Irish society. Research carried out through SIRG funding must be aligned to SFI's legal remit, but need not necessarily be specifically aligned to one of the 14 designated National Research Priority (NRP) areas.

Research Bodies will be permitted to put forward **a maximum of 12 candidates** for the submission of a proposal to the SIRG programme. SFI is aware of the need to address gender imbalance in STEM research areas and is supportive of the **Athena SWAN**[3] initiative which recently launched in Ireland and is endorsed by Irish Research Bodies. In recognition of this, SFI is running a pilot scheme for the SIRG 2015 call, whereby **a maximum of six candidates, out of the 12 permitted from each eligible research body, may be male candidates.** See Section 8 and FAQs for further details. Upon submission to SFI all applications will be treated equally regardless of the gender of the applicant. In addition, research bodies are encouraged to prioritise applicants by paying particular attention to the strategic research priorities of the research body and future likely manpower needs in HEIs (e.g., taking into account future retirement patterns, areas of research they wish to develop, etc.), in addition to selecting excellent candidates.

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2.   Objectives of the SIRG Programme

- To support excellent scientific research that has potential economic and societal impact.
- To enable those at an early career stage to establish themselves as independent researchers;
- To provide the support and infrastructure to carry out novel research in areas that underpin SFI's legal remit;
- To gain important experience towards a full-time academic position, including the supervision of the postgraduate student supported by the award;
- To enable the award holder, together with his/her postgraduate student, to carry out their work in Ireland's public research bodies, including Universities and Institutes of Technology;
- To offer funding opportunities that help third-level institutions attract and develop researchers and their careers;
- To allow early-career investigators of all nationalities to enhance their experience in Irish HEIs;
- To allow early-career investigators who have been employed outside of Ireland to return to work in an Irish HEI;
- To build capacity and expertise so as to enable researchers to compete in other funding programmes such as those coordinated by the ERC or through the Horizon 2020 framework.
- To contribute to improving gender balance in the higher education sector.

3.   Definitions of Applicant and Mentor

The **Applicant** will be a researcher with between three and eight years' experience beyond the award of their PhD or equivalent qualification[4] (**that is, those who graduated during the period of September 2007 to December 2012, inclusive, are eligible to apply**), who is currently employed as a Postdoctoral Research Associate (or equivalent) or a Research Fellow under the guidance of a named supervisor, and who has never previously held an independent research position of any kind. The applicant will be responsible for the scientific and technical direction of the research programme, the supervision of the postgraduate student and the submission of reports to SFI. The applicant has primary responsibility for carrying out the research within the funding limits awarded and in accordance with the SFI Terms and Conditions of Research Grants. The Applicant will serve as the primary point of contact for SFI on the award.

The **Mentor** will be an established researcher within the host institution who will give advice and provide laboratory space and related infrastructure to both the Starting Investigator (SI) and the postgraduate student. The mentor will also take the role of co-supervisor for the postgraduate student; however, it is the SI who will act as the primary supervisor. The mentor does not play a supervisory or presiding role to the SI, but acts as an advisor and host. The mentor will work with the SI to ensure that all fiduciary aspects of the award are managed successfully.

4.   Eligibility Criteria of Applicant

The SIRG applicant must:

- Have at least three years, but not more than eight years of research experience beyond the PhD, or equivalent (**also see Section 3**). Allowances will be made for <u>documented</u> leave, including maternity leave, paternity leave, parental leave, military service, sick/disability leave, time spent in industry and carer's leave. See FAQs for further details.
- The applicant must demonstrate a proven record of internationally recognised research accomplishments. The applicant must be senior author (first, last or corresponding) on **at least**

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three primary research articles (that is, not reviews or other secondary research articles) in international peer-reviewed publications.

- The applicant must not hold or have held a significant, independent internationally peer reviewed research award of greater than one-year duration. In addition, this previous award must not have had a total value in excess of €100,000 (or equivalent) direct costs. Personal awards, including student and postdoctoral fellowships, travel awards, and bursaries of greater than one-year duration are permissible, so long as their value was no greater than €100,000 per annum. **One exception to the above rule is that applicants may hold or have held an SFI Industry Fellowship award with a value greater than €100,000**.
- The applicant must not hold a faculty position at the time of application.[5]
- The SI must have an identified mentor, who has agreed to allow the SI and postgraduate student to carry out research within their laboratory space for the duration of the award.
- The Research Body must confirm that the SI applicant meets the above criteria and must also provide assurance that the space and infrastructure to carry out the proposed research are available for the duration of the award.

Where an applicant fails to meet the eligibility criteria outlined above, the application will be deemed ineligible and will not be accepted for review.

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5. Eligibility of Research Body

The Research Body is the body in charge of the financial and administrative coordination of the research programme receiving a research grant from the Foundation. A list of eligible research bodies is available on the SFI website.[6]

6. Funding

SFI Starting Investigator Research Grant awards have a maximum value of **€400,000** direct costs for a period of **four years**. General overheads, currently 30% of "modified" total direct costs, should not be included in the requested budget (see below).

