Call Application Document

Terms of Reference

The OurTech Challenge seeks to strengthen the connections between people, their communities and with government.

OurTech refers to co-created technology-based innovations that empower citizens and communities to connect and engage with local and national government to address societal challenges.

The challenge focuses on supporting research teams to address the issue of enhancing the connections between government, communities and people. The challenge provides researchers with the opportunity to explore how digital technologies could enhance government processes and functions, create new value for the public through people-centric digital-first public services, and new ways to strengthen the connections between people, their communities and with government (both local and national).

The OurTech Challenge will support several national strategies (e.g., Making Innovation Real, Civil Service Renewal 2030 Strategy, Our Public Service 2020, AI - Here for Good, Connecting Government 2030 and Harnessing Digital – The Digital Ireland Framework) relating to digital transformation in, for example, the public service, and more broadly around the application of AI for societal good. It is envisaged that the challenge will , by demonstration of impact potential, inform national strategies and policies on how our society can be more resilient.

Areas of Interest

Applications are encouraged to focus on the challenge of strengthening the connections the between people, communities, and government based on principles of trust, privacy and security. Under this challenge, areas of interest include (along with illustrative examples of high-level research questions):

- **Knowledge, Learning & Skills** - How can access to scientific knowledge and data be made more accessible and equitable? How can remote learning opportunities be made more accessible and impactful?
- **Trust, Privacy and Security** – How can digital technologies build trust between people? Can the effects of misinformation be prevented? How can digital technologies ensure privacy while sharing more data? How can cyber-physical systems be made more robust and secure?

- **Health Systems and Health Care** – How can digital technologies enhance the efficiency of delivery and effectiveness of health care? How can digital technologies allow for more holistic approaches to managing physical and mental wellbeing?
- **Data-Driven Public Policy** – How can digital technologies be used to develop and promote inclusive, sustainable and ambitious national policies? Can digital technologies use data to assist in the design of more efficient and cohesive public policy?
- **Government Processes and Public Services** – How can digital technologies transform the delivery of government processes and services? How can public services be co-created with and realise new value for citizens?
- **Civic Engagement and Social Connections** – How can we strengthen engagement between citizens, communities and governments for societal good? How can digital technologies be used to increase the quality of social connections between people and communities?

This challenge is funded under the Digital Transformation component of the National Challenge Fund. Please refer to the section on Programme Remit for requirements associated with this.

Key Dates

Milestone	Date
Call Launch	7 November 2022
SESAME Open for Applications	14 November 2022
Application Deadline	10 February 2023
Funding Decision	April 2023
Award Start Date	1 June 2023
Concept Phase Review	Q4 2023
Seed Phase Review	Q4 2024
Grow Phase Review	Q4 2025
Prize Award Start Date	Q4 2026

Challenge Structure and Funding

The OurTech Challenge comprises four phases: Concept, Seed, Grow and Prize Award. Participation in the challenge will involve teams progressing through phases to compete for an overall Prize Award of €1M.

Phase	No. Teams	Duration (Months)	Funding (€)
Concept	10	6	50k
Seed	10	12	150k
Grow	3	12	500k
Prize Award	1	24	1M

Additional Guidance (Challenge specific)

Digital Responsibility

Leveraging data and digital technologies has transformative impact potential to address some of the most pressing societal challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and sustainability. However, the ubiquity and power of digital technologies requires that creators and users act responsibly to ensure they are utilised in an ethical way that reflects values such as safety, fairness and inclusion, transparency, and privacy. Where relevant, applications submitted to the National Challenge Fund should consider the ethical issues associated with digital assets or systems proposed and ensure that appropriate measures are in place to identify, monitor and manage risks across the full life cycle of the digital asset or system.

Contents

INTRODUCTION

1   The National Challenge Fund

The National Challenge Fund is a €65M research fund established under the Government's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), funded by the EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility,[1] that will support academic researchers to work with government, enterprise, public sector organisations and societal stakeholders to address national priorities for Ireland. This fund will be coordinated and administered by Science Foundation Ireland (SFI).

The National Challenge Fund will use challenge funding approaches to coordinate, mobilise and accelerate national research and innovation capacity to address key national challenges that underpin recovery efforts aligned to the Green Transition and Digital Transformation. 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.

The National Challenge Fund has three overarching objectives:

- **Impact** – To generate impact through advancement of sustainable solutions that demonstrate positive societal impact for Ireland, and inform national and European policy relating to the Green Transition and Digital Transformation.
- **Collaboration** – To enable collaboration between government departments, enterprise, the academic research community, and societal stakeholders to inform the scoping and validation of challenges relevant to our national recovery, resilience, and competitiveness.
- **Mobilisation** – To support the mobilisation of transdisciplinary teams[2], comprising academic researchers and societal stakeholders, to advance development of solutions to challenges identified.

