

SCIENCE FOUNDATION IRELAND

SFI Spokes Programme 2022



Frequently Asked Questions

Queries should be directed to: spokes@sfi.ie

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	APPLICANTS AND COLLABORATORS	3
2	SUBMISSION AND REVIEW	3
3	ELIGIBILITY	6
4	FUNDING.....	8
5	PARTNER ENGAGEMENT	9
6	IMPACT	12
7	INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY.....	13
8	ACCESS CHARGES.....	13
9	EDUCATION AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT (EPE).....	14

1 APPLICANTS AND COLLABORATORS

1.1 Can researchers in Research Bodies outside Ireland (Republic of) be Spoke Leaders and can they receive funding from the award?

Researchers in Research Bodies outside Ireland cannot be Spoke Leaders / Co-Applicants but can be official collaborators. However, only researchers in eligible Research Bodies within the Republic of Ireland can receive funding from an SFI Spokes Programme award.

1.2 Is it possible for collaborators on an SFI Spokes Programme award to receive funding from the award?

A collaborator working within an eligible Research Body within the Republic of Ireland may receive funding from the award. A collaborator outside Ireland cannot receive funding from the award. Their contribution to the research programme must be clearly delineated within the research programme section and within the collaborator's letter of support. The financial support a collaborator is to receive must also be fully justified in the budget justification section. Financial responsibility for the grant (including any audit) remains the responsibility of the Lead Applicant.

1.3 Can a Spoke Leader become a Lead Co-Investigator in the Research Centre?

Yes, should the Centre Director wish to do so and the Spokes application is deemed fundable, they may nominate the Spokes leader as a Centre Lead Co-Investigator. This request must be submitted by the Award Administrator via SESAME for approval by SFI.

1.4 Can a funded investigator from the Research Centre be a part of a Spoke application?

Yes, researchers who are currently approved as a Funded Investigator with a Research Centre can be listed on a Spoke application but must be assigned as a co-applicant or official collaborator. The funded investigators role applies only to Research Centre awards and does not exist on Spoke awards.

2 SUBMISSION AND REVIEW

2.1 Should applications for the SFI Spokes Programme be submitted through SESAME?

Yes, all Expression of Interests (EoIs) and Full Proposals must be submitted via SESAME, SFI's online grants and awards management system. Applicants to the Spokes Call must request an invitation to submit an Expression of Interest by emailing spokes@sfi.ie. Both EoI and Full proposal applications must be submitted via SESAME by the Centre Director of the Lead Research Centre involved in the Spoke. Where multiple Research Centres are involved, a lead Research Centre must be nominated.

2.2 Should the CVs of collaborators and team members (e.g. Postdoctoral Researchers) be submitted?

Please do not submit the CVs of collaborators or research team members. SFI will fund a contribution to the salary of a postdoctoral researcher according to the SFI Team Member Budgeting Scale, Levels 2A (new postdoctoral researcher) and 2B (experienced postdoctoral researcher) (see SFI's [Grant Application Budget Policy](#)). The point on the scale should be determined by qualifications and experience, and the rationale for appointing an individual at that point should be explained in the budget justification section. SFI would expect to see individuals directly post-PhD be appointed at point 1 of the 2A scale.

2.3 Do I need to submit an Expression of Interest (Eoi) prior to my full application?

Applicants to the Spokes Call must submit an Expression of Interest (Eoi) application prior to submission of a full application. Applicants who submit Eois that are reviewed positively by SFI will be invited to submit a full application which will be evaluated by international peer review. Applicants who wish to submit Expression of Interest must email spokes@sfi.ie to access the Eoi application on form on SESAME.

2.4 What are the timelines involved for the Eoi process?

Eoi applications will receive a response from SFI within 6 weeks from submission. If invited to full proposal, submission is required within 3 months.

2.5 I am requesting funding for 40 months, but the options in the drop-down menu do not allow me to do this. How should I proceed?

The options for duration are in units of 12 months (12, 24, 36 months etc). If requesting funding for a period of time which is not specified in the drop-down menu, please select the option which is closest to and is greater than the number of months for which you are seeking funding e.g., for a 40-month duration, please select 48 months. This will ensure that the budget template displays the appropriate duration. Please indicate the exact proposed award duration within the body of the proposal.