The budget requested should include the SI's salary, to which SFI will contribute over the duration of the award. The maximum contribution to the SI's salary each year must be set at a point on the Experienced Postdoctoral Researcher scale (Level 2B) of the SFI Grants Team Member Budgeting Scale. Applicants are permitted to start at any point within Level 2B (that is, either at Point 1, Point 2, Point 3 or Point 4, but not at an intermediate value between these points), and may move up to a higher point in following years, as desired. Similarly, it is permissible to remain at the same point over consecutive years; reductions in salary contributions over consecutive years are not expected. Note that **at no stage in the lifetime of a SIRG award** may the salary contribution be greater than Point 4 of the Experienced Postdoctoral Researcher scale (Level 2B). Regardless of how the salary contributions are planned, it is important to explain the reasoning for the chosen plan in the budget justification (**see Section 9**). Please see the SFI Grant Application Budget Policy for full details, and note that the SI's salary contribution includes PRSI at 10.75%.

SIRG awards are intended to be the primary source of funding for the award holders and as such the expected time commitment to the research supported through this award should represent the majority of the time of the award holder. SFI understands that SIRG award holders will actively seek further funding for their research. It is expected that award holders will dedicate almost all of their

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[5] *Researchers already holding a faculty position may be eligible to apply to the SFI Career Development Award. Interested parties should visit the SFI website or contact their institution's Research Office for more details.*
[6] *Please note that Research Bodies that have been approved specifically for SFI non-research programmes are not eligible to apply for funding under the SIRG Programme.*

time to the SIRG award in the first year. In cases where further funding has been obtained, SFI's expectation is that the SIRG commitment should never drop below 50%. SFI must be notified of any other awards won by the SI and, where necessary, reserves the right to approve any expected changes to the SI's time commitments. **SFI will also not allow SIRG award holders to apply to any SFI programmes during the first 12 months of the award, unless specifically indicated in the relevant call documentation that it is permissible to do so**. Potential applicants are advised to contact SFI in advance of submission to ensure eligibility.

The remainder of the requested budget should cover the fees and stipend of the postgraduate student (in line with the SFI Grant Application Budget Policy), and costs for materials and consumables, equipment and travel (see Section 9 for more details).

In addition to the direct costs, SFI also makes an indirect or overhead ***contribution*** to the host research body, which is reflected as a percentage of the direct costs (excluding equipment). Overheads are payable as a contribution *to the research body* for the indirect costs of hosting SFI-funded research programmes and are intended to enable the research body to develop internationally competitive research infrastructure and support services.

7. Submission

For the 2015 SIRG Programme, proposals will only be accepted through SESAME, SFI's grants and awards management system. Access to SESAME is controlled by staff at the research office of your host research body. Please follow your internal organisational process to request this access. Once you have been registered by your research office, **you will receive an email** containing the following:

1. Username
2. Password
3. SFI PIN number
4. SESAME website address

Your **username** and **password** are needed to log in to SESAME. This PIN number is also stored in your **contact profile** on SESAME.

SFI's grants and awards management system, SESAME, is accessed using the Internet; no additional software needs to be installed. You can access SESAME online from any location. The configuration of some browsers and internet infrastructure (popup blockers, firewalls, etc.) can restrict an individual's access to the internet and as a result to the SESAME system. If you are having any such difficulties please contact your organisation's internal IT support team.

The SESAME system is accessed using the following Internet address:

https://grants.sfi.ie

Please see the **SESAME Researcher User Guide** for more detailed information (SESAME Researcher User Guide).

SESAME enables:

- Individual researchers to apply online for SFI grants.
- Host research bodies to review and authorise all applications.

Please note that submission of an application to the SIRG programme may affect eligibility to submit to other SFI programmes – please refer to appropriate call documents. Note also that if a SIRG proposal is under active review, proposals cannot be submitted to the SFI PIYRA, TIDA, Investigators, Spokes, Industry Fellowships, Career Development Award (CDA) or similar programmes.

Once submitted to SFI, an application to the SIRG programme cannot be withdrawn and modified for resubmission in the same call.

Applicants currently under active review by SFI as either Principal Investigator (PI) or co-Principal Investigator (co-PI) under certain programmes are not entitled to apply to the SIRG Programme. These programmes include, but are not limited to: SFI Investigators Programme, SFI Research Centres, Spokes, CDA and PIYRA programmes. Please contact SFI in advance of applying to confirm your eligibility for this call where you are currently under review for another SFI programme.

Applicants under review as team members in the TIDA 2015 call are permitted to submit an application to the SIRG 2015 Programme but must withdraw their application upon acceptance of a TIDA award, where successful.

Applicants under review as team members in the Industry Fellowship (IF) 2015 call are permitted to submit an application to the SIRG 2015 Programme but may be required to withdraw their application upon acceptance of an IF award, where successful.

