

Science Foundation Ireland Future Innovator Prize

SDG Challenge



2024 Call Document

Version: 24 April 2024

KEY DATES

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| • Call Launch | 16 May 2024 |
| • SESAME Open for Applications | June 2024 |
| • Workshop Support Grant Deadline | 5 July 2024, 13:00 Dublin Local Time |
| • Application Deadline | 8 October 2024, 13:00 Dublin Local Time |
| • Funding Decision | December 2024 |
| • Award Start Date | 1 February 2025 |
| • Concept Phase Review | June 2025 |
| • Seed Phase Review | May 2026 |
| • Prize Award Start Date | 1 August 2026 |

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 Ireland¹, the Government of Ireland, or any of their respective servants or agents. Science Foundation Ireland 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.

¹ SFI is in the process of amalgamating with the Irish Research Council to form Taighde Éireann – Research Ireland. This SDG Challenge call in 2024 will not be materially affected by the amalgamation process. Adjustments, if any, will be communicated to the Lead Applicant and via FAQ documentation on our website. Awards will be made by SFI or Research Ireland, depending on the timeline of the amalgamation.

Contents

1	The SDG Challenge.....	1
2	Challenge Funding and the SFI Future Innovator Prize	2
3	Objectives of the SDG Challenge	3
4	SFI Strategy 2025 – <i>Shaping Our Future</i>	3
5	Challenge Theme	4
6	Remit.....	5
7	State Aid and SFI Grant Funding	6
8	Who Can Apply?.....	7
9	Applicant Team Composition & Eligibility	10
10	Programme Structure and Funding	12
10.1	Application	12
10.2	Workshop Support Grants	13
10.3	Concept Phase	14
10.4	Seed Phase	15
10.5	Prize Award	15
10.6	Skills Development	15
11	Review Process and Criteria	16
12	Application Procedure	18
12.1	Idea	19
12.2	Team, Challenge, Solution & Societal Impact.....	19
12.3	Sex and Gender Dimension in Research Statement (max. 1000 words).....	19
12.4	Budget.....	20
12.5	Authorisation	22
12.6	Curricula Vitae	23
12.7	Letters of Support	24
13	Data Management Plans	25

14	Progress Review and Prize Award Management.....	26
15	SFI's Policies and Positions	26

1 The SDG Challenge

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a call to action for all countries, in partnership, to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges we face, including poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice.

Achieving the SDGs lies at the heart of Ireland's international development policy, *A Better World*², to achieve a more equal, peaceful and sustainable world and to reach those furthest behind first. In its strategy, *Shaping our Future*³, Science Foundation Ireland outlines its ambition to deliver tangible benefits for society, and notes the key role that research and innovation will play in achieving the SDGs. With these common goals, Irish Aid (Department of Foreign Affairs), which delivers a significant part of Ireland's Official Development Assistance (ODA) programme, are partnering with SFI to launch the SDG Challenge 2024.

The world is not on track to deliver the SDGs⁴. With a multitude of crisis – the COVID19 pandemic, conflicts, climate change - exacerbating the situation, the number of people facing hunger and food insecurity has been rising since 2015. The effects of food insecurity are being most intensely felt by the poorest and most vulnerable³. Taking urgent action to address the global food crisis requires solutions that transform food systems by addressing inequities, boosting sustainable agricultural practices, and mitigating the compounding impact of conflict and other crises on global food security.

The 2021 UN Food Systems Summit⁵, which arose from a need to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the SDGs, pointed to food systems transformation as a key part of the solution. The summit calls on the need to rethink the way the world produces and consumes food as a step towards accelerating progress on all 17 SDGs, each of which relies to some degree on healthier, more sustainable and equitable food systems. The 2023 UN Food Systems Summit + 2 Stocktake Moment⁶ succeeded in renewing political commitment to food systems transformation as a key SDG accelerator. The event highlighted the importance of sustainable, resilient, equitable and healthy food systems – acknowledging the central role of nutrition and healthy diets in the food and agriculture space. At the event, Ireland reiterated the importance of ending hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition, as well as promoting more sustainable and resilient agriculture and food systems. Ireland commits in both its

² <https://www.irishaid.ie/media/irishaid/aboutus/abetterworldirelandspolicyforinternationaldevelopment/A-Better-World-Irelands-Policy-for-International-Development.pdf>

³ <https://www.sfi.ie/strategy/shaping-our-future/index.xml>

⁴ <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2023.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.un.org/en/food-systems-summit/action-tracks>

⁶ <https://www.unfoodsystemshub.org/fs-stocktaking-moment>

International Development Policy, *A Better World*, and its agri-food strategy *Food Vision 2030*⁷ to adopting an integrated approach to sustainable food systems.

Innovation, equitable partnerships and inclusivity will be key enablers in developing and deploying sustainable solutions for food systems that accelerate progress in tackling hunger and fostering sustainable livelihoods. The purpose of the SDG Challenge is to support diverse, transdisciplinary⁸ teams to develop transformative, sustainable solutions that will contribute to addressing development challenges under the UN SDGs in countries supported by Ireland's ODA. By placing a strong focus on teams, collaboration between the research communities in Ireland and partner countries will be strengthened and links between the international development community, international NGOs, as well as non-academic stakeholders and end-users, will be enhanced.

2 Challenge Funding and the SFI Future Innovator Prize

Challenge funding is a solution-focused approach to direct research activities at specific, often complex, problems. SFI's approach to challenge funding places strong emphasis on:

- (i) **Inter and Transdisciplinary Teams**, reflecting the need to bring together experts and innovators from different disciplines to address complex challenges;
- (ii) **Engagement & Validation** with stakeholders, beneficiaries and end-users of research to understand the nature of specific problems, to test assumptions and to co-create solutions; and
- (iii) **Acceleration** through efficient adaptation of approaches based on iterative engagement with beneficiaries and stakeholders.

The SDG Challenge will be run within the challenge-funding framework of the SFI Future Innovator Prize Programme, which is structured around the principles set out above. The SDG Challenge will be open to international transdisciplinary teams involving researchers in partner countries eligible under this call (See Section 5), and expertise from across research disciplines, including both STEM and AHSS disciplines (See section 8). The SFI Future Innovator Prize consists of three phases: Concept, Seed and Prize Award. Additionally, Workshop Support Grants of up to €5k are available to potential applicants to facilitate team formation and seed idea generation before submitting an application (See section 10.2). Following application review, successful teams will be awarded funding of up to €50k over 6 months to undertake team building, scoping and concept validation activities during the Concept

⁷<https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/179717/910771f6-05ed-43f1-b8ce-52ef7c602710.pdf#page=18>

⁸ For the purposes of this document, transdisciplinary refers to teams that may include collaboration between researchers from different academic disciplines (STEM, AHSS, etc) but also other stakeholders with the objective of addressing societal challenges or problems.

Phase. They then undergo a rigorous review before receiving additional funding of up to €250k in the 12-month Seed Phase to further validate and prototype their proposed solutions. Finalists compete to be awarded follow-on funding within the challenge prize fund of €1M.

3 Objectives of the SDG Challenge

The overarching purpose of the SDG Challenge is to develop transformative, sustainable solutions that will contribute to addressing development challenges under the UN SDGs in Irish Aid's partner countries.

The objectives of the SDG Challenge are:

- To generate impact through advancement of sustainable solutions in addressing global sustainability issues and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);
- To support the mobilisation of transdisciplinary teams, comprising academic researchers and societal stakeholders to identify key development challenges where sustainable solutions can deliver transformative impact with a focus on southern partner countries;
- To enable the development of collaborations between researchers in Ireland and researchers in partner countries where Irish Aid works;
- To support development, deployment and demonstration of sustainable solutions across a range of application areas.

