

National Challenge Fund

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

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Contents

General.....	1
Applicant Eligibility.....	3
Programme Remit.....	6
Stakeholders	7
Budget.....	9
Do No Significant Harm.....	10
Review Process.....	11
Training and Mentoring.....	13

Terms of Reference

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General

Q1. What is Challenge Research Funding?

Challenge Research Funding (challenge research or challenge funding) is a *solution-focused* approach to research funding that directs research activities at specific, often complex, challenges or problems. Challenge funding uses defined timelines, stage-gated (phased) release of funding and incentive prizes to accelerate research activities toward tangible impact.

Q2. What is the National Challenge Fund?

The National Challenge Fund is a €65M challenge research fund that will support academic researchers to work with stakeholders to address societal challenges of relevance to Ireland. The Fund aims to

foster collaboration between government departments, agencies, enterprise, the academic research community, and societal stakeholders to identify challenges and mobilise action to address green transition and digitalisation targets set at government level. Research and innovation activities supported will be outcome-focused, maximising the opportunity for research translation and impact.

Q3. What is the National Challenge Fund aiming to support? (What is SFI looking for?)

Applications are sought from ambitious transdisciplinary teams (comprising academic and non-academic stakeholders) with potentially transformative ideas to address societal and economic challenges relevant to Ireland. It is expected that proposed solutions are underpinned by research in science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM). Applications should articulate a specific issue or problem to be addressed as part of a challenge call, describe the proposed solution and how the solution can achieve impact for Ireland. Challenge programmes under the National Challenge Fund are designed to support the most motivated teams that want to drive their idea to impact.

Q4. Should applications reference recovery and resilience?

The National Challenge Fund is funded under the government's [National Recovery and Resilience Plan](#) and identifies eight challenges relevant to these efforts and aligned to opportunities associated with the green transition and digital transformation. Applications should be aligned to the specific challenges and therefore should impact positively on Ireland's recovery and future resilience efforts.

Q5. What does disruptive technology mean?

For the purposes of the National Challenge Fund, a disruptive technology is one that significantly alters how a problem can be addressed or how a solution creates value for end-users or beneficiaries, which, in turn, leads to transformative impact potential.

Q6. How many challenges will be launched under the National Challenge Fund?

Under the National Challenge Fund, *eight individual challenge calls will be launched between Q3 2022 and Q2 2023*. Five of these challenges will be aligned to the green transition with the remaining three aligned to digital transformation.

Details of the challenges can be found at <https://www.sfi.ie/challenges/national-challenge-fund/>

Q7. Does the National Challenge Fund support engaged research?

Challenge funding represents an approach to *engaged research* in that it recognises that to address complex societal challenges, stakeholders, beneficiaries and end-users should be involved in the co-creation of research activities and should inform the expected outputs and outcomes to ensure that they are meaningful and relevant. Under SFI's approach to challenge funding, stakeholder engagement is required, and researchers are supported to undertake engaged research activities.

Q8. What is a transdisciplinary team?

SFI's approach to challenge funding brings together teams that comprise academic researchers from different disciplines to work together (in an interdisciplinary way) but also with non-academic stakeholders who have direct experience in the challenge/problem domain. Bringing together different disciplines and perspectives from within (interdisciplinary) and from outside academia to move beyond discipline-specific approaches to addressing issues is termed transdisciplinary.

Q9. How is challenge funding different to traditional research grant funding?

Like traditional approaches, challenge funding provides grants to support research activities. However, in addition, it also uses defined timelines (or phases) in conjunction with incentive prizes to direct and accelerate research activities. SFI's approach to challenge funding also provides significant additional supports to team such as training, mentoring and networking opportunities.