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8.   **Application Procedure**

The research offices of potential host institutions will be expected to instigate a procedure to select candidates for this call. Those wishing to apply to the SIRG 2015 call should first contact their intended host institution, informing the Research Office about their identity and credentials (curriculum vitae), the identity of their chosen mentor, and an outline of their intended research plan.

Eligible research bodies may nominate up to **a maximum of 12 candidates** from whom proposals will be invited. **No more than six of the 12 nominated candidates may be male candidates**. See FAQs for further details.

To provide useful information and assist SFI with its future calls, research offices will be asked to submit a document that lists the names and genders of their approved candidates, provisional titles for their applications, and a description of the selection process that was undertaken in order to select their nominated candidates. Consideration should be given to the suitability of the candidates, research body strategy, and strategic talent management. Any proposals submitted by applicants not featuring in this document **will be deemed ineligible and not reviewed**.

Please note that Research Bodies must provide SFI with their list of approved applicants by 13:00 on the 25th September 2015. The document should be sent by email to sirg@sfi.ie, and may nominate a maximum of 12 candidates. No more than six of the 12 nominated candidates may be male candidates. If more than 12 candidates in total and/or more than six male candidates are named in the document, all applications from that institution will be deemed ineligible.

Following successful selection of candidates by the associated host research body, approved candidates will be required to submit a proposal to SFI. Full details of the information required are provided in the following section. **Proposals must be submitted online through SESAME to SFI by the Research Office of the applicant's research body before the call deadline.**

> **Only applicants that submit a proposal in the format described above, and before the deadline of 26th November 2015 at 13:00, will be eligible.**
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> **Only proposals submitted by applicants approved in advance by their host institution will be eligible for this call. Any other submitted proposals will be returned without review.**

9.   Research Proposal Preparation

Applications for the SIRG programme consist of a proposal submitted online through SESAME to SFI by the Research Office of the applicant's research body. Applicants should carefully follow the instructions below and in the SESAME Researcher User Guide to complete the various sections of the application. A checklist is provided in Appendix A at the end of this document. Please contact your Research Office well in advance in order to obtain registration details for SESAME.

General Guidelines

- **All text in uploaded PDF attachments** must be provided in Times New Roman font, or similar, with minimum font size of 12, and at least single-line spacing as well as a minimum margin size of 2.54cm. Text in diagrams may be in any clearly legible font.
- Uploads in SESAME must be submitted in **Adobe or Microsoft PDF format only**.
- The number of pages in attachments must not exceed the specifications for any given section. **Applications that do not comply with these guidelines will be deemed ineligible and will be returned without review.**
- Appendices or other unsolicited documentation are not permitted. **Applications that include such unsolicited documentation will be returned without review.**
- The currency to be used is the **euro** (€).
- File sizes of attachments should be **less than 5MB**.

> **Applications not adhering to these guidelines or with incomplete content will be deemed ineligible and will not be accepted for review, regardless of the date of submission.**
>
> **It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that eligible proposals are received by SFI on, or before, the deadline indicated. In order to safeguard against ineligibility, applicants are reminded to adhere rigorously to the guidelines presented in the call documentation and to review the proposal document prior to submission in SESAME.**
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> **Applications cannot be withdrawn and modified for resubmission in the same call.**

(a) Proposal Summary

- **Proposal Title**
  The Research Proposal title should clearly convey the nature of the research to be undertaken, in up to 30 words.

- **Duration of Award Requested**
  All SIRG-funded proposals are supported for a period of 48 months.

- **Alignment to SFI Legal Remit (max. 250 words)**

This section must be used to describe how the proposed research aligns to SFI's legal remit, as defined in Section 1. This statement will be used to determine the eligibility of the application.

- **NRP Area**

  Research in proposals to the SIRG programme does not have to align strictly to the 14 NRP areas. Nevertheless, applicants are requested to identify, where possible, the area that best reflects the proposed research. Where a proposal does not align to any of the NRP areas, please select "Other" from the drop-down menu.

- **Research Area -Primary**

  Applicants should select a primary SFI research area from the drop-down menu, which best describes the proposed research.

- **Research Area -Secondary**

  Applicants should select a secondary SFI research area from the drop-down menu, which best describes the proposed research.

(b) Lead Applicant Details

- **Location of Applicant at time of Submission**

  Applicants must enter the country in which they are employed at the time of submission

- **Lead Applicant % Commitment to Project**

  Enter the percentage time commitment that is expected to be required to carry out the proposed research (see Section 6 for SFI's expectations concerning the time commitment to SIRG awards).

- **Applicant CV**

  A CV for the applicant (**maximum of five pages**) should be completed and uploaded as a PDF document. A link to the template is provided at the top of the application form, and is also displayed at the end of this document (see Appendix B). Publications in peer-reviewed journals (including conference proceedings) should be listed, ensuring that the criteria outlined in Section 4 are adhered to. Please indicate with an asterisk those publications where the applicant was the senior author. **A maximum of 20** of the most relevant and important publications should be listed; secondary research articles may be listed **but will not contribute towards fulfilling the eligibility criteria stated in Section 4**.