4 SFI Strategy 2025 – *Shaping Our Future*

Science Foundation Ireland's strategy, *Shaping Our Future*³, has been developed to unlock the potential of Irish research to meet current challenges, seize future opportunities and support the government's priorities. SFI's strategy has two core ambitions: *Delivering Today* and *Preparing for Tomorrow*. As part of *Delivering Today*, a key focus will be to deliver tangible benefits for society. SFI will build strategic, national and international partnerships to drive economic impact and to address societal challenges.

Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy, *Impact 2030*⁹, identifies challenge funding as a key funding mechanism contributing to one of its pillars, *Maximising the Impact of Research and Innovation on the Economy, Society and the Environment*. *Impact 2030* is overseen by the Department of Further and

⁹ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/27c78-impact-2030-irelands-new-research-and-innovation-strategy/>

Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science. The strategy further supports the development of Ireland's global connectivity through international research collaboration. The SDG Challenge is underpinned by these organisational and national strategies.

5 Challenge Theme

Complex inter-linkages exist between food security and nutrition, equitable livelihoods and environmental sustainability. The SDG Challenge 2024 is a call to action to international, transdisciplinary research teams to work in partnership to develop solutions that will help to ensure no one is left behind on the road towards a world with zero hunger.

The SDG Challenge 2024 seeks solutions that will contribute to achieving the targets and indicators set out in SDG 2: Zero Hunger: "End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture". Applications will be considered that contribute towards one or more of the five SDG 2 outcome targets^{10,11}; improving access to food, ending all forms of malnutrition, enhancing agricultural productivity, sustainable food production and resilient agricultural practices, and maintaining genetic diversity of food production. Recognising the opportunities for innovation within this challenge theme, applicants are encouraged to consider where innovations could be impactful in areas including, but not limited to;

- Advancing sustainable, resilient, equitable and healthy food systems;
- Strengthening the use of technology (including digital) and data in food systems transformations, with particular consideration of gender-responsive interventions;
- Encouraging nutrition-sensitive agriculture interventions that advance nutritionally rich foods and dietary diversity, and that recognise the importance of genetic diversity in food production;
- Fostering climate resilient and nature-positive production systems;
- Harnessing the role of blue foods^{12,13} for sustainable, resilient, equitable and healthy food systems.

In line with the SFI Future Innovator Prize framework, solutions must be underpinned by a credible and robust pathway to impact, built on primary evidence gathered through direct engagement with stakeholders. Solutions must demonstrate context-specific expected impact in one of Irish Aid's

¹⁰ https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal2#targets_and_indicators

¹¹ Challenges associated with related goals and targets will also be considered where a clear impact on ending hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture can be demonstrated. Applicants may wish to refer to the [Nexus Approach For The SDGs: Interlinkages between the goals and targets](#)

¹²Blue food: food derived from aquatic animals, plants or algae that are caught or cultivate in freshwater and marine environments; <https://bluefood.earth/>

¹³ <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/2f12c8a2-fc0a-4569-bb97-6b5dbf5b6fbc/content>

partner countries (see below), but applicants are also encouraged to consider broader opportunities where solutions may have wider impact and may foster learning for regional and sub-regional use.

Innovative solutions may include development of novel technologies, repurposing existing technologies, and addressing barriers to deployment of known solutions. Consideration should also be given to novel approaches to enable decision and policy-making, such as for planning, measurement, monitoring and evaluation, as well as meaningful inclusion of local communities in these processes, particularly women and youth. Finally, teams must demonstrate capacity to deliver their solution. Applicants should consider specific barriers related to deployment and scalability, as well as to cost, sustainability and access to infrastructure in the partner country.

Eligible partner countries for this SDG Challenge Call are: Cambodia; Laos; Palestine; Vietnam; ODA-eligible countries on the African continent; ODA-eligible Small Island Developing States (SIDS), (Refer to Appendix 2 for expanded list). See Section 9 for more information on applicant eligibility.

6 Remit

The SDG Challenge recognises that addressing the Sustainable Development Goals requires transdisciplinary teams, involving expertise from across research disciplines as well as from outside of academia to develop integrated solutions for complex challenges. Proposed solutions must rely on or be directly informed by a STEM innovation and teams must include corresponding expertise. It is also strongly encouraged that teams include expertise relevant to the adoption and deployment of solutions, in areas such as international development, economics, behavioural science and others. Resources should be allocated appropriately to reflect all contributions to the team.

If potential applicants are unsure about the alignment of their proposed challenge/solution to the thematic area or remit of the call, they may wish to contact us at challenges@sfi.ie in advance of preparing an application.

7 State Aid and SFI Grant Funding

As per SFI's Grant Conditions (inclusive of SFI's General Terms & Conditions¹⁴, Letters of Offer and SFI Policy documents¹⁵), all SFI funding granted is subject to, and must be compliant with, State aid legislation based on Article 107(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)¹⁶.

Namely, research activities undertaken as part of a Grant awarded under the SDG Challenge programme, and agreed to subject to SFI's Grant Conditions, must be "non-economic" in nature and be designed to ensure that any funding received does not, directly or indirectly, give rise to the granting of State aid.

Where a proposed programme of research involves collaboration with an 'undertaking'¹⁷ or industry party, the activities **must** comply with the definition of "effective collaboration" and the conditions relating to the allocation between the parties of the results and/or intellectual property rights arising from the collaboration as per the 2022 Framework for State aid for research and development and innovation (2022/C 414/01) (the "Framework"¹⁸). SFI has set out guidance to support how the programme of research or project is developed and undertaken in accordance with these conditions. See 'Guidance on State aid for applicants to, and recipients of, SFI Grant funding' for further information.¹⁹

Where a proposed programme of research activities involves a collaboration with an industry party or "undertaking", for all or part of the term of the Grant, applicants must demonstrate compliance with the conditions of "effective collaboration" and complete an "Industry Collaboration Form" (ICF). The ICF is to assist applicants in defining the relationship with the relevant industry partners in order to comply with the conditions of "effective collaboration". SFI require that the ICF is completed and returned to SFI on or before the date that the Collaborative Research (or Intellectual Property Rights) Agreement has been 'agreed' with, or signed by, the relevant partner(s). For the SFI SDG Challenge Programme the form should be submitted by the Principal Investigator and uploaded to SESAME. A download of the ICF and related guidance, inclusive of an FAQ document, can be found on the SFI website.²⁰

¹⁴ <https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/sfi-general-terms-and-conditions/>

¹⁵ <https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/>

¹⁶ [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52016XC0719\(05\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52016XC0719(05)&from=EN)

¹⁷ The concept of an "undertaking" under EU competition law rules is an entity that is engaged in an "economic activity" regardless of its legal status or the way that it is financed. An activity is economic in nature when it involves offering goods or services on a market.