SFI's approach to challenge funding differs in a number of ways to other approaches:

- **Teams** – It focuses on teams rather than individual researchers and has the expectation that non-academic members will play an important leadership role in defining how research is planned and undertaken.
- **Stakeholder Engagement** – Engagement with stakeholders to understand issues and to reflect their needs as part of research activities is a key component of SFI's approach. Without engagement from stakeholders, potential solutions may not be meaningful or impactful.
- **Training and Skills** – Challenge funding provides a valuable opportunity for researchers to undertake engagement and innovation activities to accelerate their research. Not all researchers will have experience in these areas so to support their participation, training is provided during challenge programmes with skills development forming a central part of the supports provided.
- **Agility** - Challenges imply urgency. In challenge funding, teams need to engage with stakeholders to inform and potentially change their perspectives and ideas. Challenge funding enables and supports this flexibility and encourages agility amongst teams to deliver impact.

Q10. Can I apply to more than one Challenge Call?

Core team members may be named on only one application to a given challenge call (i.e., core team members may not be named on multiple applications to any one call). Core team members may be named on applications to different challenge calls, or be members of broader challenge teams, regardless of whether these are running concurrently or consecutively.

It is noted that applications must propose distinct ideas or, if they have been previously reviewed, must adhere to the [SFI Resubmission Policy](#). Furthermore, given the nature of challenge research, applicants should strongly consider their capacity and that of team members to deliver on project objectives if team members are included on applications to multiple concurrent or consecutive calls.

Applicant Eligibility**Q11. What is the expected profile of applicants to the National Challenge Fund?**

Postdoctoral, early career or established researchers based at [eligible research bodies](#) may lead teams under the National Challenge Fund, subject to meeting the eligibility criteria described in the relevant call document. Applicants should be ambitious and motivated to address important societal challenges and be willing to engage in an agile programme to support the development of their solution.

Profiles of funded teams supported under previous SFI challenge programmes can be found on the SFI website <https://www.sfi.ie/challenges/>.

Q12. Can an individual researcher apply to a challenge call under the National Challenge Fund?

One of the key features of SFI challenge funding is its focus on teams and the importance of including diverse expertise. Applications to a challenge call under the National Challenge Fund must be submitted by two researchers based at an [eligible research body](#) (both researchers do not need to come from the same research body). These researchers are the applicant and co-applicant. If the application is successful, they will become the team lead and co-lead on the award.

Q13. What is the role of the Societal Impact Champion? Are they a mandatory team member?

The Societal Impact Champion will have a leadership role in the team and will support identification and validation of challenges in addition to advising on solution development. It is envisaged that they will play a crucial role in contributing to the identification of barriers and in developing strategies to overcome them. They may also play a key advocacy role and assist in maximising the societal impact of the solution. It is envisaged that the Societal Impact Champion will come from a non-academic sector, for example: the public sector/government, industry, non-governmental organisations, charities, patient advocacy, philanthropy or civil society.

The Societal Impact Champion is a mandatory team member, but must not necessarily be identified in your application. In this case, applicants should provide rationale for why a Societal Impact Champion was not in place at the application stage and how one will be identified and recruited. All funded teams must have a Societal Impact Champion in place no later than the end of month 3 of the Concept Phase. Failure to secure a societal impact champion by this time may affect a team's ability to progress in the programme. Note that teams funded under the National Challenge Fund will undertake extensive stakeholder engagement during the Concept Phase of the programme which may facilitate identification of a Societal Impact Champion.

Q14. What is meant by the *core team* on an application?

The core team refers to the applicant, co-applicant and Societal Impact Champion. If an application is successful, it is expected that they become the leadership team on the award. If the Societal Impact Champion is not identified at application stage, once identified during the Concept Phase, they assume the third leadership role on the core team.

Q15. Can a researcher from an AHSS discipline lead on an application/team?

Yes. Researchers from any discipline can lead on an application to the National Challenge Fund. It is noted that the remit of the programme requires that proposed solutions rely on or are directly informed by a STEM innovation. As such, it is expected that teams include expertise in the STEM research area underpinning the proposed solution (either as lead or co-lead). It is expected that a significant component of the research activity undertaken as part of a project funded under a challenge call will be STEM-related.

Q16. The National Challenge Fund aims to support transdisciplinary teams. Does this mean that teams must include researchers from both STEM and AHSS?