2.6 Will SESAME alert me if the required documents have not been uploaded or if fields have not been completed, as part of my submission?

To check that required fields have been completed prior to submission, click "Validate". Validation will also automatically occur when "Submit" is selected. It is important however to note that there is no system validation on multiple upload file fields, including programme documents, collaborator CVs and letters of support. The number of documents required may vary depending on each application. You should view the PDF of your application prior to submission to allow you to verify the content, and to print or to save your application. It is the responsibility of the Lead Applicant to ensure that all documentation is included and that page lengths are not exceeded.

2.7 Can you list the most common issues researchers have when submitting proposals using SESAME?

Issues with PDF generation (created with open-source software, page count issue etc.):



SFI Spokes Programme

Please ensure to use unencrypted, non-password protected PDFs with the copying function disabled, developed using either Adobe or Microsoft word PDF convertor software ONLY.

Issues with PDF document titles:

Do not use commas or special characters in the title of your uploaded PDF document.

Password issues/resets:

If you forget your password, click on the 'Forgot password?' link on the SESAME homepage.

Pop Ups enabled in browser:

Please ensure that pop ups are enabled in your browser configuration.

Single/multiple upload field:

If you wish to use the multiple upload field, please ensure that you have the java plugin installed. If you click the "multiple files" button and it does not work, you will see a link to the java website where you can download the latest plugin.

Browser "Back" button:

Please do not use the browser "back" button when navigating SESAME.

Documentation uploads:

Please ensure all documents are uploaded into the correct fields in the application.

Funding support from profile:

Creating new funding support details while working on the application will add those details to both the application and to the profile. If you are not adding these new funding support details directly to your application, but are instead adding them directly to your profile, please ensure that you later also attribute the relevant details to the application. Please refer to the SESAME researcher user guide¹ for further information.

Co-Applicant access issues:

It is only possible for one person to work on the proposal at any one time. To allow a Co-Applicant to access the proposal, please save the proposal and close the browser window. Your Co-Applicant will then be able to access the proposal.

¹ <https://www.sfi.ie/funding/award-management-system/>

2.8 I will be an industry collaborator on a Spokes application and would like to know how we could get setup on SESAME.

Industry collaborators do not need SESAME access; they will be added to the application by the Lead Applicant.

3 ELIGIBILITY

3.1 How does SFI define a senior author?

A senior author is one who is listed as first or joint first author, reflecting the fact that he/she has provided the greatest intellectual contribution, has held the primary responsibility for collecting and analysing data, and for the writing of the manuscript and associated drafts. The last author will also be considered as a senior author, since this position generally reflects his/her overall responsibility for the study and suggests that a level of mentorship has been provided.

It will be noted that different publishers have differing rules on how the senior authorship is indicated (e.g., by using asterisks, underlining, placing the name first or last in the list of authors, etc.); of overriding importance however is that the applicant should be able to convince and reassure reviewers that they are the key author on these publications. Joint-first authorship may only be claimed where the article clearly states that two (or more) authors have provided equal and significant contributions to the work described.

Please note that senior authorship does NOT necessarily mean that they were responsible financially for the research that was reported.

3.2 What qualifies as an independent research grant, as defined by the call documentation?

Spokes Leaders *must* have demonstrated research independence through securing at least one independent research grant as lead investigator or as co-investigator. The grant *must* have been competitively awarded and internationally peer reviewed. Eligible research grants *must* support at least one full-time equivalent, excluding the investigator(s), and include research team costs (e.g., materials and consumables). At least one full-time equivalent funded by an eligible research grant *must* be under the supervision (or co-supervision) of the investigator. Eligible research grants exclude smaller awards such as travel grants, equipment grants, postgraduate fellowships, postdoctoral fellowships, and awards of short duration (12 months or less). Laboratory fit out / set up funding, awards from the investigator's institution, and awards that have not been subject to external international peer review are also excluded.

3.3 Can a Spoke Leader be a new academic partner?

Yes, Spoke Leaders can be either a current investigator in the Research Centre or a new academic partner. All nominated Spoke Leaders must meet the minimum eligibility criteria detailed in the call document.