- **Publication Output**

  Provide summary information on the total numbers of publications to date (see Section 4 for the eligibility criteria relating to publications).

(c) Collaborator Details

- **Addition of Collaborators (Mentor)**

  Information about the mentor must be included in this section. Clicking on the "Add" button will open a form into which details about the mentor should be completed. Ensure that "Mentor" is selected in the 'Collaborator Type' drop-down menu. **Only one mentor may be assigned in the proposal and no other collaborators should be named**. Once details regarding the name and institution of the mentor have been added and saved, which is achieved by clicking on the "Save Draft" button at the bottom of the application form, it will be possible to upload the mentor's CV (**maximum of two pages**) by clicking on the appropriate button. A

template is not provided for mentor CVs. Relevant publications for the mentor should be listed, ensuring that the two-page limit is not exceeded. Any other planned collaborative activities may be briefly described within the main body of the proposal.

(d)   Main Body of Proposal

- **Keywords**
  Keywords/phrases (**maximum of 15**) should be listed from the research discipline or sub discipline that best describe the research proposed in the application.

- **Scientific Abstract**
  This should be a succinct (**maximum of 200 words**) and accurate summary of the proposed work when separated from the application.

- **Lay Abstract**
  This should be a succinct (**maximum of 100 words**) and accurate summary in lay, non-technical language of the proposed work when separated from the application.

- **Programme Documents Upload (Research Programme and Impact Statement)**

  Please note the total number of pages in the Programme Documents Upload must not exceed 11 pages (Research Programme – eight pages, References – one page, Impact Statement – two pages).

  In no more than eight pages (**with one further page allowed for references**), and uploaded as a PDF document, the applicant should describe their research plan and provide sufficient detail for peer reviewers to comment on the quality of the proposed ideas. Include the background for context, objectives and methodology. The background section should include and provide references to the state of the art in this research field, which should then be listed after the research summary. The proposed research programme should be novel, cutting edge, competitive, and strategically important. The objectives should be coherent, well-planned and should be linked with real deliverables. The application **must** include appropriate timelines, milestones, and expected outputs for the proposed research (e.g., a Gantt chart). Importantly, the applicant **must** clearly outline a plan for the progress of the postgraduate student that will be involved in this proposal; applicants not including such a plan will render themselves **significantly less competitive**.

  Within the same PDF document, and following the references page, an impact statement (**maximum of two pages**) must be provided. The statement must articulate the planned and potential impact of the proposed research and **will be assessed as part of the review process**. SFI recognises that impacts can take time to develop from research and in many cases are unforeseen or occur serendipitously, particularly for those still at an early stage in their careers. However, in line with the Irish Government's wish to demonstrate the economic, social and cultural benefits of its publicly funded scientific research, it is essential that applicants to the SIRG programme can provide a vision of how their research can potentially be developed to the benefit of the wider society as well as to the scientific community.

  Impact can be described as the demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to economy and society. Impact embraces the diverse ways in which research-related knowledge and skills benefit individuals, organisations and nations by:

  - Powering an innovative and enterprising economy

- Creating high value jobs
- Attracting, developing and nurturing businesses, scientists and talented people
- Increasing the effectiveness of public services and policy
- Enhancing quality of life, health and creative output
- Developing the country's international reputation
- Educating and training the population
- Solving major national and global problems and challenges, such as food security and world hunger, climate change, energy security, ageing population, rural sustainability, and other sustainability challenges

The statement should consider some or all of the above potential impacts to give confidence to reviewers that clear thought and realistic ambition have been employed to assess the likely or potential longer-term benefits of SIRG-funded research, including and going beyond the training aspects for both the SI and the associated PhD student.

(e) Budget

The costs eligible for grant support by SFI under the SIRG Programme are those costs that can, uniquely and unambiguously, be identified with the proposed research programme. Applicants must give details of all relevant costs, including staff, equipment, materials and consumables and travel. Ensure that the final total provided includes all costs. All awards are made directly to the applicant's research body. Please also refer to the SFI Terms and Conditions of Research Grants and also the Grant Application Budget Policy.

See notes for completion of the budget table in the SESAME Researcher User Guide**. A link is also provided with information to assist with completion.**

SIRG awards are funded to a maximum value of **€400,000** direct costs for a period of four years. General overheads, currently 30% of "modified" total direct costs, should not be included in the requested budget (see below).

- **Staff**
  It is important to note that SFI-funded researchers are employees of the research body. SFI makes a contribution to the overall staff budget for the programme. Please refer to Section 6 and the salary scales provided as part of the Grant Application Budget Policy with regard to the funding of SI salary (noting that the 'Cost to Grant' figures in these scales include the 20% employer's pension) and postgraduate fees and stipends.