Teams should reflect the disciplinary mix appropriate to the proposed solution. It is, however, strongly encouraged that the team lead and co-lead do not come from the same domain area but rather consider inclusion of complementary expertise/experience.

Teams must include expertise in the STEM research area underpinning the proposed solution (either as lead or co-lead), but they are also encouraged to consider relevant knowledge or experience in

complementary areas such as, for example, design, humanities, economics, behavioural or social sciences, to inform the development, translation (incl. adoption) and impact of solutions.

Regardless of their academic disciplines, both lead and co-lead, as well as their broader team, must commit to working in a transdisciplinary manner to develop a greater understanding of the problem the team will address and to support the development a solution to address it.

Q17. What is the difference between the core versus broader challenge team?

The core team refers to the applicant, co-applicant and Societal Impact Champion and represents the leadership team for the project. Teams are encouraged to also consider other expertise and partnerships that may be necessary to fully understand the problem they are addressing and to successfully develop a solution. These additional members are referred to as the broader challenge team and may be described in the Team section of an application or recruited to the team at any point over the course of the award. The broader team may include both academic or non-academic members. Funding may, however, only be allocated to academic researchers based at eligible research bodies.

Q18. What should I do if I can't identify a Societal Impact Champion for my application?

The Societal Impact Champion is a mandatory team member but need not necessarily be identified in your application. Applications should identify a Societal Impact Champion as part of their application but if this is not possible they should outline, as part of their application, how they intend to identify one. If, following review, a team is successful in its application to a call, funded teams must have their Societal Impact Champion in place no later than the end of month 3 of the Concept Phase. Teams funded under the National Challenge Fund will undertake extensive stakeholder engagement during the Concept Phase of the programme which may facilitate identification of a Societal Impact Champion. Recognising the key role of the Societal Impact Champion, teams that have identified this member at the application stage may be reviewed more positively.

Q19. Can SFI Research Centre PIs, co-PIs or Funded Investigators apply to this programme?

Yes. However, all individuals should carefully consider how they will manage two or more major SFI awards. Given the nature of challenge research, applicants should strongly consider their capacity and that of team members to deliver on project objectives.

Q20. I am a postdoctoral researcher. Am I eligible to lead an application to the National Challenge Fund?

Yes. Postdoctoral researchers may be named as lead or co-lead on applications to the National Challenge Fund. It is noted that in this case, an established researcher must be nominated to act as mentor for the duration of the award. Please see the call documents for requirements for the letter of support to confirm this.

Postdoctoral researchers who are acting as a team lead or co-lead may include up to 100% of their salary as part of the budget request in line with their time commitment to the project.

Q21. I hold an SFI/IRC Pathway Award. Am I eligible to apply to the National Challenge Fund?

SFI/IRC Pathway award holders are permitted to apply to the National Challenge Fund as either Team Lead or Co-Lead.

As outlined in the SFI/IRC Pathway Programme call document, potential applicants to the SFI Challenge Programmes should note that SFI-IRC Pathway awardees are expected to dedicate the majority of their time to that award in the first year of the award. It should also be noted that your commitment to the Pathway award should not drop below 50% at any point over the course of the award.

Potential applicants are advised to contact challenges@sfi.ie or the programme manager for their SFI/IRC Pathway Award in the respective funding agency to confirm their eligibility.

Q22. Do I need to have a PhD to apply to the National Challenge Fund?

It is expected that the team lead and co-lead will typically hold a PhD or [equivalent](#) to meet this eligibility criterion for the National Challenge Fund.

However, it is recognised that in certain disciplines relevant to this call, such as engineering or international development, research-active members of academic staff may not hold a PhD or equivalent. Such research-active staff members may be considered eligible to participate as a Team Lead or Co-Lead but must confirm their eligibility with SFI in advance of submission of an application. Requests must be made by the research office of the host research body to SFI by e-mail (challenges@sfi.ie) and should include a completed narrative CV template, which must demonstrate evidence of appropriate research experience. In such cases, only current members of academic staff will be considered.