3.4 Can someone be nominated Spoke Leader on more than one application?

Yes, however, it is important to bear in mind that the evaluation process will examine the commitment and workload of individuals in determining the suitability of such an arrangement.

3.5 The eligibility criteria states “10 international peer reviewed articles” - does this include books, editorship, special issue editing, standards, patents?

Eligible publications must be original, internationally peer reviewed research publications. Review articles, patents, standards, editorship, special issue editing and books are not acceptable.

3.6 Can there be more than one industry partner involved in a targeted project? Are industry partners required to contribute the same level of cost share?

Yes, there can be more than one industry partner per targeted project. Applicants and industry partners have flexibility to manage the cost share commitments of individual industry partners. The total overall minimum industry cost share for the Spoke project, as described in the call document, must be achieved.

3.7 Why is the CV of the Centre Director required when the CV may not be relevant to the research programme in the application?

If successful, the Spoke will be fully integrated into the associated Research Centre in terms of reporting etc. As such, it will ultimately be the responsibility of the Centre Director to oversee the research and to ensure that objectives are reached. The Spoke Leader(s) will lead and direct the specific research programme associated with the Spoke.

3.8 Can a Centre Director serve as a Spoke Leader in a Spoke application?

A Centre Director can serve as a Spoke Leader subject to demonstrating their ability to commit to the award. The current workload and commitment of the Centre Director will be evaluated as part of the review process in determining the suitability of such an arrangement. Please note that in such cases, the investigator should be listed as both a Centre Director (i.e., Lead Applicant) and a Spoke Leader (i.e., Co-Applicant) in the application. SESAME prevents an investigator from designating themselves as both a Lead Applicant and a Co-Applicant. However, it is possible for another Spoke Leader involved in the same application to log in to SESAME and add the Centre Director as a Spoke Leader under the Co-Applicant section. The Centre Director should upload a 5-page CV (using the SFI template) under the Co-Applicant section and upload a blank 2-page PDF for the CV required for the Lead Applicant. Please contact spokes@sfi.ie for assistance if required.

4 FUNDING

4.1 Are there minimum or maximum award sizes for Spokes projects?

There is no minimum or maximum project size. Whilst there is no minimum project size, it is expected that all proposals submitted to the Spokes programme will involve the addition of strategically important projects/partners, and will represent projects of scale which will result in a significant value add to the Research Centre. The maximum project size should be determined by the objectives of the proposed research programme.

4.2 Is funding available for central operations support within the Spokes programme?

The budget submitted should primarily be aligned with the research programme proposed in the Spoke project. Applicants are, however, afforded the flexibility to direct a portion of this budget towards the platform research and/or operations within the Research Centre Hub if it is considered to contribute to the overall success of the Spoke. Any allocation of SFI direct costs or industry cost-share funding to the Hub must be described and justified by the Lead Applicant.

4.3 At the application stage, it is not always possible to know if you will utilise/recruit someone existing in the public sector system or a new person. How is one to know which scale to utilise?

SFI recognises that the identity of team members may not be known at the time of grant preparation. In such cases grant applicants should request budget contributions for team members using the 'Existing Public Servant' scale. If a team role is ultimately filled by a 'new entrant', SFI will decide whether funds liberated by such an occurrence shall be returned to SFI or can be used productively elsewhere within the grant. Further details about SFI's Grant Budget Policy can be found [here](#).

4.4 Are externally-funded projects, such as those funded through Horizon 2020, Wellcome Trust, ERC, etc. considered as "Spokes"?

No, Spokes are collaborative projects which receive direct co-funding from SFI and to which the co-funding partner(s) are expected to make an intellectual and financial contribution. SFI does, however, expect that Research Centres will leverage funding from non-Exchequer sources, with a particular emphasis on Horizon 2020 funding.

4.5 Does the SFI contribution cover the overhead on the industry contribution?

No, SFI will not pay overhead on the industry contribution. Overheads will be paid on SFI contribution only.

4.6 Can you confirm that the contributions should be calculated as a percentage of total direct costs and not the total budget inclusive of overhead?