The National Challenge Fund comprises eight challenge calls across the areas of Green Transition and Digital Transformation. Table 1 provides a high-level overview of the eight challenges. Please refer to the cover sheet in each document for details on the scope of the thematic areas, dates and specific funding available.

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[1] https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/recovery-coronavirus/recovery-and-resilience-facility_en
[2] 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.

Challenge	Description	Launch Date
2050 Challenge	To develop transformative, forward-looking solutions for Ireland to become climate neutral and resilient by 2050	August 2022
Future Digital Challenge	To realise transformational societal and economic impact from disruptive digital technologies	August 2022
A Healthy Environment for All Challenge	To restore and maintain clean air, water and soil for humans, animals and plants.	Q4 2022
Digital for Resilience Challenge	To gain deeper insights and better understanding of the origins and potential impacts of future environmental, social or economic shock events	Q4 2022
Energy Innovation Challenge	To accelerate Ireland's transition to a clean and secure energy system	Q4 2022
OurTech Challenge	To strengthen the connections between people, their communities and with government	Q4 2022
Sustainable Communities Challenge	To create sustainable, inclusive and productive ways of living in balance with nature, the environment and our planet	Q2 2023
Future Food Systems Challenge	To ensure sustainable, productive and resilient food systems	Q2 2023

2   Shaping Our Future

SFI'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. A key focus will be to deliver tangible benefits for society and SFI will build strategic, national and international partnerships to drive economic impact and to address societal challenges.

3   Impact 2030

Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy, *Impact 2030,*[4] sets out a whole-of-government strategy putting research and innovation (R&I) at the heart of addressing Ireland's social, economic and environmental challenges. The National Challenge Fund is a key action in Impact 2030 aimed at bringing about a step-change in Ireland's challenge-based R&I activity and approach. In the scoping of National Challenge Fund calls, SFI has engaged with key Government stakeholders in order to ensure

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[3] https://www.sfi.ie/strategy/
[4] https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/27c78-impact-2030-irelands-new-research-and-innovation-strategy/

alignment with national priorities, and where relevant, to provide access for researchers to stakeholders in government departments and public sector organisations.

4   Creating Our Future

The Government of Ireland *Creating our Future* campaign reached out to all corners of society to gather ideas about what researchers in Ireland should explore in order to create a better future for everyone. An independent expert committee reviewed the submissions and identified sixteen thematic areas where research and innovation might have a role to play in bringing about change. Examples of such areas included a focus on the creation of a more inclusive society, safeguarding of public interest and trust in a digital world, embedding climate action, future-proofing energy and water systems, and supporting innovation in farming and food. The campaign illustrated the potential power of engaging people and communities throughout Ireland in the framing of research questions, as well as the need for greater connectivity and collaboration across research disciplines. The National Challenge Fund is an opportunity for researchers and diverse stakeholders to work together to address issues highlighted by the Irish public. The database of ideas and campaign reports are available online.[5]

5   EU Missions

As part of Horizon Europe, the EU Missions[6] are an ambitious set of programmes designed to realise solutions to some of the greatest challenges faced by society. They are intended to support Europe's transformation to a greener, healthier, more inclusive, and resilient continent, and will engage Europeans in their design, implementation and monitoring. This approach to supporting research and innovation aligns strongly with challenge funding and, in particular, resonates with the principles employed in the National Challenge Fund, including: solution focus; supporting new forms of collaboration; and fostering engagement with societal stakeholders.
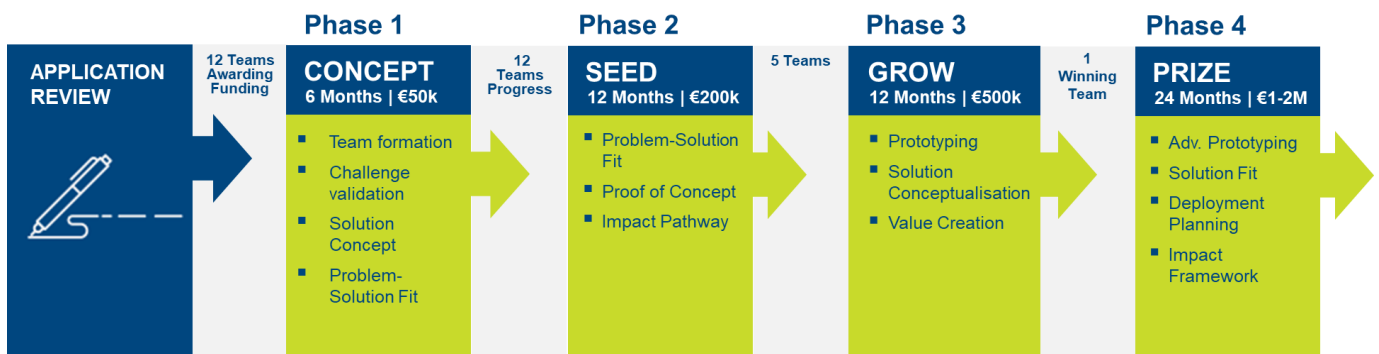
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[5] *https://creatingourfuture.ie/*
[6] *https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe/eu-missions-horizon-europe_en*

PROGRAMME STRUCTURE

6   Challenge Funding

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

(i)   **Transdisciplinarity and teamwork**, 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.