¹⁸ https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2022.414.01.0001.01.ENG

¹⁹ <https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/state-aid>

²⁰ <https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/state-aid/ICF-FAQs.pdf>

A copy of each CRA arising from the Grant must be held on file by the relevant Research Body. SFI may request a copy of the signed CRA to be provided (as advised in the Grant Terms & Conditions) and held on file by SFI for audit purposes. Further information on the role of the CRA and SFI's ex-post State aid verification checks (i.e., on-going checks after the granting of funds / partial funds) can be found in 'Guidance on State aid for applicants to, and recipients of, SFI Grant funding' on the SFI website.²¹ The ICF and related guidance, inclusive of an FAQ document, can be found on the SFI website.²²

The costs of the proposed programme of research activities should be calculated on the basis of generally accepted accounting principles.²³ Grant holders are required to put in place a full economic costing model for all activities carried out with SFI funds. Where SFI funded Research Bodies carry out activities of both economic and non-economic nature, the costs, funding and revenues of each of the two activities must be clearly accounted for separately.²⁴

Applicants are advised to seek independent legal advice in advance of applying to SFI for funding where further clarification is sought.

8 Who Can Apply?

The SDG Challenge is intended to support highly motivated, transdisciplinary teams committed to developing transformative, sustainable solutions that will contribute to addressing development challenges under the UN SDGs in Irish Aid's partner countries. It is expected that teams will encompass a range of technical and non-technical skills to address barriers associated with challenge definition and solution deployment.

Partnership and collaboration are at the heart of achieving the SDGs. The SDG Challenge aims, in as far as possible, to foster collaborative and equitable partnerships between researchers in Ireland and those in partner countries, and to fully recognise the capacity and knowledge that each contribute.

²¹ <https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/state-aid/State-Aid-Guidance.pdf>

²² <https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/state-aid/>

²³ <https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/state-aid/>

²⁴ Where SFI funded Research Body engage in both economic and non-economic activities, the economic uses must consume exactly the same inputs (such as material, equipment, labour and fixed capital) as the non-economic activities and the capacity allocated each year to such economic activities does not exceed 20 % of the Research Centre's overall annual capacity. Please see paragraph 21 of the Framework: "Where the research organisation or research infrastructure is used almost exclusively for a non-economic activity, its funding may fall outside State aid rules in its entirety, provided that the economic use remains purely ancillary, that is to say corresponds to an activity which is directly related to and necessary for the operation of the research organisation or research infrastructure or intrinsically linked to its main non- economic use, and which is limited in scope."

Applicants are encouraged to refer to good practice guidelines on establishing and maintaining such partnerships²⁵.

Teams must include expertise in the STEM research area underpinning the proposed solution, but should also include relevant knowledge or experience in complementary areas such as, for example, international development, economics, behavioural science or others, in order to inform the development, translation (incl. adoption) and impact of solutions. As part of an application, two academic researchers (at least one from a relevant STEM discipline) must be identified as part of the core-team. Funding should be allocated appropriately to reflect the various contributions to the team.

Applications to the prize must identify a core applicant/leadership team comprising a minimum of three or maximum of four members, as outlined below (please note difference in number of core team members compared to other SFI Challenge Calls). Although core team members will have different designations in the application process, all team members will be evaluated equally in the review process.

- **Team Lead** (mandatory) – It is expected that the Team Lead will have responsibility for managing the activities of the team, will provide technical leadership and have overall responsibility for delivery of research programme objectives. It is expected that the Team Lead has a demonstrable track record relevant to the proposed solution. This team member must be based in a SFI eligible research body²⁶ and will be designated Lead Applicant in the application.
- **Partner Country Team Co-Lead** (mandatory) – All teams must include a Team Co-Lead based in one of the eligible partner countries listed in Section 5. The Partner Country Team Co-Lead must be based in an eligible HEI or RPO in the partner country and will have appropriate research expertise relevant to the application. This team member will be designated as a Collaborator in the application (note that the Partner Country Team Co-Lead will have equal status to other team members; designation as collaborator is for the purposes of submission of the SESAME application only).
- **Team Co-Lead** (optional) – An additional Team Co-Lead may be included and will provide leadership as part of the research programme and should bring complementary technical/disciplinary expertise to that of the Team Lead. This team member must be based in a SFI eligible research body²⁷ and will be designated Co-Applicant in the application.

²⁵ There are various guidelines available on engaging in partnerships, for example: *EUA Responsible Partnering - Joining Forces in a World of Open Innovation*

²⁶ <https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/eligibility-related-information/>

²⁷ <https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/eligibility-related-information/>

- **Societal Impact Champion** (optional) - The Societal Impact Champion will provide non-technical leadership and support to identify and validate challenges in addition to advising on solution development. Importantly, it is envisaged that the Societal Impact Champion will play a crucial role in identifying barriers and 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 and have appropriate experience in areas relevant to the societal impact and international development focus of the application. The Societal Impact Champion may come from, for example: public sector/government, non-governmental organisations, charities, patient advocacy, philanthropy or civil society. **Where a Societal Impact Champion is not included at the application stage, applicant teams should indicate how they will access relevant end-users, stakeholders, etc. to inform the non-technical aspects of the project.**

Following successful application, core teams will have an opportunity to build a broader challenge team. This will include identification and recruitment of additional collaborators (e.g., researchers, beneficiaries, end-users, stakeholders or students) and planning or defining activities they will undertake as part of the challenge team. Applications may reference individuals outside the core team who are anticipated to play a future role as team members. In such cases, it is important to highlight the discipline and skill set that these individuals will bring to the team.

In addition, funded teams will be assigned a liaison in Irish Aid or one of their overseas missions to further inform the development and deployment of their solution, facilitate access to stakeholder networks and to provide relevant policy context.

External Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy 2023-2028

The SFI Strategy: *Shaping Our Future* underscores SFI's commitment to building equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) within the Irish research and innovation sector²⁸. SFI recognises that excellent research stems from diverse and inclusive teams which reflect our society and the communities we serve. As such, SFI aspires to pro-actively lead in driving the EDI agenda forward through the research and research teams that it funds.

²⁸ <https://www.sfi.ie/strategy/SFI-Strategy-2025.pdf>

In SFI's External Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy 2023-2028²⁹, increasing the number of women and members of Historically Underserved Communities³⁰ in Applicant Teams are key objectives. As such, women and members of Historically Underserved Communities are strongly encouraged to apply to this programme. Further details on SFI's data concerning application submission and success rates by gender (binary) can be found on the SFI website.³¹

Gender data fields on the SFI Grants and Awards Management System, SESAME, have been expanded to encompass more inclusive gender identifiers. These expanded gender identifier fields support those objectives described in SFI's External EDI Strategy, which aims to be a key driver of an inclusive research culture, lead in minimising barriers to participation in the research endeavour, and ensure that its investment reflects the input of researchers that are representative of society, and thus the outputs are relevant to society. Gender data gathered will inform the diversity of the applicant group. It will help to inform future iterations of this and similar programme calls. The data gathered will also inform how we can best improve the representation of other Historically Underserved Communities, including individuals from underrepresented genders, in our portfolio of grants awarded.

Furthermore, as part of its EDI Strategy, SFI aims to increase awareness of the sex and gender dimension in research, by requesting that researchers demonstrate that they have considered any potential biological sex and/or socio-cultural gender aspects in their proposed research (See section 12.3).

9 Applicant Team Composition & Eligibility

For the SDG Challenge, applications must satisfy the following eligibility criteria.

The **Ireland-based** Team Lead/Co-Lead must:

- Be a **member of academic staff** of an eligible Research Body³² (permanent or with a contract that covers the period of the award),
or
- Be a **contract researcher** with a contract that covers the period of the award (contract may be subject to receipt of the award).
and

²⁹ <https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/gender/>

³⁰ For the purposes of this Strategy, Historically Underserved Community encompasses a broad and diverse range of historically marginalised groups including but not limited to the nine protected grounds established in the [Equal Status Acts 2000-2018](#) and socioeconomic status.