Yes, industry contributions are calculated as a percentage of total direct costs i.e. not inclusive of overheads.

4.7 How are overheads associated with the award distributed?

Overheads will be paid directly to the lead Research Body hosting the Spokes. It is up to the Research Body to distribute the overheads according to their internal policies.

4.8 Will the industry funding leveraged through a Spoke award be countable against the Centre cost share targets?

For Spokes awarded to a Phase 1 Centre, Phase 1 Cost Share targets will be increased on a pro-rata basis and industry funding received during Phase 1 will be countable towards the Phase 1 Cost Centre share targets. If part of the Spoke award extends beyond the end date of the Phase 1 Research Centre award, industry funding received during Phase 2 will not be countable towards Phase 2 Centre Cost Share.

For a Standard Spoke awarded to a Phase 2 Centre, industry cash leveraged against the Spoke award is not countable towards Phase 2 Centre Cost Share. However, all industry in-kind realised and any industry cash leveraged in excess of the Spoke target will be countable towards Phase 2 Centre Cost Share.

For a Hybrid Spoke awarded to Phase 2 Centre, industry cash received leveraged against existing RC budget is countable towards Phase 2 Centre cash cost share. Furthermore, all industry in-kind realised and any industry cash leveraged in excess of the Spoke target will be countable towards Phase 2 Centre Cost Share.

For detailed guidance on how Spokes awards more information, please see the [Phase 2 Cost Share Reporting Guidance \(Sept 2022\)](#)

5 PARTNER ENGAGEMENT

5.1 What is the minimum number of co-funding partners required for Spokes application?

Each Spoke application must involve at least one co-funding partner. This may be a new or an existing co-funding partner.

5.2 Can government bodies, departments and agencies engage in SFI Spokes submissions?

Yes, where appropriate, and their participation will be considered to satisfy the eligibility criterion of co-funding partner engagement. Where exchequer sources of funding are contributing to the cost-share for the Spoke application, total exchequer funding must not exceed 50% including the SFI contribution, except in cases where the co-funding partner is involved in the research programme. Representatives from government bodies, departments and agencies should be named as collaborators and will not be eligible to receive SFI funding. Applicants must inform SFI of the expected cost-share breakdown for the Spoke application in advance of EoI submission. For specific queries please email spokes@sfi.ie.

5.3 Can semi-state organisations engage in SFI Spokes submissions?

Yes, where appropriate, and their participation will be considered to satisfy the eligibility criterion of industry engagement. Representatives from semi-state bodies should be named as collaborators and will not be eligible to receive SFI funding. For specific queries please email spokes@sfi.ie.

5.4 Is it necessary for a multi-national partner to have a base in Ireland?

It is not a requirement that a co-funding partner has a base in Ireland. Proposals that involve co-funding partners from outside Ireland however, will need to clearly make a strategic case for their involvement, to demonstrate the potential benefit to the Irish economy or Irish society.

5.5 Can a Technology Centre be considered to be an industry partner in an SFI Spokes application?

Although an EI/IDA Technology Centre is not considered as an 'industry partner', companies who are participating in Technology Centres are encouraged to participate in the SFI Research Centres Programme as industry partners and can therefore be included in Spokes applications.

5.6 Are cost contributions from public sources recognised as in-kind cost-share?

Contributions, cash or in-kind, from public sources will be counted as a co-funding contribution, however, only cash contributions will be counted towards the cost share requirements of the Spoke award. Total exchequer funding (incl. SFI contribution direct costs) must not exceed 50% of the total Spoke budget. Exceptions to this may be possible, where the exchequer co-funding partner is co-creating and contributing to the research programme, and in such there should be an agreement in place. This should be detailed in the co-funding partner sections and also the letter of support from the co-funding partner stating their involvement/participation and financial contribution. In this exceptional case, it will still be the expectation that non-exchequer cash funding will be the primary contribution to the co-funding component. Specific queries on the eligibility of cash and in-kind contributions should be directed to spokes@sfi.ie

5.7 What is eligible as in-kind contributions?

Eligible in-kind contributions include personnel, equipment, student placement with industry partners, software, materials, data etc. Please refer to the SFI Grant Budget Policy located at the following webpage for details: <http://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/budget-finance-related-policies/>

5.8 Are in-kind contributions counted towards the cost share in the Spoke?

In-kind contributions from co-funding partners are valuable additions to a Spokes application but are not included in the 50% cost share required for the Spoke.