(iii)   **Acceleration** through agile and efficient research activities that enable rapid testing, refinement and progression of ideas toward tangible impact.

Challenge funding represents an approach to *engaged research*, which 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. Teams are also encouraged to explore how the broader public can be engaged, for example, through dissemination of findings, consultation or participation in research activities (e.g., citizen science).

7   Programme Phases and Budget

Challenges under the National Challenge Fund will comprise four phases: **Concept, Seed, Grow** and **Prize Award** (expected innovation activities in each phase are detailed in subsequent sections). Table 1 outlines the duration and funding that can be requested as part of each phase. The award amounts and numbers of teams that progress between phases may differ depending on the specific challenge call.

Table 1. *Overview of phases under National Challenge Fund calls. (*Note: Amounts may differ by challenge call – please consult call webpage for further details).*

Phase	Duration	Funding*
Concept	6 Months	Up to €50k
Seed	12 Months	Up to €150k/€200k
Grow	12 Months	Up to €500k
Prize	24 Months	Up to €1M/€2M

Depending on the challenge, applicants can request up to €200,000 or €250,000 in total direct costs over a duration of 18-months (Concept and Seed Phases). Up to €50,000 can be allocated for use during the Concept Phase of the programme (Months 1 – 6) while the remaining €150,000 or €200,000 can be allocated to the Seed Phase (Months 7 – 18).

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. Following the Seed Phase, a number of teams will progress to the Grow Phase as finalists, where they will receive up to €500k, and will ultimately compete for the overall Prize award.

Phase 1		Phase 2		Phase 3		Phase 4
APPLICATION REVIEW	**12 Teams Awarding Funding**	**CONCEPT** 6 Months | €50k	**12 Teams Progress**	**SEED** 12 Months | €200k	**5 Teams**	**GROW** 12 Months | €500k	**1 Winning Team**	**PRIZE** 24 Months | €1-2M

Concept activities:
- Team formation
- Challenge validation
- Solution Concept
- Problem-Solution Fit

Seed activities:
- Problem-Solution Fit
- Proof of Concept
- Impact Pathway

Grow activities:
- Prototyping
- Solution Conceptualisation
- Value Creation

Prize activities:
- Adv. Prototyping
- Solution Fit
- Deployment Planning
- Impact Framework

Figure 1. *Example of phased structure of a challenge programme under the National Challenge Fund. Innovation activities associated with each phase are also shown. (Numbers of teams and award amounts are indicative and may differ depending on the specific challenge call and outcome of the review process).*

Figure 1 outlines the phased structure of the programme. At the conclusion of each phase, teams will be subject to review by a panel of international experts drawn from a range of sectors such as academia, policymaking, impact and investment. This panel will assess the progress of the team and the likelihood of success and make a recommendation as to whether the team should progress to the next phase of the programme. This review process and the review criteria are described in detail in Section 14.

Concept Phase (6 months)

The Concept Phase is intended to support the formation of teams and to assist them in developing a deeper understanding of the challenge/problem they propose to address and to explore the feasibility and viability of a solution concept. The programme is designed to support researchers to reassess their assumptions about an identified challenge/problem through stakeholder engagement[7] and as such,

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[7] *Teams are encouraged to engage and consult with stakeholders across all relevant sectors of society. Please note that if collaborative research activity is undertaken with an industry partner, this must be compliant with the conditions of "effective collaboration". Please refer to Section 9 for more information.*

the understanding of challenges and solutions that teams develop as part of the Concept Phase may evolve from those presented in their original application.

Teams will be expected to further develop detail on the proposed solution and its implementation, and to describe an impact pathway for how the solution might be successfully implemented. As part of the impact pathway, teams will be expected to describe both technical and non-technical barriers to be overcome, the opportunity associated with addressing these barriers and how the solution will achieve impact.

During all stages of this process teams are encouraged to expand allowing them to bring in new members with additional skills and knowledge to support the objectives of the research activities.

Seed Phase (12 months)

The Seed Phase enables teams to continue stakeholder engagement and undertake co-development of an initial solution concept (proof of concept). This should 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. Given the breadth of potential impact that the challenge calls target, these impacts could be achieved through a variety of routes such as social innovation, commercialisation, or policy change. It is expected that as more information becomes available to teams during the validation and early prototyping process that the collective skill set of the challenge team may need to be expanded to support such activity.