³¹ <https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/gender/>

³² <https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/eligibility-related-information/>

- Hold a PhD or equivalent. Please consult the SFI Policy on PhD Equivalence⁶ for further information*.

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. The track record of eligible team members and their role in the team will be assessed as part of the review process. **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 equivalence³³.*

The **Partner Country** Team Co-Lead must:

- Be employed at a HEI or RPO in one of the partner countries eligible under this call (See Section 5). The HEI/RPO in the partner country must be a publicly funded or not-for-profit institution. The RPO must have the capacity and infrastructure to support the research, should be research active and be able to demonstrate the standard of academic rigour required for a significant research project.
- Be a **member of academic staff or a contract researcher** at an eligible HEI/RPO with a contract that covers the period of the award.
- Hold a PhD or equivalent. Please consult the SFI Policy on PhD Equivalence⁶ for further information.

Unlike other calls under the SFI Future Innovator Prize, applications will not be accepted where a Team Lead or Co-Lead is a postgraduate researcher.

In cases where the Team Lead and/or Co-Lead is a postdoctoral researcher, the application must include a Letter of Support from an established researcher confirming they will act as a mentor to the Lead/Co-Lead for the duration of the award (see Section 12.7 for further details). The Partner Country Team Co-Lead may not be a postdoctoral researcher.

³³This should be noted, for example, for the purpose of ensuring appropriate supervisory arrangements for PhD students.

Please note that **Members of the Core Team** (Lead/Co-Lead Applicants, Societal Impact Champion) are permitted to be named on only one application to this call.

10 Programme Structure and Funding

There are three phases to the programme: **Concept, Seed and Prize Award.**

Applications to the programme can request up to €300,000 in total direct costs over a duration of 18-months. Up to €50,000 can be allocated for use during the Concept Phase of the programme (Months 1 – 6) while the remaining request of up to €250,000 can be allocated to the Seed Phase (Months 7 – 18). It is expected that approximately 5 teams will be funded through the programme and enter the Concept Phase. To reflect the collaborative nature of the research to be undertaken and the joint leadership of teams funded under this programme, applications must include funding allocations for researchers based in eligible institutions in both Ireland and in the partner country (See section 12.34 for more information on the Budget).

At the conclusion of the Concept Phase, all teams that are deemed competitive and whose project demonstrates high impact potential may progress to the Seed Phase as finalists. Following the Seed Phase, one or more teams may be provided with follow-on funding from the prize fund of up to €1M.

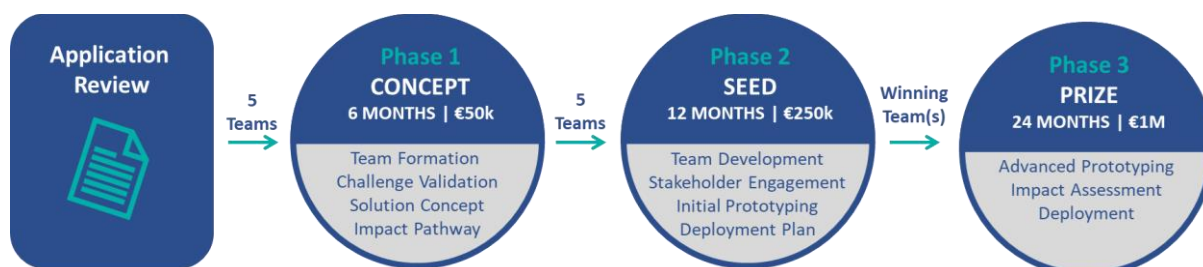


Figure 2. Phase structure of the SFI Future Innovator Prize. Numbers of teams and award sizes are indicative and may differ depending on the specific challenge call and outcome of the review process.

10.1 Application

Applications to this programme should provide information on four key areas:

- **Team:** Applicants should provide a clear description on how, through its composition, complementarity and formation, the team brings a unique perspective in addressing this problem. Applicants are advised not to provide biographies of team members rather to convey the team's ambition and its ability to deliver. Information on the team will be complemented by the curricula vitae submitted as part of the application.

- **Challenge/Problem:** Applicants should describe clearly the specific challenge/problem that will be addressed, articulate their understanding of it and identify key issues or barriers in addressing this problem. This should include consideration of the specific context of this challenge in the partner country. As part of this description, insights from engaging with stakeholders/beneficiaries and how this has validated the problem should be included. Applicants may also include information on the wider relevance of the proposed challenge/problem beyond the partner country.
- **Solution:** Applicants should clearly describe the solution proposed. This should include a description of how the proposed solution is novel and/or unconventional in its approach, what is its current stage of technical development, what is the current state-of-the-art and how will the proposed approach overcome current barriers. Applicants should include consideration of ethical or regulatory issues where relevant. Evidence that the solution is feasible/viable associated risks should be provided. Applicants may consider providing a number of high-level milestones/deliverables (and achievement times).
- **Societal Impact:** Applicants should outline the societal impact that their proposed solution can achieve in the partner country and more broadly. Applicants should outline outcomes their solution is expected to deliver, as well as timeframe for delivery.

Applications will be assessed based on the review process and criteria described in Section 11. Approximately five³⁴ of the most competitive teams will enter the Concept Phase of the programme.

10.2 Workshop Support Grants

The SDG Challenge is intended to support highly motivated, interdisciplinary and international challenge teams, who together with beneficiaries, end-users and other stakeholders will identify and validate relevant, meaningful and important challenges, and co-create solutions that will maximise societal impact. To facilitate this engagement, instigate team formation and seed idea generation, SFI and Irish Aid will provide limited support to organise networking events. Organisers are expected to include participants from potential partner countries, and are encouraged to engage with a broad network of innovators (including from outside of academia) that may help to strengthen the societal impact of applications to the programme. In organising such networking events, applicants are encouraged to consider their carbon footprint relating to travel, and consider options with lowest carbon impact.

³⁴ SFI reserves the right to fund a greater or fewer number of teams at either phase depending on quality and budget availability.

Departments, institutions and Research Centres are encouraged to apply, but individual researchers may also apply to organise such an event. Requests may be made up to €5k and events should be of an appropriate scale to warrant support from SFI and Irish Aid. Awards may not be used to support activities of individual applicants in the preparation of their application.

Applications for this support must be made by e-mail (to challenges@sfi.ie) through the research office at your host research body and using the application form available through the call webpage (Downloads section). Submissions must be made by 13:00, 5 July 2024 and events must take place before the application deadline (8 October 2024).

Decisions on applications for workshop support grants rest with SFI and applicants will be notified by 15 July 2024. Provision of this kind of support is provided under this call only and thus will not be available for other challenge calls. It is noted that no overhead will be paid on these awards.

10.3 Concept Phase

The Concept Phase is intended to support teams to develop a deeper understanding of the challenge/problem they propose to address and to explore the feasibility and viability case for the solution concept presented in their application.

Teams will be expected to further validate the challenge identified, provide detail on the proposed solution and its implementation, and describe an impact pathway for their solution. As part of the impact pathway, teams must describe technical and non-technical barriers to be overcome, the opportunity associated with addressing those barriers and how the solution will achieve impact.

During this process, the core (applicant) team will have the opportunity to recruit additional team members with skills and knowledge to support the objectives of the proposal. It is strongly recommended that stakeholders and beneficiaries be included as members of a broader team.

At the conclusion of the Concept Phase, teams will prepare a report and representatives from the team will be invited to pitch their concept to a panel of international experts drawn from a range of sectors such as academia, international development and policymaking. This panel will assess the progress of the team and the likelihood of success based on the review criteria in Section 11 and make a recommendation as to whether the team should progress to receive seed funding under the programme.