- **Equipment**
  As SIRG applicants will have an identified mentor, who will provide laboratory space and necessary equipment to both the SI and the postgraduate student, it is not expected that applicants will require significant items of equipment in their budget request. Therefore, requests for equipment in SIRG proposals should be very carefully considered, and full justification should be provided. Small equipment of a value of **less than €2,000** should be included in the materials and consumables section. The exception to this is costs associated with computers/laptops, which must be listed in the equipment section regardless of cost.

- **Materials and Consumables**
  An outline of all materials and consumables that will be used in the course of the research programme should be provided.

Access charges may be sought for use of infrastructure where SFI pre-approved access charge plans are in place. Note that these may include, with SFI approval, access to facilities and services not available to the applicant, such as the costs associated with accessing international databases or commissioning specific experiments in national facilities (e.g., Tyndall NAP, CRANN etc.).

Access charge requests must be included as a separate line item in the budget and where relevant must include the grant code and name of the relevant infrastructure to be used. A rationale for the amount of use proposed must be provided in the budget justification.

- **Travel**
  Only travel costs for journeys directly related to the progress of the research programme may be requested as a direct cost on the research grant. The applicant should outline the details of travel expenses directly related to, for example, conferences, scientific collaboration on the research programme, or learning special research techniques. Where possible, please supply the conference name and location. In the case of working visits, the rates sought for subsistence and other allowances may be no more than those which the research body's permanent staff may claim. Relocation costs of up to €2,000 for SIs relocating from outside of Ireland can be requested.

(f)   Budget Justification

The applicant must upload a Budget Justification as a PDF document. This is achieved by clicking on the "Upload" button in the application form and adding the appropriate file. Justification for requested salary, stipend, fees, equipment, consumables and travel should be provided in **no more than two pages**. Only eligible research bodies will be entitled to receive direct funding through the award and all funding will be administered through the applicant's research body. If funding is sought for overseas services, this should be clearly justified and the rationale for not carrying out this activity in Ireland must be explained. As noted in Section 6, the SI's salary contribution over the lifetime of the proposed award should be well justified.

(g)   Letters of Support

SIRG applications require two letters of support, which should be uploaded as PDF documents at the appropriate point on the application form. First, a letter of support from the mentor (**maximum of one page**) outlining the support offered to the applicant, commitment to the co-supervision of the postgraduate student, and the availability of laboratory space and infrastructure available to the applicant and student is required. The letter should include a statement outlining the applicant's potential as an independent SI and their ability to lead a research programme.

A letter from the research body named by the applicant as the host institution for the SIRG award must also be provided (**maximum of two pages**). The letter should comment on the support, infrastructure and services available to the applicant and postgraduate student. For example, details of the office, laboratory, computing, animal, or other facilities where the research will be carried out should be included as necessary. In addition, details of all of the equipment that will be available to the SI and postgraduate student should be provided, excluding any equipment requested in this application. The letter should also outline the research body's commitment to the career development of the SI (e.g., teaching, professional development, training, etc.). Research bodies are reminded that the primary focus of the SI must be on the research itself and are expected to ensure that the SI is not unduly burdened with teaching and other non-research commitments. Details including expected teaching hours **must** be included in the letter of support.

The Letters of Support may be uploaded as single or multiple files, using the appropriate buttons in the application form.

(h)   Declaration

It should be noted that submission of an application represents agreement from the applicant to the [SFI Terms and Conditions of Research Grants](). The applicant must tick the box to confirm that such an agreement is in place.

(i)   Submission to Research Office

Once all sections of the application form have been completed, applicants must submit their proposal to their Research Office by clicking on the "Submit for RO Review" button. Following submission, it will not be possible to edit the proposal while its status is given as "*Full Proposal - Pending RO Approval*". The Research Office may require applicants to make revisions to their proposals before they submit the application to SFI; a notification will be sent to applicants where such revisions are mandated, and the status of the proposal in SESAME will revert to "*Full Proposal – In Preparation*", thus allowing the required revisions to be made.

It is the responsibility of applicants to ensure that their Research Office has successfully submitted their proposal to SFI before the stated deadline of 13:00 on the 26ᵗʰ November 2015. It is not possible to submit applications through SESAME once this deadline has elapsed.

Applicants will receive a notification from SESAME periodically when the status of their proposal changes. Alternatively, if you wish to track the status of your proposal (e.g., when the proposal is pending Research Office approval or under review at SFI), this information will be displayed in SESAME.

10.   Research Body Approval

It should be noted that submission of an application represents an agreement to SFI Terms and Conditions of Research Grants. Submission must only be made by an authorised Research Body representative. In particular, the Research Body is approving:

- The eligibility of the applicant.
- That the requested budget including salaries/stipends, equipment, consumables and travel is in line with accepted institutional guidelines.
- The availability of infrastructure within the institution as outlined by the applicant in the research proposal.
- That the proposed research programme has not been funded by other sources.
- That relevant ethical approval has been or will be sought and must be granted prior to the award commencing.
- That the relevant licences will be in place at the time of award.
- That the details provided in relation to research funding history (i.e., current, pending or expired grants, as detailed in the application) are valid and accurate

For SIRG applications, the Research Body is also approving:

- The suitability and willingness of the mentor to host the applicant.
- That the research body is responsible for supporting the applicant and postgraduate student, if successful in the application.