Grow Phase (12 months)

The Grow Phase is intended to provide finalist teams with funding and support to significantly advance prototyping activities and to clearly demonstrate how the solution being developed can create value for stakeholders by addressing specific societal needs identified and refined in the previous phases of the programme. It is envisaged that in the Grow Phase, technical development will progress beyond proof of concept toward a robust prototype which, as part of a solution, should make tangible to stakeholders the potential of the proposed solution. In particular, teams will be supported to articulate the societal or economic value their solution is capable of creating.

Prize Award (24 months)

A significant total Prize Award fund will be available for each challenge call ranging between €1M and €2M. During the Prize Award Phase, the winning team 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. During this phase, advanced prototyping can be undertaken and based on this, and activities in previous phases, the winning team will be positioned to deploy and put in place a means of assessing the impact of their solution to the identified challenge.

Skills Development & Mentoring

A core feature of SFI's approach to challenge funding has been a focus on skills development for teams in areas such as innovation, and in particular, human-centric innovation processes such as, for example, design thinking. This arises from the focus of challenges on accelerating the development of solutions for and with stakeholders. Hence, it is important that the experiences and needs of stakeholders are understood, reflected and inform solutions developed. Research teams will participate in a bespoke skills development programme, comprising in-person cohort-based training workshops and online mentoring sessions. Training will be delivered to support the specific innovation activities associated with each phase. Mentoring will also be provided to teams giving them further opportunity to refine application of these techniques and gain keys insights. Training will also be provided to teams in areas such as evidence-based entrepreneurship, impact and communications. Further details of these supports will be provided to teams successful in securing funding under the programme. It is expected that core team members participate in these workshops.[8]

Access to I-Corps@SFI

Teams supported under the National Challenge Fund may also have an opportunity to participate in the I-Corps@SFI Academy[9] and the NSF Innovation Corps (NSF I-Corps) through the I-Corps@SFI Partnership.[10] While this will be particularly beneficial for teams that have identified commercialisation as a route to impact, it may also be useful for teams seeking to further validate aspects of how they will address a challenge. Access to these programmes will likely be provided after the initial Concept Phase. Further details of these opportunities will be available to teams participating in the programme.

In addition to the supports outlined above, teams will have regular progress update meetings with SFI Challenge Research Managers during the course of a programme. These updates will complement the activities undertaken during training and provide agile programme management that enables teams to progress with the pace and adaptability required under the programme.

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[8] Please note that to comply with the State aid requirements for this programme (please refer to Section 9), team members from industry are <u>not permitted</u> to participate in skills development and workshops provided by SFI.
[9] *https://www.sfi.ie/funding/funding-calls/i-corps@sfi-academy/*
[10] *https://www.sfi.ie/funding/funding-calls/i-corps@sfi/*

PROGRAMME REQUIREMENTS

8   Programme Remit

The National Challenge Fund enables formation of transdisciplinary teams, involving expertise from across research disciplines as well as from outside of academia. While the remit of the programme requires that proposed solutions rely on or are directly informed by a STEM innovation and that teams include corresponding expertise,[11] it is strongly encouraged that teams also include expertise, relevant to, for example, the adoption and deployment of solutions, from non-STEM disciplines such as social sciences, economics, behavioural science and others. It is also noted that the programme is intended to support pre-commercial research activities only.

There are a number of important additional remit conditions stipulated under the National Challenge Fund, that applicants must consider as part of their application.

Green and Digital alignment – Challenge calls are aligned with either the Green Transition or Digital Transformation, in line with the objectives of the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility,[1] and corresponding funding will be 'tagged' accordingly. Therefore, for the purposes of the National Challenge Fund:

- Projects supported under **Green Transition** calls must represent research and innovation that focuses on the low carbon economy, resilience and adaptation to climate change.[12]

- Projects supported under **Digital Transformation** calls must represent digital-related research and innovation.[13]

Excluded Areas of R&I – It is highlighted that research and innovation directly related to 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.[14]

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[11] *In alignment with the legal remit of SFI*

[12] *Tag 022: Research and innovation processes, technology transfer and cooperation between enterprises focusing on the low carbon economy, resilience and adaptation to climate change (Annex VI of RRF Regulation)*

[13] *Tag 009bis: Investment in digital-related R&I activities (including excellence research centres, industrial research, experimental development, feasibility studies, acquisition of fixed or intangible assets for digital related R&I activities) (Annex VII of RRF Regulation)*

[14] Commission Notice Technical guidance on the application of *Do No Significant Harm Principle* *https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/5dce0e53-718b-11eb-9ac9-01aa75ed71a1/language-en*

Technological Neutrality – It is noted that challenge themes for calls under the National Challenge Fund have been developed to be technologically neutral,[15] identifying key national challenges without preference for any given technological solution.