It is noted that eligibility for this call will not be considered in the assessment of eligibility for other SFI funding calls and does not correspond to confirmation of PhD equivalence.

Programme Remit

Q23. How important is it for applications to align to challenges under the National Challenge Fund?

Eight challenges will be launched under the National Challenge Fund and applications submitted to any call must be aligned to that specific challenge. Examples of areas that are aligned or relevant to each challenge have been provided as guidance to applicants. These examples are not meant to be exhaustive; rather they should serve to give applicants an indication of issues/opportunities aligned to a specific challenge.

Q24. Is funding under the National Challenge Fund limited to supporting only STEM research?

No. While the remit of the programme requires that proposed solutions rely on or are directly informed by a STEM innovation (and undertake associated research activities) and that teams include corresponding expertise, teams are strongly encouraged to include expertise from non-STEM disciplines (e.g., AHSS) relevant to gaining greater understanding of the context of challenges, and the adoption and deployment of solutions. Teams should reflect the disciplinary mix appropriate to address the identified challenge and develop the proposed solution.

Q25. Are there areas of research that are not eligible for support under the National Challenge Fund?

The National Challenge Fund cannot support environmentally unsustainable research. As such, research and innovation directly related to or that could promote the further use of fossil fuels, including downstream use (i.e., related to coal, lignite, oil/petroleum, blue and grey hydrogen, and

natural gas), as well as research related to incinerators or landfills is excluded from support under the National Challenge Fund.

Q26. What information should I include in my remit statement?

Your remit statement should outline how the proposed research aligns to the Programme Remit as described in call document. Applicants are advised to review this section carefully and consider all components of the programme remit. Specifically, applicants should confirm and provide appropriate justification that the proposal:

- relies on or is directly informed by a STEM innovation;
- is aligned to the specific challenge theme;
- is aligned to the Green Transition / Digital Transformation;
- does not include any areas of research excluded from the programme.

This statement will be used to determine the eligibility of the application. In addition to the areas outlined above, applications will be required to comply with the principle of the Do No Significant Harm and State aid, as described in the call document.

Stakeholders

Q27. Will Government stakeholders engage in the National Challenge Fund?

The National Challenge Fund aims to foster collaboration between Government departments, agencies, enterprise, the academic research community, and societal stakeholders to identify challenges and mobilise action to address green transition and digitalisation targets set at government level. SFI has commenced an engagement process with Government departments to inform specific areas associated with challenge calls and to identify contact points for future engagement. Representatives of Government departments or agencies may also link directly with researcher teams to be represented as, for example, Societal Impact Champions, on teams.

Q28. Will researchers have an opportunity to work with Government stakeholders as part of the National Challenge Fund?

As part of challenge programmes, SFI facilitates networking and other activities between research teams and stakeholders in government departments and agencies.

Q29. Can industry/enterprise participate in the National Challenge Fund?

Yes. Research teams funded under the National Challenge Fund are required to engage with stakeholders across a range of sectors, which may include industry. This engagement is undertaken to develop greater understanding of a challenge, to inform research activities and how a solution could address this challenge.

Teams supported under the National Challenge Fund may include industry as a team member (i.e., Societal Impact Champion) or collaborator. In this case, the involvement of industry must be compliant with the conditions of *effective collaboration* as per the Framework for State aid for research, development and innovation (2014/C 198/01). Please see Section 9 of the call document for details on SFI's policy on State aid and how compliance will be demonstrated.

Q30. Are industry partners eligible to receive funding under the National Challenge Fund?

No. Challenge calls under the National Challenge Fund are open to academic teams, based at eligible research bodies in Ireland, to undertake research on challenges aligned to the green transition and digital transformation. The National Challenge Fund does not provide funding support for industry.

As part of a funded project, research teams are encouraged to engage with stakeholders, which may include industry, but this is undertaken to develop greater understanding of a challenge or solution.