11. Deadlines

Applicants selected by their intended host institution must ensure that their proposal is submitted to SFI no later than the **26th November, 2015** at **13:00** by their Research Office. **Applications cannot be submitted through SESAME after this deadline**.

12. Proposal Review Process and Evaluation Criteria

The submission of an application to SFI shall be construed as consent by the applicant to participate in the peer-review process.

All eligible proposals will undergo full, technical peer review. The proposals will be assessed on the basis of six key evaluation criteria, weighted as described below:

- **Quality, significance, and relevance of the research record of the applicant (weight 25%)**
  Impact and citation level of prior publication; success in obtaining previous eligible funding; success with patent applications; visibility at and involvement in international conferences; relevant industrial experience; etc.
- **Quality, significance, novelty, and strategic relevance of the research plan (weight 25%)**
  Novelty, importance, timeliness of the intended research; relevance to other SFI-funded projects; compatibility with SFI remit and strategy; communication and description of the research; comprehension of the current state of the art; etc.
- **Quality of the proposed programme for the postgraduate student (weight 15%)**
  Clearly delineated roles of the SI and the postgraduate student; suitability and achievability of the programme based on the experience of the student; appropriate use of the available budget, etc.
- **Potential impact and value to Ireland (weight 15%)**
  Appreciation of how research may be developed and exploited in the medium-to-long term; realistic and convincing evaluation of the benefits that will result from a successful project; areas and fields where impacts are likely to be made; etc.
- **Suitability of the mentor and their commitment to the programme (weight 10%)**
  Clear rationale for the SI and mentor working together; coherent plan between SI and mentor; confidence from the cover letter that the SI will have significant independence and that it will be respected by the mentor, etc.
- **Quality of institutional support and infrastructure provided (weight 10%)**
  Necessary space and equipment in place to carry out the programme of research; assurance from the cover letter that the team will be looked after appropriately, etc.

SFI reserves the right to modify the review process. Applicants will be notified of any relevant modification to the review procedure.

13. Research Integrity

SFI places high importance on ensuring research integrity and endorses the National Policy Statement on Ensuring Research Integrity in Ireland. All applicants and institutions are expected to abide by the aforementioned Irish Policy on Research Integrity and the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity. SFI plans to audit compliance by its award holders and relevant research bodies with the principles laid down in these guidelines that are relevant to the agency's activities and the awards it makes.

14. Ethical Issues

Research supported by SFI must respect fundamental ethical principles. Furthermore, in line with a current directive from its parent government department, research funded by SFI must not comprise any component of the following:

- Research intended to create human embryos solely for the purpose of research or for the purpose of stem cell procurement, including by means of somatic cell nuclear transfer;
- Research using human embryonic stem cells or tissues.

Applicants must ensure that the proposed research respects all national rules and procedures. It is the responsibility of the applicant to identify if their proposed research requires ethical approval. Where ethical approval is required, applicants must inform SFI (sirg@sfi.ie) and may be requested to provide further detail. Ethical approval must be obtained from the relevant national or local ethics committee prior to the start of the project.

15. Non-compliance

Proposals not in compliance with any details specified in this document or in the SFI Terms and Conditions of Research Grants or any other relevant SFI policies will not be eligible for a grant and will be **returned without review**.

16. Confidentiality

Science Foundation Ireland takes all reasonable steps to ensure that information provided in the application is treated as confidential subject to submission to the members of its committees and merit review and to any obligations under law.

17. Conflict of Interest

Conflict-of-interest rules are applied rigorously and apply to both reviewers and applicants.

Reviewers engaged by SFI are required to adhere to SFI's conflict-of-interest policy and immediately declare to SFI where a conflict of interest exists or arises so that an alternative reviewer may be appointed. International peer reviewers will not provide comments or scores on any application on which they have a conflict of interest.

Reviewers must adhere to high standards of integrity during the peer-review process. They must not compromise the intellectual property integrity of the application and may not appropriate and use as their own, or disclose to any third party, ideas, concepts or data contained in the applications they review.

SFI recognises that applicants may have a prior relationship with an industry collaborator engaged in an application for funding to SFI (e.g., industry consultancy role, founder of an academic spin-out company), which may be perceived as a conflict of interest. Where a potential conflict of interest exists, SFI requires that it is disclosed by the applicant to the Foundation and Research Body and is managed by the Research Body in accordance with the principles and mandates laid out in the National Intellectual Property Guidelines.

18. Award Management

18.1 Reporting Requirements

The progress reporting requirements for all awards made under the SIRG 2015 call must be adhered to, that is, those awardees that fail to comply will risk having their grant payments suspended and/or the processing of any applications under review in other SFI Programme funding calls paused, until their reporting status is rectified. Reporting is inclusive of annual reporting, completion of the annual stocktake of SFI Research Outputs (formerly referred to as the SFI Census) and the completion of a Researcher Snapshot.