Applicants should consider alignment to the above points in addition to alignment with the challenge theme when completing the remit statement in their application (see Section 13.2).

Potential applicants unsure about the alignment to the remit or theme of a call may wish to contact SFI at challenges@sfi.ie in advance of preparing an application.

9 State Aid and SFI Grant Funding

As per SFI's Grant Conditions (inclusive of SFI's General Terms & Conditions,[16] Letters of Offer and SFI Policy documents[17]), all SFI funding granted is subject to, and must be compliant with, State aid legislation based on Article 107(1) of the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).[18]

Research activities undertaken as part of a Grant awarded under the National Challenge Fund 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 an application for funding involves a collaboration with an 'undertaking'[19] or industry partner, 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 Framework for State aid for research, development and innovation (2014/C 198/01) (the "Framework").[20] 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.[21]

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

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[15] *Technology neutrality: the freedom of individuals and organisations to choose the most appropriate and suitable technology for their needs. Products, services or regulatory frameworks taking into account the principle of technology neutrality neither impose nor discriminate in favour of the use of a particular type of technology.*
[16] *https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/sfi-general-terms-and-conditions/*
[17] *https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/*
[18] *https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52016XC0719(05)&from=EN*
[19] The concept of an 'undertaking' under EU competition rules is an entity that is engaged in an "economic activity" (offering a good or service on a market) regardless of its legal status or the way that it is financed.
[20] *https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52014XC0627(01)&from=EN*
[21] https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/state-aid/

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 requires 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). 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.[17]

Additional guidance on State aid and the ICF is available in the relevant section of the SFI website.[22] Applicants are advised to seek independent legal advice in advance of applying to SFI for funding, where further clarification is sought.

10   Do No Significant Harm (DNSH)

The National Challenge Fund is funded under the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility (Regulation (EU) 2021/241), which requires that all supported activities must comply with the 'Do No Significant Harm' (DNSH) principle.[23] This principle safeguards that an economic activity is environmentally sustainable in relation to the six environmental objectives:

- climate change mitigation
- climate change adaption
- the sustainable use and protection of water and marine resources
- the transition to a circular economy
- pollution prevention and control
- the protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystems.

The DNSH principle requires that researchers consider possible negative impacts of their research. In the context of the National Challenge Fund,[24] compliance 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. Projects should include assessments commensurate with their stage of development. It is recognised that projects may be at early stages of development (i.e.,

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[22] https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/state-aid/

[23] as defined in Articles 3(b) and 17 of the EU Taxonomy Regulation: https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/banking-and-finance/sustainable-finance/eu-taxonomy-sustainable-activities_en

[24]Commission Notice Technical guidance on the application of *Do No Significant Harm Principle* https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/5dce0e53-718b-11eb-9ac9-01aa75ed71a1/language-en

up to TRL 4[25]), in which case a simplified assessment of compliance may be appropriate. All assessments should be based on the latest scientific evidence.

An assessment of the expected compliance with each of the environmental objectives has been performed for each call under the National Challenge Fund (see supporting documentation for the relevant Challenge Call). Applicants to calls are required to complete a similar assessment as part of their application to outline how the proposed outputs are compliant with the principle of DNSH. Updated DNSH self-assessments will be submitted at each stage of the programme. 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. Applicants or awardees may be required to provide additional information to SFI upon request.

Additional guidance is provided in the template available on the SFI website, which must be completed and uploaded as part of an application. It is noted that this must be completed for all submissions to the National Challenge Fund, regardless of whether the call is aligned to the Green Transition or Digital Transformation.

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[25] https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/wp/2014_2015/annexes/h2020-wp1415-annex-g-trl_en.pdf

WHO CAN APPLY

11   Team Structure

The National Challenge Fund is intended to support highly motivated, transdisciplinary teams committed to developing transformative, sustainable solutions to address challenges set out in each of its calls. It is expected that teams will encompass technical and non-technical expertise and skills to address barriers associated with challenge definition and solution deployment.

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, design, humanities, economics, behavioural or social sciences, 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 to act as team lead and co-lead. It is also strongly recommended that the Societal Impact Champion, who will act as non-technical lead, is identified in the application.

Figure 2. *Core team structure.*

Where a Societal Impact Champion is not identified as part of an application, a clear outline as to why this was not possible must be provided as part of the application in addition to a plan for how one will be identified and recruited (see Section 13.8). Such applications, if successful, 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 an extensive process of stakeholder engagement during the Concept Phase of the programme which may facilitate identification of a Societal Impact Champion.

The following outlines the expected roles of each of the core team members. All core team members will be evaluated equally in the review process.