Based on the outcome of the international review panel, all teams deemed competitive and whose project demonstrates high impact potential may progress to the Seed Phase as finalists. During the

12-month Seed Phase, teams may use the remaining award amount. Those teams that do not progress at the end of the Concept Phase will have their funding decommitted.

10.4 Seed Phase

The Seed Phase enables teams to undertake further stakeholder engagement and collaborative co-development of their solution. This should be guided by the needs of stakeholders and beneficiaries and be informed by key measures of success identified through engagement with stakeholders and beneficiaries. During this phase of the award, the team should commence planning for further development and deployment of the solution. The programme is intended to support pre-commercial activities only, and as such development of existing products is not permitted. Notwithstanding this, as part of the Seed Phase it may be necessary for successful applicants to consider potential commercialisation routes as part of the project to fully scope solution deployment. In this context, teams should take into consideration the necessary requirements to facilitate this process and it is anticipated that the collective skill set of the challenge team will support such activity.

At the end of the Seed Phase, teams will submit a further progress report and will again pitch to an international prize panel who will assess progress made in developing their solution and validation of the deployment plan.

Following assessment of Seed Phase teams against the review criteria in Section 11, one or more teams may be selected to receive a prize award to support development and deployment of their challenge solution.

10.5 Prize Award

A total Prize Award fund of €1M will be available. The winning team(s) will finalise and implement their plan for solution deployment with a view to advancing delivery of the solution within two years of the end of the Prize Award Phase.

<p>NOTE: SFI reserves the right not to grant the Prize Award(s) if the review panel does not identify a winning team</p>

10.6 Skills Development

In addition to the provision of funding, SFI organises a number of training workshops during the Concept and Seed Phases to support team skills and knowledge development. The topics of these

workshops are selected to complement team activities within the specific phases of the programme. Further details of these workshops will be provided to teams successful in securing funding under the programme. **It is mandatory that core team members participate in these workshops.**

11 Review Process and Criteria

SFI became a signatory of the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)³⁵ in 2019 and, as such, is aligning its review and evaluation processes with DORA principles. In January 2022, SFI reinforced its existing commitment to the core principles by joining DORA as a member³⁶. To this end, all types of research output are recognised, and SFI is committed to assessing the quality and impact of research through means other than journal-based metrics and research performance-based metrics such as impact factors and H-index. In the spirit of supporting open research and as a signatory of Plan S,³⁷ SFI will also consider a commitment to making data and other types of research open and accessible. SFI is also a signatory to Ireland's National Action Plan for Open Research 2022-2030³⁸. To complement these activities and further reinforce SFI's commitment to the overarching objectives of the Narrative CV, during 2022, SFI became a signatory to the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment³⁹ and thus became a member of the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA)⁴⁰.

The review process and criteria apply at the application review stage and also at the progress review stages at the end of the Concept and Seed Phases.

Following submission, applications/progress reports are checked for eligibility.⁴¹ As part of these eligibility checks, input may be sought from Irish Aid on the alignment of applications to the SDG Challenge programme and eligibility of applicants. Teams that submit applications that are not deemed eligible under the programme or do not sufficiently align with the programme will be notified and their application will be withdrawn.

Following these checks, documentation will then be assigned to a panel of international experts secured by SFI for review. The reviews for the Concept and Seed Phase Progress Reviews will also

³⁵ <https://sfdora.org/read/>

³⁶ Contributor level membership

³⁷ <https://www.coalition-s.org/>

³⁸ [National Action Plan | National Open Research Forum \(norfi.ie\)](https://www.norfi.ie/national-action-plan)

³⁹ https://coara.eu/app/uploads/2022/09/2022_07_19_rra_agreement_final.pdf

⁴⁰ <https://coara.eu/>

⁴¹ Applications are checked for compliance with: non-technical mandatory criteria (e.g. all sections complete, page numbers not exceeded); technical mandatory criteria (e.g. any applicant eligibility requirements, alignment with the remit of the call); and any other requirements outlined in the call document.

include an interview between the expert panel and the applicant group. At all stages, projects will be assessed based on the following criteria:

- **Quality, experience and ambition of the applicant team** – Consideration will be given to the team’s ambition, complementarity of expertise, the appropriateness of its composition for addressing the proposed challenge and that necessary partnerships/collaborations are in place to deliver the proposed impact. Consideration will also be given to the quality, significance and relevance of the individual team members’ track record and key achievements as demonstrated in the CVs under the following headings: 1) Generation of Knowledge, 2) Development of Individuals and Collaboration, 3) Supporting Broader Society & the Economy and, 4) Supporting the Research Community.⁴² The review will make note of individuals’ career stages and research disciplines, taking into account any periods of leave.
- **Understanding of the challenge/problem** – Consideration will be given to recognition and understanding of the significance of the problem identified. Stakeholder/beneficiary engagement undertaken in validation of the problem will also be taken into account.
- **Novelty of the proposed solution, including its potential to deliver disruptive innovation** – Consideration will be given to the innovation potential of the overall proposed solution, including the novelty of the proposed solution, comprehension of the current state of the art, value for money, the sex and gender dimension etc. Note that novelty may arise through combination, convergence, application or repurposing of technologies in a new or unforeseen way.
- **Transformative societal impact potential of the solution** – Consideration will be given to the potential for the solution to create significant beneficial societal change or impact. Stakeholder/beneficiary engagement undertaken in validation of the solution will also be taken into account.
- **Feasibility of execution within the budget and timeframe permitted** – Consideration will be given to the feasibility of delivering the project within the budget and timeframe of the Concept and Seed Phases and likelihood that this can lead to successful delivery of the solution during the Prize Award Phase.

⁴² Examples are provided in the Applicant CV template, which is available on the Programme website.

NOTE: The Sex and Gender Dimension Statement will be evaluated as part of **Understanding of the challenge/problem, Novelty of the proposed solution and Transformative societal impact potential of the solution** components of the review, if relevant.

Under the SDG Challenge, all review criteria will be evaluated considering the context-specific nature of the proposed challenge/solution in the partner country. Only applications deemed to be of both excellent scientific/engineering/technical quality and demonstrating strong impact potential will be recommended for funding by the panel. Teams that are not funded or do not progress between award stages will be notified by SFI.

The identity of international experts who conduct reviews shall remain confidential and will not be disclosed to applicants. SFI shall not be liable for the release of information concerning proposals to third parties by those international peer reviewers involved in the review process.

Reviewers engaged by SFI are required to abide by the SFI Reviewer Code of Conduct⁴³. The submission of an application to SFI shall be construed as consent by the applicant(s) to participate in the peer-review process and for their application to be shared with Irish Aid. SFI reserves the right to return applications without review where they do not meet the eligibility criteria.

SFI reserves the right to modify the review process. Applicants will be notified of any relevant modification to the review procedure. The final funding decisions are at the sole and exclusive discretion of SFI.

12 Application Procedure

Applications to this call of the SFI Future Innovator Prize must be submitted through SESAME, SFI's online grants and awards management system in advance of the application deadline indicated on the first page of this document. Full details of this application procedure can be found in the **SDG Challenge SESAME Guide** available for download from SDG Challenge webpage.

Application through SESAME, involves completion of an online form with details on, for example, team members, alignment to research areas/SDG and requested budget. In addition, applicants will be required to upload information in PDF documents.