The SFI Grants and Awards Management System, SESAME, is the primary conduit for annual reporting. SIRG 2015 awardees will be requested to submit their annual report by 31st January every year to reflect the activity of the previous calendar year (January –December). The annual report template, which is available on SESAME, must be used. An additional final report, prepared with a template that is also available on SESAME, must be submitted within three months of the expiration date of the award. In addition to the annual report, awardees are also obliged to keep their SESAME Researcher Profile updated since the annual stocktake of SFI Research Outputs is drawn directly from the data entered into the Researcher Profile; this must also be updated and completed by 31st January every year. SFI reporting procedures are detailed here, and webinars describing the entry of data into the Researcher Profile are available on the SFI website.

The annual report is used to monitor progress of the individual awards against the overall objectives of the SIRG Programme and associated Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), as set out in SFI's Strategic Plan, Agenda 2020. Each of the SIRG Programme 2015 call objectives, with expected outputs, is discussed in turn below:

- *To support excellent scientific research that has potential economic and societal impact*

Success against this objective will be determined from productivity in a number of areas. In their annual reports, awardees are asked to report on scientific progress and strategic impact. Awardees are asked to outline their key research highlights and to report on all refereed journal and conference publications directly supported by their SIRG Programme grant. This support must be acknowledged in all publications as "This work was supported by a research grant from Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) under its Starter Investigator Research Grant (SIRG) Programme 2015, grant number 15/SIRG/####". If the research is also funded by other bodies, for example as a result of future successful grant applications to Horizon 2020, publications must acknowledge "This work was supported in part by a research grant from Science Foundation Ireland (SFI) under its Starter Investigator Research Grant (SIRG) Programme 2015, grant number 15/SIRG/####".

Awards made under the SIRG 2015 call will reference to both scientific excellence and impact. In the Strategic Impact section of the annual report, awardees are provided with a list of 10 impact statements or declarations and are asked to prioritise those that are relevant to the outputs on their award. Narrative must then be provide with additional details justifying the options chosen, with cross reference to relevant metrics included in the Researcher Profile. This data will help towards quantifying the types of impacts arising from the awards SFI has made under the SIRG 2015 call.

- *To enable those at an early career stage to establish themselves as independent researchers*

A key purpose of the SIRG Programme is to support and enable excellent early-career-stage researchers to establish themselves as independent investigators. SFI's expectation is that the SIRG Programme will provide the support necessary for these researchers to develop their research to a

level where they can compete successfully for an academic position and ultimately obtain additional funding from both exchequer and non-exchequer sources. Additional funding secured during the reporting period will be captured directly in their annual reports.

It is expected that the SIRG award holder will be the primary mentor for the PhD student supported by the award, thus enabling the development of necessary supervisory skills. SFI expects that the PhD student supported by the SIRG award will contribute to the outputs on the award and their subsequent impact. In the annual report, awardees will be asked to report on the training and development of the student. The first destination of team members will also be tracked, providing further information of the career track of mentored individuals.

- *To maintain Ireland's top 20 position in international bibliometric rankings through an increase in the number and quality of journal publications*

It is expected that, given their calibre, SIRG awardees will make significant contributions to the target of maintaining Ireland's position in international bibliometric rankings of repute; in the past SIRG research activity has given rise to high-quality, high-impact publications.

- *To increase the average research income secured by Ireland-based PIs from international funding entities such as the EU and in doing so reduce the number of researchers that rely on SFI for the majority of their funding*

A key purpose of the SIRG Programme is to build capacity and expertise so as to enable researchers to compete in funding programmes such as the ERC and Horizon 2020. SFI's expectation is that the SIRG Programme will provide the support necessary for early-career-stage researchers to develop their research to a level where they can compete successfully for international funding. In line with the objectives of SFI's Agenda 2020, SFI strongly encourages that its funding be leveraged to achieve funding from other funding sources. Similarly SFI expects that Ireland-based researchers will obtain research funding from as wide a range of sources as possible. In the annual report, awardees are asked to report on the funding opportunities that they have both pursued and won.

SFI will evaluate the contribution of the SIRG Programme to a number of relevant key performance indicators (KPIs), as set out in SFI's Agenda 2020. Many of these KPIs overlap with the overarching objectives of the SIRG Programme (as outlined above).

For example, SFI funding has produced high-quality, high-impact publications, which have resulted in Ireland rising into the top 20 of international bibliometric ranking lists of repute. SFI's Agenda 2020 sets a target for Ireland to remain in these top rankings. It is expected that the excellence of the SIRG researcher will be evinced by the delivery of publications in top tier journals, thereby contributing to this target.