5.9 What is the relationship with industry partners?

Collaboration with industry partners must comply with the definition of “effective collaboration”-see [here](#) for further details. An Industry Collaboration Form (ICF) must be completed which helps define the relationship with the industry partners. This form must be signed and returned by the recipients of the grant to SFI before the Collaborative Research Agreement (CRA) is signed.

5.10 What is the view of SFI on international collaborators or industry partners that wish to fund quality R&D initiatives in Ireland?

International partners are welcome to participate. However, the Centre/Spoke applicants should be mindful of the overall programme goal – to provide an economic benefit to Ireland – and ensure that inclusion of such partners will contribute to this goal.

5.11 Do the National IP Guidelines also apply to applications to the Spokes Call?

Yes, all applicants are advised to adhere to the [National IP Protocol](#) and the [SFI Guidelines for Industry Access to Intellectual Property](#) in the SFI Research Centres Programme.

5.12 Should an Industry Collaboration Form be completed for projects funded under the Spokes Programme?

Yes, SFI requires an Industry Collaborator Form to be completed and returned to SFI on or before the date that the Collaborative Research (or Intellectual Property Rights) Agreement has been ‘agreed’ with the relevant partner.

5.13 Who should complete and sign the ICF?

The ICF should be completed and signed by the Project Leader, who oversees the direct management of the budget and deliverables associated with the project in question.

If the Project Leader is not the Principal Investigator on the Grant (as per the Letter of Offer) to which the CRA is attributed, the PI should also sign the form. However, if the project takes place within a Research Body that is different to that associated with the Principal Investigator (as per the Letter of

Offer) it will be acceptable for a local signatory to sign in their stead as long as it is in accordance with the authorised signatory provisions described in the relevant inter-institutional agreement. If no formal signatory provision is described or where no inter-institutional agreement exists, then the local signatory provided should be that of a named co-PI as specified in the Letter of Offer who is affiliated with the Research Body where the CRA exists.

The “Authorised Institutional Signatory” can be a member of the RB or TTO etc.; it is up to each RB / Institution to decide how to manage this signatory in line with its own signing policies. Since this could be subject to audit, it is recommended that there should be an inter-institutional signing policy in place to support how governance is assured across multiple Research Bodies in receipt of funds under the SFI Grant in question.

6 IMPACT

6.1 What is impact?

We define Impact as “*the demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy*”. Thus, the direct and indirect ‘influence’ of research, or its ‘effect’ on an individual, a community, the development of policy, or the creation of a new product, service or technology. Impact embraces the diverse ways in which research-related knowledge and skills benefit individuals, organisations and nations by:

- Enabling and developing global economic performance, and specifically the economic competitiveness of Ireland
- Increasing the effectiveness of public services and policy
- Enhancing quality of life, health and creative output

In thinking about potential impacts, the following points should also be considered:

- What is the activity’s potential impact on the development of industry and the Irish economy, competitiveness and development?
- What is the activity’s potential impact on society and the quality of life of Ireland’s citizens?
- Are there potential beneficiaries within the private sector, public sector, third level sector or any others (e.g. professional or practitioner groups, charities or patient groups)?
- Are there potential international beneficiaries, collaborations with international industry or partner organisations?
- What is the activity’s potential impact on the education and training of Ireland’s students, the career development of research team members and the infrastructure for further research and education e.g., facilities and instrumentation?
- How will the potential impacts from your research best be realised?
- How do you propose the impact from your research could be measured?

Further information is available on the [SFI website](#).

6.2 Will impact be evaluated as part of the review process?

Impact will be a key evaluation criterion at both the EoI and full proposal stages. To be considered for funding, proposals must achieve an appropriate level of excellence in both the scientific/technical and impact evaluation.

6.3 What if the research is reviewed as excellent but the impact is not?

Only proposals achieving excellence in both scientific research and impact will be considered for funding.