If your submission relates to a previous unsuccessful application to any SFI scheme, a statement referencing the previous application and explaining the differences must be provided as part of the

⁴³ <http://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/review/>

SESAME application and must make reference to reviewer comments where relevant. This statement will assist SFI Scientific Staff in the assessment of the eligibility of a revised application and will not be shared with reviewers. See SFI's Resubmission policy for further details.⁴⁴

Given the time commitment involved with leading on an SFI Challenge award, SFI may follow up with individuals managing other/multiple SFI grants to provide justification and rationale for how they would manage two or more major SFI grants. This information is provided for planning purposes by SFI Scientific Staff, and will not be shared with reviewers.

Applications to the SDG Challenge comprise a number of sections that include:

12.1 Idea

This section of the application allows you to provide summary information on the idea you are proposing. As part of this section, you should provide a clear and concise summary of your idea. Ensure that you clearly describe the challenge you have identified and your proposed solution. Describe what is visionary about the challenge and what is unconventional about your approach, why you expect it to succeed and how it will deliver impact.

12.2 Team, Challenge, Solution & Societal Impact

This section provides you with the opportunity to provide more detailed information on the team, societal challenge, proposed solution and the societal impact that your solution will deliver. Please download the application form template from the challenge website and please refer to Section 10.1 above for guidance on what should be considered when completing this template.

All fields should be completed, converted to PDF and uploaded in SESAME as part of your application.

Ethics and Scientific Issues

In preparing your application to the programme, please review the SFI guidance on ethical and scientific issues⁴⁵.

12.3 Sex and Gender Dimension in Research Statement (max. 1000 words).

In accordance with the SFI External Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy⁴⁶, all applicants must complete a statement articulating the consideration of biological sex and/or social gender

⁴⁴ <http://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/eligibility-related-information/>

⁴⁵ <http://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/ethical-and-scientific-issues/>

⁴⁶ <http://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/gender/>

variables in their research programme. Please consult the Guidance for Applicants on Ethical and Scientific Issues⁴⁷ for resources on how to address the sex and/or gender dimension of research in your grant.

Do not include information on how you have addressed gender equality, diversity and inclusion in your research team/environment; this should be addressed in the body of the proposal and/or in your CV, as appropriate.

To complete this section, please consider the following questions:

1. Is sex as a biological variable taken into account in the research design, methods, analysis and interpretation, and/or dissemination of findings?
2. Is gender as a socio-cultural factor taken into account in the research design, methods, analysis and interpretation, and/or dissemination of findings?

If the answer is yes, please describe how sex and/or gender considerations will be integrated into your research proposal. If no, please explain why sex and/or gender are not applicable to your research proposal.

12.4 Budget

This section should be used to describe the budget (direct costs) and resources you will need. Given the phased structure of the SFI Future Innovator Prize programme, it will not be possible to provide significant detail in relation to requirements for the Seed Phase. As such, the requested budget and resources for this phase should be indicative and be based on what you currently envisage. It is recommended that you maximise the budget requested at each stage. In this section:

- Provide a breakdown of the indicative eligible direct costs (in €) associated with your application.
- Please review the SFI Grant Budget Policy⁴⁸ for eligible costs and team member salary scales.
- Please include any subcontracting to be undertaken in the Materials & Consumables section.
- Please provide a high-level justification for your Concept Phase requests.

Teaching replacement costs (Technological Universities/Institutes of Technology)

⁴⁷ <https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/ethical-and-scientific-issues/>

⁴⁸ <http://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/budget-finance-related-policies/>

Team Leads and Co-Leads in Technological Universities (TUs) or in 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. It is noted that postdoctoral researchers based in any eligible research body 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.

Societal Impact Champion Costs

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.

Partner country costs

Under this programme, it is expected that resources are allocated to all research partners involved in the challenge team. For budget allocations to the Partner Country Team Co-Lead, the following guidance should be followed:

- In the Concept Phase of the award, a maximum of €23k (of the total €50k) may be allocated to the Partner Country Team Co-Lead.
- In the Seed Phase of the award, a maximum of €115k (of the total €250k) may be allocated to the Partner Country Team Co-Lead.
- Eligible costs for the Partner Country Team Co-Lead are the same as those in the SFI Grant Budget Policy. However, local institutional salary scales should be used for research team members (e.g., postdoctoral research assistants, research assistants) funded under this award and should be indicated in the budget justification. Subject to appropriate justification, a contribution of up to 50% of salary costs for the Partner Country Team Co-Lead may be requested. The requested level should be commensurate with the time commitment to the project and the salary scale should be indicated in the budget justification.
- For each line-item, please indicate clearly if this to be allocated to the Partner Country Team Co-Lead.

In addition to direct costs, SFI also makes an indirect or overhead contribution to the host research body, which is reflected as a percentage (30%) 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.

The Team Lead and their host Research Body will be responsible for administration and management of the whole award made under this programme and will be required to enter into a collaborative research agreement with host research body of the Partner Country Team Co-Lead to manage transfer of funds, including overheads. This collaborative research agreement must include appropriate conditions sufficient to ensure requirements set out in SFI's Grant General Terms and Conditions⁴⁹ are met, including but not limited to reporting, auditing and limitation of liability and indemnity. This collaborative agreement must be made available to SFI upon request and may be shared with Irish Aid.

12.5 Authorisation

For an application to be accepted, it must be authorised for submission by the host research body of the lead applicant. It should be noted that Research Body submission of an application confirms that the SFI Grant General Terms & Conditions have been read and understood⁵⁰. Submission may only be made by an authorised Research Body representative. In particular, the Research Body is approving:

- The eligibility of the applicants;
- That the applicants are, or will be upon receipt of the grant, recognised as employees of the Research Body for the duration of the grant;
- That the requested budget including salaries/stipends, equipment, travel and consumables are 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 and regulatory 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;

⁴⁹ <https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/sfi-general-terms-and-conditions/>

⁵⁰ <https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/sfi-general-terms-and-conditions/>

- That permission from all team members and collaborators has been obtained, such that SFI may receive their personal information, and may process such data for the purpose of peer review.
- That the information supplied in the application is correct and the research proposal is the applicant's own work

SFI's Grant Conditions shall govern the administration of SFI grants and awards to the exclusion of this and any other oral, written, or recorded statement.

12.6 Curricula Vitae

A Narrative CV for the **Lead** and **Co-Lead** using the templates available on the programme website⁵¹, must be completed and uploaded (**upload; max. 3 pages**). **Please click on "Save Draft" after upload.** The SFI Narrative CV template not only provides an opportunity to give information about education, employment record and research outputs where relevant, but also allows you to identify key achievements in research and impact. The current Narrative CV template allows for the provision of additional information such as that relating to periods of leave from research, where relevant. **Also, reference to metrics such as journal impact factor, h-index and total number of publications are not permitted. If these metrics are included, they will be redacted prior to expert review.**

The Societal Impact Champion is not required to use the CV template provided and may use a format of their choosing. However, the overall length of the CV must not exceed three pages. **Also, reference to metrics such as journal impact factor, h-index and total number of publications are not permitted. If these metrics are included, they will be redacted prior to expert review.**

San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)

SFI became a signatory of the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)⁵² in 2019 and as such, is aligning its review and evaluation processes with DORA principles. In January 2022, SFI reinforced its existing commitment to the core principles by joining DORA as a member⁵³. To this end, all types of research output are recognised, and SFI is committed to assessing the quality and impact of research through means other than journal-based metrics and research performance-based metrics such as impact factors and H-index. In the spirit of supporting open research and as a signatory of Plan

⁵¹ <https://www.sfi.ie/funding/funding-calls/future-innovator-sdg/>

⁵² <https://sfdora.org/read/>

⁵³ Contributor level membership

S,⁵⁴ SFI will also consider a commitment to making data and other types of research open and accessible. SFI is also a signatory to Ireland's National Action Plan for Open Research 2022-2030⁵⁵. To complement these activities and further reinforce SFI's commitment to the overarching objectives of the Narrative CV, during 2022, SFI became a signatory to the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment⁵⁶ and thus became a member of the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA)⁵⁷.