Research funded under a call is to be undertaken by academic researchers and must therefore be independent (albeit informed by stakeholder perspectives) and must conform with the requirements of non-economic research activity. It is also expected that all research activities undertaken are pre-commercial.

Where an application for funding involves a collaboration with an industry partner, the activities must comply with the definition of *effective collaboration* as per the Framework for State aid for research, development and innovation (2014/C 198/01).

Q31. Can industry lead an application under the National Challenge Fund?

No. Applications to challenge calls under the National Challenge Fund must be led by academic teams, based at eligible research bodies in Ireland. However, industry may be included as a Societal Impact Champion or as a collaborator within the broader team. All industry involvement in an application must be compliant with the conditions of “effective collaboration”. Please see Section 9 of the relevant call document for more details on SFI’s policy on State aid and how compliance will be demonstrated.

Q32. Can industry be included as a Societal Impact Champion under the National Challenge Fund?

Yes. It is noted that applications to the National Challenge Fund involving industry as a team member (i.e., Societal Impact Champion) or collaborator must be compliant with the conditions of “effective collaboration”. Please see Section 9 of the relevant call document for more details on SFI’s policy on State aid and how compliance will be demonstrated.

It is further noted that if industry is included as a Societal Impact Champion at the application stage, it will be required that an industry collaboration form be submitted in advance of the commencement of the Concept Phase for the Challenge. Dates for commencement of phases are provided in the relevant call document.

Q33. Can industry collaborate with funded teams under the National Challenge Fund?

Yes. Industry may collaborate with funded teams under the National Challenge Fund. Collaboration must be compliant with the conditions of “effective collaboration”. Please see Section 9 of the relevant call document for more details on SFI’s policy on State aid and how compliance will be demonstrated.

Q34. Can industry participate in the skills development and workshops provided to funded teams under the National Challenge Fund?

No. In order to comply with the State aid requirements, team members from industry are not permitted to participate in skills development and workshops provided by SFI.

Q35. Where can I find out more about SFI's policies on State aid, effective collaboration and Industry Collaboration Forms?

Please refer to Section 9 of the call document for the relevant challenge. Further information is also available at <https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/state-aid/>

Q36. Can charity organisations, NGOs or non-profit organisations participate in the National Challenge Fund?

Yes. Applications to challenge calls under the National Challenge Fund are led by academic teams, based at eligible research bodies in Ireland. However, we do strongly encourage academic research teams applying to SFI Challenge Programmes to engage with organisations outside of academia to bring knowledge and expertise directly relevant to the proposed challenge/solution to their team. These may include charity organisations, NGOs or non-profit organisations. Representatives from these organisations may be included as a non-academic team member, referred to as the Societal Impact Champion. Teams may also include non-academic partners in their wider team.

It is noted that only researchers at SFI Eligible Research Bodies are eligible to receive funding through the National Challenge Fund.

Q37. Is ethical approval required to engage with stakeholders as part of validation activities undertaken during a challenge-based funding award?

Stakeholder engagement undertaken to gain greater understanding of the broad context of a challenge/problem and to develop insights on stakeholder needs is considered consultation. This engagement is undertaken to gain knowledge that is typically general in nature and informs understanding of a challenge/problem as well as assisting in solution conceptualisation.

Engaging with stakeholders at this early stage of research does not generally raise any ethical concerns because stakeholders are not acting in the same way as research participants. At this stage, stakeholders act as advisers, providing valuable knowledge and expertise based on their experiences.

While consultation does not generally require ethical approval, it is advised that you seek advice from your Research Office in advance of commencement of such activities.

Budget

Q38. Are costs associated with the participation of the Societal Impact Champions eligible to be included in the budget?

While it is not permitted to request direct support for Societal Impact Champions (e.g., salary or fees), expenses that can be directly aligned to the execution of the research programme may be eligible. Activities may include, for example, travel costs associated with team activities, organisation of workshops, stakeholder engagement, and other related activities. Requests for such costs must be appropriately justified.