7 INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

7.1 When do IP agreements have to be in place?

Suitable contracts and IP agreements (Collaborative Research Agreements) between the Research Body or Bodies, and the industry partner(s) must be concluded and signed within 90 days of the official start date of the Spoke award, and before the individual project starts, as per the Letter of Offer. Copies of these agreements are to be returned to SFI. As a matter of policy, until an IP agreement relating to the awarded Spoke is executed, it is to be understood by all parties that full ownership of the IP in question will remain with the Research Body, with no access or exploitation rights by the corporate partner(s).

7.2 Is an Industry Collaborator Form/ Collaborative Research Agreement required?

The activities undertaken as part of the proposed research programme must be “non-economic” in nature and / or comply with the definition of an “effective collaboration” where a project involves collaboration with an industry party or “undertaking”. Further information is available [here](#). Evidence of effective collaboration must be provided via submission of an ICF prior to the submission the CRA.

8 ACCESS CHARGES

8.1 How do I apply for access costs to shared facilities through the Spokes Programme?

Access charges may be sought for use of infrastructure where SFI pre-approved access charge plans are in place. This may include, for example, access charges for use of infrastructure approved under the SFI Research Infrastructure Call where pre-approved access charge plans are in place. Charges for access to facilities and services not directly available to the applicant, such as the costs associated with commissioning specific experiments in research facilities (e.g. Tyndall, CRANN etc.) may also be requested where SFI pre-approved access charge plans are in place.

Access charges may also be requested for use of other shared facilities or national test-beds, which are required as part of the proposed research. The requested access charges should be clearly specified in the budget as a separate line item and justified in the budget justification section. The scientific rationale for undertaking such experiments should be outlined in the research description.

In addition, requests may be included for accessing international databases and facilities or for the commissioning of experiments in international facilities/research labs where appropriately detailed justification is provided and where the required infrastructure is not available in Ireland.

Further information and a listing of current SFI Approved Access Charge plans and associated key contacts can be found [here](#).

9 EDUCATION AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT (EPE)

9.1 What are considered eligible EPE costs?

Examples include: contributions towards the salary of dedicated EPE operations staff (where justified); direct public engagement activity and production costs such as venue, props and equipment, materials and promotion; relevant training and development; and EPE evaluation costs (including formative/development). Budgets should demonstrate appropriate consideration and justification of costs associated with planned EPE activity and management.

9.2 What does the term ‘an engaged public’ refer to from SFI’s perspective?

SFI defined ‘an engaged public’ as one which: understands the role of STEM; can judge between competing STEM arguments; encourages young people to study and work in STEM; and feels engaged with STEM research.

9.3 What audiences should the EPE activities target?

SFI is not prescriptive in terms of defining the target audiences for public engagement activity. More importantly SFI expects that Research Centre applicants will select the most appropriate audiences and present details of the objectives which it aims to achieve, and to outline how this aligns with SFI objectives, how it will be delivered and how it will be measured and evaluated. Some ‘publics’ have been identified in the Science in Ireland Barometer as less connected to STEM.

9.4 Who is responsible for the EPE programme of a Spoke?

Whilst each Spoke *may* request costs towards the salary of an EPE Manager, it is imperative that a whole Centre approach to EPE is adopted by the Centre, meaning researchers at all levels are responsible for EPE and should be involved in the planning, development and delivery of the EPE programme of activities. The Spoke Director should promote the involvement of all researchers in the

SFI Spokes Programme

EPE programme and should provide leadership by example in this regard. Request for contributions to the salary of an EPE Manager should be discussed with SFI during the Expression of Interest stage.

9.5 Should the logic model outline the entire Education and Public Engagement programme, or the Public Engagement activities only?

The logic model can apply to each activity, but the review process will examine how the strategy for the EPE programme is activated by the sum of the activities.

9.6 For the reference to the growth in Public Engagement experience of staff, does it need to be specified for each proposed activity or the programme as a whole?

As for the growth in people – that should be at a programme level and the experience and expertise of the team managing, creating and driving the EPE strategy should be highlighted, including how the Spoke is accessing and harnessing greater expertise through partnerships and benchmarking.