NOTE: The Societal Impact Champion is not required to use the narrative CV template provided and may use a CV format of their choosing. However, the overall length of the CV must not exceed three pages. **Also, reference to metrics such as journal impact factor, h-index and total number of publications are not permitted. If these metrics are included, they will be redacted prior to expert review.**

12.7 Letters of Support

As part of an application to the prize, several Letters of Support must be provided. These include:

- A Letter of Support from the **Host Research Body of the Team Lead, Team Co-Lead and Partner Country Team Co-Lead** which should confirm the eligibility of the applicant, comment on the significance of the proposal and confirm related infrastructure and services available to the applicant. In addition, in cases where team members will be transferring from another active SFI research grant, an outline of the management plan (i.e., a description of how the individual will be replaced on the original award) to assure how these awards progress satisfactorily should be provided. Note also the Host Research Body Letter of Support should contain a description of the institutional policy regarding management of conflicts of interest.
- Where any applicant is a postdoctoral researcher, a Letter of Support must be provided from an established researcher from their Host Research Body endorsing the application. The established researcher may or may not be also an applicant on the proposal. Each Letter of Support must confirm that the established researcher has agreed to act as mentor for the duration of the award. In cases where the established researcher is not the current mentor/supervisor, the Letter of Support must outline how this situation will be managed and must be countersigned by the current mentor/supervisor of the postdoctoral researcher. The Letter of Support must include details of the postdoctoral researcher's current role and

⁵⁴ <https://www.coalition-s.org/>

⁵⁵ <https://norf.ie/national-action-plan/>

⁵⁶ https://coara.eu/app/uploads/2022/09/2022_07_19_rra_agreement_final.pdf

⁵⁷ <https://coara.eu/>

funding arrangements including remuneration level. The grant identification code and grant title under which the postdoctoral researcher is currently funded should also be provided.

- A Letter of Support from the **Societal Impact Champion** outlining their role in the team and how they propose to actively guide/support the team to deliver impact.

NOTE: No additional Letters of Support may be included at the application stage. Any additional/unsolicited Letters of Support will be removed from an application.

13 Data Management Plans

Good data governance and stewardship are key components of good research practice. **While data Management Plans are not required to be submitted at the application stage of this programme, teams are encouraged to consider data management at an early stage in their project.** At the end of the Seed Phase, as part of the Seed Phase Progress Report, teams will be required to provide a short (2 page) Data Management Plan (DMP). In preparing this plan, consideration should be given to [SFI's Guidance on Data Management Plans](#).⁵⁸ A DMP is a living document which details the procedures for careful handling of data and other research outputs. A DMP follows the data through the lifecycle of the programme of research⁵⁹, from collection to analysis and interpretation, sharing and dissemination, and long-term storage.

Data Management Plan Requirements for SFI Grant Applicants

DMPs will be reviewed to ensure that they contain sufficient information on practices and standards as guided below; this assessment will be incorporated into the overall scoring criteria for the Research Programme section of the application. Although practices and standards vary across disciplines, SFI recommends the use of [Science Europe DMP templates and guidelines](#). Each DMP should include the following as appropriate to the programme or project⁶⁰:

1. Data description and collection or re-use of existing data
2. Documentation and data quality
3. Storage and backup during the research process

⁵⁸ <https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/open-research/SFI-DMP-Guidance-FINAL-140322.pdf>

⁵⁹ SFI-funded research programmes, as described in call documents, can range from a single research project to a collection of research projects encompassed in several work packages. The data management plan should reflect the relevant standards for individual research projects while describing a cohesive approach to managing data across the overall programme of research as appropriate.

⁶⁰ Based primarily on guidance provided by Science Europe: <https://www.scienceeurope.org/our-resources/practical-guide-to-the-international-alignment-of-research-data-management/> and supplemented by guidance from the European Research Council of the European Commission: https://erc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document/file/ERC_info_document-Open_Research_Data_and_Data_Management_Plans.pdf

4. Legal and ethical requirements, codes of conduct
5. Data sharing and long-term preservation
6. Data management responsibilities and resources including institutional or project-specific resources dedicated to managing data and ensuring adherence with the [FAIR](#) principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Re-usable).

14 Progress Review and Prize Award Management

Review of progress at the end of the Concept and Seed Phases will be undertaken by a sitting panel of international experts. This process will involve the completion and submission of a progress report to SFI and an interview with the sitting panel. The sitting panel will review progress and future plans and make a recommendation to SFI as to whether the team should progress to the subsequent phase of the programme. Guidance on progress reports will be provided to applicants at the start of each phase.

Prior to completion of the Seed Phase, the remaining teams will submit a progress report to SFI, followed by a final presentation and interview with a prize panel. This panel will assess the potential societal and economic impact of the work undertaken to date through the Concept and Seed Phases of the programme. Based on the recommendations of the prize panel, one or more teams may be selected to receive a prize award to support development and deployment of their challenge solution.

15 SFI's Policies and Positions

In addition to complying with the GT&Cs, applicants are expected to be familiar and consult with SFI policies/positions and with all relevant national policies when preparing their application to any SFI programme. All members involved in the funded research should be apprised of the following non-exhaustive list of relevant policies, which may be revised from time to time:

Clinical Trials

Research programmes that include clinical trials as part of the study must adhere to the **SFI Clinical Trial and Clinical Investigation Policy**,⁶¹ as well as with the requirements set out by the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA).

Animal Usage

⁶¹ <http://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/ethical-and-scientific-issues/>

Applicants intending to use animals in their research projects are obliged to comply with the **SFI Use of Animals in Research Policy**,⁶² and should also ensure that their studies align with the HRPAs position on the use of animals in research.

Research Integrity

SFI places paramount importance on ensuring that the highest standards of research integrity underpin all aspects of the research that it supports. To this end, SFI endorses the **National Policy Statement on Ensuring Research Integrity in Ireland**⁶³; that is, all institutions and SFI award holders are expected to abide by this statement and the **European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity**,⁶⁴ in addition to their respective institutional policies and procedures for handling research misconduct allegations.

Doctoral Education

For postgraduate students funded by SFI, the host Research Body is expected to adopt the principles, standards and good practice for doctoral education described in the **National Framework for Doctoral Education (2023)**.⁶⁵

Intellectual Property Management

Intellectual Property (IP) should be managed according to the policies set out in the Government publication: **Ireland's National IP Protocol 2019** and must comply with State aid Regulations.⁶⁶ The IP arrangements are the responsibility of the Research Body and shall reflect the collaborative nature of the project and the level of cash and in-kind commitment made by the Industry Partner. IP arrangements should be explicitly described in collaborative research agreements (CRAs).

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

SFI's ambition is that Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2023-2028 will be a key driver of an inclusive, engaged research culture and, through this Strategy, SFI will be an agent of change. As such, the SFI EDI Strategy presents a vision and strategy for SFI, as a leading research funder, to help reduce systemic barriers to participating in the research endeavour.