Q39. Is teaching buyout an eligible cost under the National Challenge Fund?

Team Leads and Co-Leads based at Technological Universities (TUs) or Institutes of Technology (IoTs) are permitted to apply for teaching replacement of up to a maximum of 50% of their teaching load for the duration of each phase of the programme. Salary scales for replacement lecturers must be

reasonable and justified appropriately within the budget justification. Teaching replacement requests must be pro-rata and proportional to the time commitment to the award. Confirmation for support for these requests should be included in the Letter of Support from the Research Body.

Do No Significant Harm

Q40. What is meant by do no significant harm (DNSH)?

The Do No Significant Harm principle (DNSH) is a condition of the funding that states that the research and its outcomes may not cause any significant harm to the environment. This restriction applies to all programmes funded under the NRRP (National Recovery and Resilience Plan) and is aligned with the [EU Taxonomy Regulation](#). The EU taxonomy is a science-based system for determining if an activity can be considered environmentally sustainable.

The Taxonomy Regulation establishes six environmental objectives. It must be confirmed that no significant harm is expected as a result of the research in terms of each objective for the project to be eligible for funding.

1. Climate change mitigation
2. Climate change adaptation
3. The sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources
4. The transition to a circular economy
5. Pollution prevention and control
6. The protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems

Further guidance on DNSH is available on the website for the relevant call.

Q41. How do applicants confirm that their research and its outcomes will be environmentally sustainable?

Applicants must complete a DNSH assessment as part of their application. This assessment should be commensurate with the level of development of the project. For projects at an early stage of development (TRL < 4), it is expected that a general assessment should be sufficient. Where there is potential impact on any of the environmental objectives, a more detailed assessment may be required.

All DNSH assessments must confirm that the proposed application of their research will not cause significant harm in respect of any of the 6 environmental objectives, i.e., provide an answer of “no” against all environmental objectives in either the general or detailed assessment. Please note that you may refer to your research project in your DNSH assessment or vice versa, e.g., part of the proposed research activities may include an assessment of the environmental impact of the proposed solution over its life cycle and how it can be mitigated and it may be relevant to highlight this in your DNSH assessment.

Q42. My project does not impact any of the environmental objectives. Do I have to complete the DNSH assessment?

The DNSH assessment must be completed for all applications under the National Challenge Fund. Where there are no harmful impacts anticipated, it is sufficient to complete the general assessment. In the case where no impact is expected to any environmental objective this can be stated with a brief

justification for each of the six objectives. For example, for an application in the area of digital health, there would likely be no harmful impacts anticipated for any of the environmental objectives.

Q43. My project is at a very early stage of development and details related to its deployment have not yet been finalised. How much information do I need to include in the DNSH assessment?

The level of detail required for the assessment should be commensurate with the stage of development. For early-stage research projects (TRL < 4), a brief justification may be sufficient. However, where the products of the research could have a negative effect on the environment, sufficient detail must be included to confirm that there will be no significant harm will be caused.

Applicants may wish to refer to their research programme to highlight how the proposed approach will ensure compliance with DNSH and mitigate any potential impacts, e.g., through inclusion of a life-cycle analysis as part of the research programme or through the development of supporting scientific evidence.

Q44. Will there be an opportunity to update my DNSH assessment as my project progresses?

Yes, it is expected that the DNSH assessment will be updated as a project progresses through the programme and the technology is advanced toward deployment. At each review stage, awardees will be required to submit updated DNSH assessments as part of the progress review process.

Q45. Will my DNSH assessment be used in the evaluation of my application or progress reviews?

Compliance with DNSH is an eligibility criterion for the National Challenge Fund. Reviewers will receive these assessments as part of the proposal documentation and will be required to confirm that sufficient information has been provided in the self-assessment to demonstrate compliance. Reviewers will not be asked to consider the DNSH in their assessment of the quality of the proposal.

Q46. In my DNSH assessment, am I required to include information on my research lab, for example, the energy efficiency of the lab equipment?