- **Team Lead** – 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.

- **Team Co-Lead** – It is expected that the Team Co-Lead will provide leadership as part of the research programme and should bring complementary technical/disciplinary expertise to that of the Team Lead.

- **Societal Impact Champion** - 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.

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 for more details on SFI's policy on State aid and how compliance will be demonstrated.

Over the course of the programme, teams will engage with a broad range of stakeholders such as researchers, beneficiaries, end-users and industry, all of whom play a role in gaining a full understanding of challenges and the barriers to adoption and scaling of solutions. Based on this engagement, core teams may expand their broader challenge team through the recruitment of additional collaborators, and planning or defining activities they will undertake as part of the challenge team.

Gender Strategy

SFI is committed to increasing the number of SFI grants held by women researchers, as described in its Gender Strategy (*Strand 2: Gender Balance in Research Teams*).[26] Women are strongly encouraged to apply to this funding call. Further details on SFI's data on application submission and success rates by gender can be found on the SFI website.[27]

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[26] https://www.sfi.ie/resources/SFI-Gender-Strategy-2016-2020.pdf
[27] https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/gender/

12   Applicant Team Eligibility

For the National Challenge Fund, applications must satisfy the following eligibility criteria.

The Team Lead/Co-Lead must:

- Be a **member of academic staff** of an eligible Research Body[28] (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

- Hold a PhD or equivalent. Please consult the SFI Policy on PhD Equivalence[6] for further information*.

*It is recognised that in certain disciplines relevant to this call, 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 equivalence.***

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

Applicants may be named as members of the core or broader team to other challenge calls open for applications at the same time or at a later date. However, given the solution-focused nature of challenge calls under the National Challenge Fund, applicants should strongly consider the capacity of team members to deliver on project objectives if participating on multiple teams.

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[28] https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/eligibility-related-information/

NATIONAL **CHALLENGE FUND**

Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Science
Foundation **sfi**
Ireland For what's next

Maoinithe ag an
Aontas Eorpach
Funded by the
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NextGenerationEU

Applications must propose distinct ideas or, if they have been previously reviewed, must adhere to the SFI Resubmission Policy[29].

HOW TO APPLY

13   Application Procedure

Applications to calls under the National Challenge Fund must be submitted through SESAME, SFI's online grants and awards management system in advance of the application deadline. Full details of this application procedure can be found in the documentation pertaining to the relevant challenge call available for download from SFI/National Challenge Fund webpage.

Applying through SESAME involves completion of an online form with details including team members, alignment to remit and challenge thematic area and requested budget. In addition, applicants will be required to upload information in PDF documents. Applicants must use the templates provided on the call website. Applications to challenge calls under the National Challenge Fund comprise a number of sections detailed below.

13.1   Resubmission Statement

Any submission relating to a previously unsuccessful application to any SFI programme, should provide a statement referencing the previous application and explaining the differences between the previous and current application. This statement must be provided as part of the 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.[30]

13.2   Alignment to Programme Remit

This section must be used to outline how the proposed research aligns to the Programme Remit as described in Section 8. Applicants are advised to review this section carefully. This statement will be used to determine the eligibility of the application.

13.3   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.

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[30] *http://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/eligibility-related-information/*

13.4 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 potential societal impact that your solution will deliver. Please use the application form template available from the challenge website and ensure all fields are completed. The document must be converted to PDF and uploaded in SESAME as part of your application.

Your application form 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 strongly advised not to provide biographies of team members but rather to convey the team's ambition and its ability to deliver. This information about the team should be complemented by the curricula vitae submitted as part of the application. 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.

- **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 for Ireland. As part of this description, it is strongly encouraged to include any insights from engaging with stakeholders/beneficiaries and how these validate the problem. Applicants may also include information on the wider European/international relevance of the proposed challenge/problem.

- **Solution**: Applicants should clearly describe the proposed solution.[31] This should include a description of how it is novel (either as a new concept or through, for example, the convergence of existing ideas) and how technological development enables this solution. Applicants should describe the current stage of technical development, the current state-of-the-art and how the proposed approach will overcome current barriers. Applicants should include consideration of ethical or regulatory issues where relevant. Evidence that the solution is feasible/viable and associated risks should be provided. Applicants may consider providing high-level milestones/deliverables.

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[31] *Note that a solution may comprise both technical and non-technical aspects which, when combined, address a problem.*

- **Societal Impact**: Applicants should outline the societal (incl. economic) impact that their proposed solution can achieve in Ireland and more broadly. Applicants should also outline what outcomes the solution could deliver and what the expected timeframe might be.

13.5   Ethical and Scientific Issues

In preparing your application to the programme, please review the SFI guidance on ethical and scientific issues. As part of its Gender Strategy (Strand 3: Integrating Gender in Research and Innovation), 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. A statement on this consideration should be included in the appropriate part of the application form.