SFI has already demonstrated leadership in improving the representation of women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) research more broadly in the entire education talent pipeline. Whilst gender will remain a central tenet of the new EDI Strategy, SFI will now

⁶² http://www.sfi.ie/resources/SFI-Policy-on-the-Use-of-Animals-in-Research_June_2016.pdf

⁶³ <https://www.iaa.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/National-Policy-Statement-on-Ensuring-Research-Integrity-in-Ireland.pdf>

⁶⁴ <https://allea.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/European-Code-of-Conduct-Revised-Edition-2023.pdf>

⁶⁵ <https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2023/02/National-Framework-for-Doctoral-Education-2023.pdf>

⁶⁶ <http://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/national-policies-sfi-positions/>

proactively consider other areas of inequality or disadvantage to support an intersectional approach, in keeping with our values and best practice.

In the SFI Strategy 2025 *Shaping Our Future*,⁶⁷ targets are set for 35% of SFI's funded leadership positions (PIs & Co-PIs) to be women and for research teams to be composed of at least 40% of the underrepresented gender by 2025. As such, applicants should consider and describe how these targets can be achieved at all levels of the research team.

Research should fully consider potential biological sex and socio-cultural gender dimensions as key analytical and explanatory variables. As articulated in the SFI EDI Strategy, applicants are advised to demonstrate that they have considered any potential sex/gender aspects in their proposed research programme.

Maternity Supplement

SFI is committed to removing and mitigating any existing or perceived factors that may limit the participation of women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) careers. SFI invites its award holders to apply for a supplemental discretionary allowance to support their SFI-funded award when either an SFI Awardee or a team member, including PhD students funded by an SFI award, takes a period of maternity or adoptive leave.⁶⁸

Appeals Process

The Appeals Process Policy establishes procedures and responsibilities for the appeal of the declination of a proposal by SFI.⁶⁹

State Aid

Please refer to the **State aid** section (See section 7) above.

Child Protection

Where relevant, applicants and Research Bodies are required to comply with the provisions of the **Children First Act 2015**,⁷⁰ and the **National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017**.⁷¹ It is the responsibility of the Research Body to ensure that they are compliant with all applicable law.

Data Protection Policy

⁶⁷ <https://www.sfi.ie/strategy/>

⁶⁸ <https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/gender/>

⁶⁹ <https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/review/>

⁷⁰ <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2015/act/36/enacted/en/pdf>

⁷¹ http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Children_First_National_Guidance_2017.pdf

The General Data Protection Regulation⁷² is a legal framework that sets out guidelines for the collection and processing of personal information of individuals within the European Union.⁷³ Applicants are advised that they must be compliant with this regulation if they collect or process personal data.

SFI may collect, use and disclose personal data provided in the application and/or otherwise obtained under, or in connection with, the application for processing the submission, for the performance of its statutory powers and functions, and for the general activities of SFI. Further details regarding SFI's collection, use and disclosure of personal data, and the rights of individuals with respect to any personal data held by SFI, are available in the **SFI Privacy Statement**.⁷⁴

During peer review procedures, information may be sent to external experts in countries outside of the European Economic Area, including countries that are not recognised by the European Commission as having adequate data protection laws. By submitting an application to SFI, the Research Body and members of the Research Team are agreeing that they consent to the processing and transfer of personal information in this way.

During the application process or at any time thereafter, SFI may contact the Research Body, the Principal Investigator, or any member of the Research Team with regard to funding opportunities, activities or events organised by SFI or other relevant bodies, or for the purposes of monitoring and evaluation (including, but not limited to, the collection of scientific data or data relating to the application process). SFI may choose to authorise a third party to contact the Research Body, the Principal Investigator or any member of the Research Team on its behalf.

Conflict of Interest

SFI recognises that applicants may have a prior relationship with an industry partner 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 SFI and their Research Body and that any such situations are managed by the Research Body in accordance with the principles and mandates laid out in **Ireland's National IP Protocol 2019**.⁷⁵

Open access

⁷² <https://www.dataprotection.ie/>

⁷³ <https://www.eugdpr.org/>

⁷⁴ <http://www.sfi.ie/privacy/>

⁷⁵ <http://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/national-policies-sfi-positions/>

In line with the principles espoused by Plan S⁷⁶ and as a signatory of the National Action Plan for Open Research 2022- 30⁷⁷, SFI is committed to ensuring that all publicly funded research articles are openly available. Where a research publication arises in whole or in part from SFI-funded research (i.e., where at least one of the researchers concerned receives SFI funds in support of their endeavours), the researcher(s) should adhere to **SFI's Open Access policy**.⁷⁸ SFI monitors compliance with this policy through scientific and financial reporting, financial audits and other reviews, and data gathered through Research Outputs.

Data Management

Good data governance and stewardship are key components of good research practice. Science Foundation Ireland is part of an initiative for the voluntary international alignment of research data management policies.⁷⁹ Applicants may find it helpful to consult with this and Science Europe's framework for discipline-specific research data management if preparing a data management plan as part of their application for funding to SFI.⁸⁰ Applicants should review individual programme funding call requirements regarding data management plans and timelines as to when they are required to be submitted.

Current SFI policies and positions are reviewed on a regular basis; applicants are advised to consult the policy information in advance of submission of a proposal.

⁷⁶ <https://www.coalition-s.org/principles-and-implementation/>

⁷⁷ <https://norf.ie>

⁷⁸ <https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/open-research>

⁷⁹ <https://www.scienceeurope.org/our-resources/practical-guide-to-the-international-alignment-of-research-data-management/>

⁸⁰ <https://www.scienceeurope.org/our-resources/guidance-document-presenting-a-framework-for-discipline-specific-research-data-management/>

Appendix 1

SDG 2: Zero Hunger: Interlinkages between the goals and targets (taken from [A Nexus Approach For The SDGs, SDG Toolkit](#))



Appendix 2

Eligible Partner Country List*

ODA eligible countries in the African continent	ODA eligible Small Island Developing States
Algeria	Belize
Angola	Cabo Verde**
Benin	Comoros**
Botswana	Cuba
Burkina Faso	Dominica
Burundi	Dominican Republic
Cabo Verde**	Fiji
Cameroon	Grenada
Central African Republic	Guinea-Bissau**
Chad	Guyana
Comoros**	Haiti
Congo	Jamaica
Cote d'Ivoire	Kiribati
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Maldives
Djibouti	Marshall Islands
Egypt	Mauritius**
Equatorial Guinea	Micronesia
Eritrea	Montserrat
Eswatini	Nauru
Ethiopia	Niue
Gabon	Palau
Gambia	Papua New Guinea
Ghana	Saint Lucia
Guinea	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
Guinea-Bissau**	Samoa
Kenya	Sao Tome and Principe
Lesotho	Solomon Islands
Liberia	Suriname
Libya	Timor-Leste
Madagascar	Tokelau
Malawi	Tonga
Mali	Tuvalu
Mauritania	Vanuatu
Mauritius**	
Morocco	
Mozambique	
Namibia	
Niger	

Nigeria	
Rwanda	
Senegal	
Sierra Leone	
Somalia	
South Africa	
South Sudan	
Sudan	
Tanzania	
Togo	
Tunisia	
Uganda	
Zambia	
Zimbabwe	

* Eligibility of countries is determined based on the DAC list of ODA-eligible countries (source: <https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/DAC-List-of-ODA-Recipients-for-reporting-2024-25-flows.pdf>) in the African continent, and Small Island Developing States (source: <https://www.un.org/ohrlls/content/list-sids>), as of 3rd May 2024.

**ODA-eligible country in the African continent and ODA-eligible Small Island Developing State