No, in the context of the National Challenge Fund, compliance with the DNSH principle refers to the potential life-cycle impact of the solutions, processes, technologies, and other products developed when deployed, rather than to the research activities in and of themselves.

Review Process

Q47. Who is responsible for review of applications to challenge calls under the National Challenge Fund?

Following the application deadline associated with a particular challenge call, applications submitted are checked by SFI staff to ensure that they contain all the required information and that all eligibility requirements have been met. Applications that do not meet these requirements are deemed ineligible and do not progress to review. Eligible applications are then reviewed by a panel of independent

international experts selected by SFI. These reviewers are selected based on their experience and expertise relevant to a challenge area.

Q48. What do I do if I think that my idea could fit under different challenge calls?

In cases where you think your idea could potentially be aligned to one or more challenge calls, its advised that you contact the National Challenge Fund team at challenges@sfi.ie to discuss your idea.

Q49. How will I be notified whether my application has been successful or unsuccessful?

SFI will notify all applicants of the outcome of the application review process by email. Tentative dates for notifications to be issued and for the commencement of awards are provided in the call document.

Q50. Will I receive feedback if my application is unsuccessful?

Under the National Challenge Fund, unsuccessful applicants will not receive feedback on their application unless it is sought in writing. Successful applicants will be provided with feedback as part of their progression in a challenge call. This feedback can be written or verbal.

Q51. Are unsuccessful applicants eligible to apply to another challenge call?

Yes. Unsuccessful applications may be resubmitted to a subsequent challenge call. Applications to any call that are based primarily on an unsuccessful submission (following peer review) to any SFI programme must demonstrate that review comments resulting from the initial application have been taken into account in the preparation of the new submission. For further information please refer to [SFI's Policy on Resubmission of Grant Proposals](#).

Q52. How do teams progress from one phase to another in a challenge?

Teams progress from one phase to another in a challenge based on a review of progress that is undertaken by a panel of independent international experts. This review takes the form of an interview with the review panel. Prior to the end date of a phase, teams are requested to prepare a presentation and submit a progress report. Progress reports are provided to the panel in advance of the review. At the review, each team delivers a presentation to the panel for its consideration. The panel then recommends to SFI which teams should progress to the next phase and provides feedback to assist teams in their projects.

Q53. How many teams are expected to progress at each phase?

Indicative numbers of teams expected to progress through each phase under a given challenge is available in call documentation and on the SFI website. Under the National Challenge Fund, it is expected that all teams entering the Concept Phase should progress to the Seed Phase. However, if a team is not deemed to have made sufficient progress in its work during the Concept Phase, the review panel may recommend to SFI that the team does not progress. A team that is not recommended to progress will then exit the programme.

Q54. What criteria are used to assess progress of teams under the National Challenge Fund?

All stages of review under the National Challenge Fund employ a set of five, equally weighted, review criteria. Details of these criteria can be found in the call document.

Q55. Are projects under different calls reviewed differently?

The same review process is used across all challenges under the National Challenge Fund.

Training and Mentoring

Q56. Will successful teams receive any training during the programme?

Teams awarded funding under the National Challenge Fund will participate in a bespoke skills development programme, comprising in-person cohort-based training workshops and online mentoring sessions.

This training programme will support teams to develop and apply skills that will enable them to identify stakeholder needs and develop solutions to address those needs. Training will be provided in areas such as Theory of Change, Design Thinking and Evidence-based Entrepreneurship. This training will be provided by international experts.

In addition, teams will be mentored by members of SFI's challenge research team, who have significant experience in supporting teams through challenges. The challenge research team can offer invaluable insights to assist teams in maximising the impact potential of their research activities.

Q57. Who is expected to attend training?

It is expected that core team members will attend training workshops and mentoring sessions. Some flexibility may be possible in terms of additional team members wishing to attend sessions. SFI must be notified in advance of any changes to the participants attending training sessions.

Please note that in order to comply with the State aid requirements, team members from industry are not permitted to participate in skills development and workshops provided by SFI.