13.6   Budget

This section should be used to describe the budget (direct costs) and resources you will need. At the application stage, budget requests are required for only the Concept and Seed Phases of the programme. Given the nature of the National Challenge Fund, it may 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 may be indicative. 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 Policy[32] 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)

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.

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[32] *http://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/budget-finance-related-policies/*

It is noted that postdoctoral researchers based in <u>any</u> eligible research body (i.e., University, Technological University or Institute of Technology) 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.

Grant Overheads

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.

> **NOTE:** Consult the appropriate challenge coversheet for details on budget limits.

13.7   Curricula Vitae

Please upload curricula vitae for each of the core applicant team members (i.e., Lead, Co-Lead and Societal impact Champion) using the template available on the programme website. The CV not only provides an opportunity to give information about education, employment record and research outputs where relevant, but also allows you to identify up to three key achievements in research and impact.

> **NOTE:** 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.

13.8 Letters of Support

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

- A Letter of Support from the **Host Research Body of the Team Lead and 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 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. If a Societal Impact Champion is not identified as part of an application, the academic applicants should, in place of this letter, provide a statement (max. one page) outlining why this was not possible and providing an overview of how they intend to identify and recruit a Societal Impact Champion.

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.

13.9 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 represents their approval of an application and agreement to SFI General Terms and Conditions.[33] 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;

- 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 programme communications, organisation of training and peer review.

It is the responsibility of applicants to ensure that their Research Office has successfully submitted their proposal to SFI before the call deadline. After the submission deadline, applications will not be accepted by SESAME and will not be accepted by SFI. Please contact your Research Office well in advance of the call deadline.

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[33] https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/sfi-general-terms-and-conditions/

REVIEW PROCESS

14   Application and Progress Review Process and Criteria

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

Following submission, applications/progress reports are checked for eligibility.[34] Teams that submit applications that are not deemed eligible under a challenge call of the National Challenge Fund programme or do not sufficiently align with the programme will be notified and their application will be withdrawn.

Following these checks, documentation (e.g., applications or progress reports) will then be assigned to a panel of international experts secured by SFI for review. The reviews for the Concept, Seed and Grow Phase Progress Reviews will also include an interview between the expert panel members and teams. At all stages, projects will be assessed based on the following criteria:

- **Quality, experience and ambition of the team** – Consideration will be given to the team's ambition, complementarity of expertise (transdisciplinary, where appropriate), appropriateness of its composition to address the proposed challenge, and the ability 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.

- **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 challenge/problem will also be taken into account.

- **Quality of the proposed solution** - Consideration will be given to the novelty of the technology being developed as well as its significance in enabling the proposed solution and value it creates. 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.

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[34] *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.*

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 relevant phases and the likelihood that this can lead to successful delivery of the solution during the Prize Award Phase.

San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)

SFI is a signatory of the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) and is aligning its review and evaluation processes with DORA principles. In this regard, all types of research output are recognised in the assessment of research quality and impact. In the spirit of supporting open research and as a signatory of Plan S, SFI will also consider a commitment to making data and other types of research, open and accessible.

As part of challenge calls under the National Challenge Fund, all review criteria will be evaluated considering the context-specific nature of the proposed challenge/solution. Only projects deemed to be of both excellent scientific/engineering/technical quality and demonstrating strong impact potential will be recommended for funding or to progress by a panel. Teams that are not funded or do not progress between award stages will be notified by SFI.

Indicative numbers of teams that will be supported or that will progress between phases of the programme are provided in the call document. However, based on the recommendations provided by expert review panels and available budget, SFI reserves the right to fund more or fewer teams than indicated. It is further noted that SFI reserves the right not to grant the Prize Award(s).

The identity of international experts who conduct desk-based reviews shall remain confidential and will not be disclosed to applicants. However, in the case of interview-based review processes, SFI may at their discretion disclose the identities of those panel members in advance of the panel meeting. 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 Conduct.[35] The submission of an application to SFI shall be construed as consent by the applicant(s) to participate in the peer-review process. 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.

POST-AWARD MANAGEMENT AND PROGRESS REVIEW

15   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 Grow Phase, as part of the Grow 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.[36] 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 research,[37] from collection to analysis and interpretation, sharing and dissemination, and long-term storage.

Data Management Plan Requirements

DMPs will be evaluated by reviewers to ensure that they contain sufficient information on practices and standards as guided below. Although practices and standards vary across disciplines, SFI recommends the use of Science Europe DMP templates and guidelines.[38] Each DMP should include the following as appropriate to the programme or project[39]:

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[35] http://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/review/

[36] https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/open-research/SFI-DMP-Guidance-FINAL-140322.pdf

[37] 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.