- *Ireland's place in international bibliometric rankings of repute should remain inside top 20 over period to 2020*

A key purpose of the SIRG Programme is to support and enable excellent early-career-stage researchers to establish themselves as independent investigators. Hence, it is expected that recipients of these awards will contribute towards the following KPI:

- *A 50% increase in the level of early-career-stage researcher support by 2015, sustained thereafter to 2020*

Other Agenda 2020 KPIs that are relevant to the SIRG programme are listed below:

- *The number of European Research Council grants secured by SFI researchers will exceed Ireland's* juste retour *level of 1.06% by 2016*

- *The research income secured by SFI researchers from international funding entities such as the EU will double the average figure secured between 2008-2011, to €120m by 2020*

- *Increased representation of women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) in Ireland – 25% of SFI award holders by 2020.*

19. Progress Site Reviews

Each recipient of an SFI SIRG Award will be subject to progress review assessment in the form of a site review performed by international peer reviewers during the period of the award. The commitment of the research body as outlined in the letter of support, in particular the teaching and non-research commitments of the SI will be assessed. The outcome of such a review will be taken into consideration in the assessment of future applications to the Foundation. As stated in the SFI Terms and Conditions of Research Grants, the Foundation reserves the right to terminate an award if, in the opinion of the Foundation, progress is not deemed to be satisfactory.

20. Intellectual Property Management

IP management practices will be in accordance with national guidelines. In particular, IP processes arising out of the Investigator Programme must comply with the practices and procedures described in the national IP protocol document [Putting Public Research to Work for Ireland](). Refer to the SFI IP management guidelines [webpage]() for further details.

21. Further information

FAQs are available from the SIRG 2015 webpage.

For all additional queries please contact [sirg@sfi.ie]().

Appendix A: SIRG Programme Proposal Checklist

SECTION	DESCRIPTION	REQUIREMENTS
Proposal Summary	Proposal Title	**Up to 30 words**
	Duration of Award Requested	**48 months**
	NRP Area	**Select one option**
	Research Area (Primary and Secondary)	**Select one for each**
	Justification for SFI Legal Remit	**Max. 250 words**
Lead Applicant Details	Location of Applicant at time of submission	**Select country of residence**
	Lead Applicant Commitment to Project	**Enter percentage figure**
	Lead Applicant CV – use template provided	**Max. 5 pages**
	Publication Output	**Enter figure for each type**
Mentor (Collaborator) Details	Name/Contact Details etc for Mentor	**Enter details**
	CV for Mentor – no template	**Max. 2 pages**
Main Body of Full Proposal	Keywords	**Max. 15**
	Scientific Abstract	**Max. 200 words**
	Lay Abstract	**Max. 100 words**
	Research Programme	**Max. 8 pages**
	References	**Max. 1 page**
	Impact Statement	**Max. 2 pages**
Proposed Budget	Details of all Relevant Costs	**Budget Table**
Budget Justification	Budget Justification	**Max. 2 pages**
Letters of Support	Mentor Letter of Support	**Max. 1 page**
	Host Research Body Letter of Support	**Max. 2 pages**
Declaration	Agreement to SFI Terms and Conditions	**Tick box to agree**

Appendix B: Applicant CV Template

To be used for applications to the SFI SIRG Programme 2015 call

<u>*5 PAGES MAX:*</u>
Section 1 (max. 2 pages) + Section 2 (max. 3 pages)

SECTION 1 – Required Details (up to 2 pages maximum)

NAME AND CONTACT DETAILS

FULL TIME ☐   **PART TIME** ☐
If you wish to carry out this award part time please provide further details

CAREER PROFILE (Education and Employment)

FUNDING HISTORY
*Please detail any previous awards, bursaries, fellowships or other funding that was obtained by you or on your behalf by your supervisor. Please give the name of the award, the awarding body, the award type (e.g., fellowship, bursary), the dates that the award was active (or the start date if the award is still active), the duration and the size of the award. If it is an award shared between a team, provide the full award value **and** the amount assigned to you*

INNOVATION/COMMERCIALISATION ACTIVITY (e.g., relevant industry collaborations, invention disclosures, patents, spin-outs)

Please distinguish between patents applied and under review versus patents granted

OTHER INFORMATION AS APPROPRIATE

Please include details of key achievements including measures of esteem, invited presentations, principal scientific activities and responsibilities, as well as a statement demonstrating the applicant's accomplishments to date

SECTION 2 – Publication Listing (up to 3 pages maximum)

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS (a maximum of 20 relevant and important publications)

Please **highlight below with an asterisk** each of your <u>senior author publications</u> (as per the eligibility criteria stated in Section 4 of the SIRG Call Document).

Secondary research publications (e.g., Reviews, Highlights and Essays) that do not focus, in the main, on the applicant's own research results may be listed **but will not contribute towards fulfilling the eligibility criteria stated in the SIRG Call Document**.

Please underline the name of the applicant on each publication listed.

Viewing the PDF of your application prior to submission allows you to verify content.

There is no system validation on multiple upload file fields as the number of documents required may vary for each application.

It is the responsibility of the lead applicant to ensure that all documentation is included and that page lengths are not exceeded.