[38] https://www.scienceeurope.org/our-priorities/research-data/research-data-management/

[39] 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

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

16   Progress Review

Review of progress at the end of the Concept, Seed and Grow Phases will be undertaken by panels of international experts. This process will involve the completion and submission of a progress report to SFI and an interview with the review panel. The 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.

17   Frequently Asked Questions

A set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) will be maintained and is available on the relevant call webpage.

SFI POLICIES AND POSITIONS

In addition to complying with the General Terms & Conditions, 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,**[40] as well as with the requirements set out by the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA).

Animal Usage

> Applicants intending to use animals in their research projects are obliged to comply with the **SFI Use of Animals in Research Policy**[41] and should also ensure that their studies are in line with the HRPA's 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;**[42] that is, all institutions and SFI award holders are expected to abide by this policy statement and the **European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity**,[43] 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 as described in the **National Framework for Doctoral Education (2015)**,[44] which SFI has endorsed.

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[40] https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/ethical-and-scientific-issues/
[41] http://www.sfi.ie/resources/SFI-Policy-on-the-Use-of-Animals-in-Research_June_2016.pdf

[42] https://www.iua.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/IUA_Research_Integrity_in_Ireland_Report_2019.pdf
[43] https://allea.org/code-of-conduct/
[44] http://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2017/04/national_framework_for_doctoral_education_0.pdf

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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.[45] 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).

Gender Strategy

Research should fully consider potential biological sex and socio-cultural gender dimensions as key analytical and explanatory variables. As articulated in the **SFI Gender Strategy (Strand 3: Integrating Gender in Research and Innovation),**[46] applicants are advised to demonstrate that they have considered any potential sex/gender aspects in their proposed research programme.

In the SFI Strategy 2025 Shaping Our Future[47] targets 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 genders by 2025 are set. As such, applicants should consider how these targets can be achieved at all levels of the research team.

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 on an SFI award takes a period of maternity or adoptive leave.[48]

Appeals Process

The Appeals Process Policy establishes procedures and responsibilities for the appeal of the declination of a proposal by SFI.[49]

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[45] http://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/national-policies-sfi-positions/
[46] https://www.sfi.ie/research-news/publications/SFI-Gender-Strategy-2016-2020.pdf
[47] https://www.sfi.ie/strategy/
[48] https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/gender/
[49] http://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/review/

State aid

All SFI funding granted under this call will be subject to, and must be compliant with, State aid law. As such, proposals must be designed to ensure that any funding received from SFI does not, directly or indirectly, give rise to the granting of State aid. Applicants are referred to the guidance provided by the European Commission in Section 2 of its **2014 Framework for State aid for research and development and innovation (2014/C 198/01)**[50] and that which has been developed by Knowledge Transfer Ireland.[51] If in any doubt as to the interpretation or application of this guidance, potential applicants are advised to seek independent legal advice.

Child Protection

Where relevant, applicants and Research Bodies are required to comply with the provisions of the **Children First Act 2015**,[52] and the **National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017**.[53] It is the responsibility of the Research Body to ensure that they are compliant with all applicable law.

Data Protection Policy

The General Data Protection Regulation[54] is a legal framework that sets out guidelines for the collection and processing of personal information of individuals within the European Union. 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.**[55]

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

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[50] *http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52014XC0627(01)&from=EN*
[51] *https://www.knowledgetransferireland.com/Model-Agreements/Practical-Guides/Practical-Guide-to-State-Aid-Considerations-in-Research-Development-and-Innovation-for-RPOs-and-Industry.pdf*
[52] *http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2015/act/36/enacted/en/pdf*
[53] *http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Children_First_National_Guidance_2017.pdf*
[54] *https://www.dataprotection.ie/docs/GDPR/1623.htm*
[55] *http://www.sfi.ie/privacy/*

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**.[56]

Open access

In line with the principles espoused by Plan S[57] and those of the National Framework on the Transition to an Open Research Environment[58] 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 one or other of the researchers concerned receives SFI funds in support of their endeavours), **SFI's Open Access policy**[59] should be adhered to. SFI monitors compliance with this policy through scientific and financial reporting, financial audits and its Annual Stocktake of Research Outputs.

Data Management

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[56] http://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/national-policies-sfi-positions/
[57] https://www.coalition-s.org/principles-and-implementation/
[58] https://norf.ie
[59] https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/open-research/SFIs-Open-Access-Policy-V.3.-04.05.2021.pdf

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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.[60] 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.[61] 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 will be reviewed on a regular basis; applicants are advised to consult the policy information in advance of submission of a proposal.

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[60] https://www.scienceeurope.org/our-resources/practical-guide-to-the-international-alignment-of-research-data-management/
[61] https://www.scienceeurope.org/our-resources/guidance-document-presenting-a-framework-for-discipline-specific-research-data-management/