

Research Ireland Centres Programme

Full Proposal Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)¹

Last Updated: 30th January 2025

Text highlighted in **yellow** has been added to this document since the original document was first published on the call website 29th October 2024.

Queries should be directed to: centres@researchireland.ie

¹ 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 the funder, the Government of Ireland, or any of their respective servants or agents. The Grant General Terms and Conditions shall govern the administration of grants and awards to the exclusion of this and any other oral, written, or recorded statement.

Contents

1.	Applicant Team	3
2.	Letters of Support	4
3.	Full Proposal Submission.....	5
4.	Review Process.....	8

1. Applicant Team

1.1 What constitutes a “rising star” as outlined in the Programme Objectives?

It is for Applicants to best present the strengths of their team through their proposal, including that this team is “led by a team of world-leading PIs and rising stars”. Reviewers will not be provided with a definition for what a “rising star” is, and it is for them to assess this in-line with the Programme Objectives and Review Criteria.

1.2 Is it possible, with prior approval, to add a new research performing organisation and/or a new principal investigator (PI) to the Full Proposal submission to address weaknesses highlighted in the review received?

Yes. Each request will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Changes can include the addition of a new Research Body that was not previously included in the Pre-Proposal submission. Applicants should be mindful of other eligibility requirements, including the maximum number of proposals that an individual can be named on. Any requests for changes to Lead Applicant/Co-Applicants/Centre PIs must be notified to Research Ireland by email to centres@researchireland.ie as early as possible and in advance of the Full Proposal submission deadline.

1.3 Does a Co-Director have to also lead a research theme?

No. A Centre Director will have a key research role on one or more of the research themes of the Centre. However, as the Director has the overarching responsibility for leadership of the Centre, they should not also be named as a Theme Lead on the proposal. Funded Centres may put in place further management and leadership structures and processes to facilitate the successful operation of the research theme, and this could include a role for the Centre Director.

1.4 Has there been any change to rules for the Applicant Team and the leadership of research themes?

All members of the Applicant Team other than the Director/Co-Directors are required to be named as a theme lead on the proposal. Please refer to the Call Document for further details.

1.5 Can both Co-Directors be included on communications, rather than solely the Lead Applicant?

In general, Research Ireland directs communications to the Lead Applicant for each proposal. This is done for the purposes of equality between all applications, administrative simplicity, and remaining in-line with the call documents which set out that the Lead Applicant will be the primary point of contact:

The Lead Applicant (also referred to as the Lead Investigator) is the administrative lead for the Research Centre proposal and will serve as the primary point of contact for SFI during the review process.

It should be stated, however, that this is not a comment on any hierarchy between the two Co-Directors, and it should not be inferred that this is how communication would be approached for funded Research Centres. This approach is for the purposes of pre-award evaluations only.

1.6 Is there a deadline for changes to Lead Applicant/Co-Applicants/Centre PIs between the pre-proposal and full proposal submissions?

Yes the deadline for requests for changes to Lead Applicant/Co-Applicants/Centre PIs between the pre-proposal and full proposal is **31st January 2025**. Please note that any requests for changes to Lead Applicant/Co-Applicants/Centre PIs received after 31st January 2025 will not be approved.

2. Letters of Support

2.1 Should institutional letters of support indicate supports for EPE?

Yes, institutional letters of support should outline the supports that will be provided for EPE. This was included in the additional feedback from EPE reviewers at the Pre-Proposal stage.

2.2 What are the rules and guidance around exchequer cash commitments made available through other government Departments and Agencies? What details need to be included in the letter(s) of support confirming cash commitments coming from exchequer sources?

Letters of support can be provided by the Research Bodies of Co-Applicants, industry partners, and other organisations committing non-exchequer cost share. Letters from Government Departments, Agencies, and other public sector bodies are not eligible. Where Applicants wish to include mention of other partnerships, collaborations, etc., that do not meet the requirements for a letter of support as outlined in the Guidance for Applicants document, they can mention these in relevant sections of the Programme Document. In addition, Research Ireland will be considering the input of Government Departments and Agencies by means of a consultation. More details on letters of support can be found in section 7.13 of the Guidance for Applicants.

2.3 Regarding the industry letters of support, what is the position if some companies are only willing at this point to commit for a period less than the 8 years of the award?

Please refer to section 7.13 of the Guidance for Applicants, which includes the following:
The letter of support should cover at a minimum the first two years of the grant and the plans, interests and other potential collaborative research projects during the course of the grant from each industry partner. Applicants should ensure that a completed company contribution table (Industry Partner Letter of Support) is included within each letter.

2.4 If an industry is willing to make a commitment of more than 2 years, should all of that be included?

Yes.

2.5 What happens to ineligible letters of support?

Ineligible letters of support will be redacted.

2.6 Can letters of support from academic collaborators/centres be included, without cost share commitment?

No. As mentioned, where Applicants wish to include mention of other partnerships, collaborations, etc., that do not meet the requirements for a letter of support as outlined in the Guidance for Applicants document, they can mention these in relevant sections of the Programme Document.

2.7 What will be the dates for counting industry funding for cost share?

Matters such as precise rules for cost share will be looked at in the run-up to the commencement of awards that are ultimately funded through this call. Research Ireland does currently have guidance concerning cost share, and when projects need to start or cost share received in order for them to count for an award. However, this and a number of other matters will be looked at and determined before the start date of the award. For now, Research Ireland would advise all Applicant Teams to maintain focus on preparing a proposal that sets out the best case for how their proposed Research Centre will deliver on the Programme Objectives and the vision for their Research Centre. Specifically, regarding industry letters of support, section 7.13 of the Guidance for Applicants document sets out requirements for a letter of support from each industry partner.

2.8 In the letters of support from industry partners what cost share should be included?

In the letters of support from industry partners the level of cost-share commitment from the industry partner should be stated both in terms of cash and in-kind contributions, even if one of those values is expected to be €0. The time period for which the contribution is being made should also be stated, and should cover at a minimum the first two years of the grant. Please see section 7.13 of the Guidance for Applicants document and the letters of support template.

2.9 Do Centre PIs need to be included in the letter of support from the Research Body?

No, Centre PIs do not need to be listed in the letter of support from the Research Body, only the Applicant Team. Please see section 7.13 of the Guidance for Applicants document.

3. Full Proposal Submission

3.1 Can Research Centre titles change between Pre- and Full Proposal stages if justified (aside from the change from SFI to Research Ireland that was already communicated)?

No. Please note that any name should be considered to be temporary, and final Research Centre branding is to be discussed and agreed with the funder prior to grant start date.

3.2 The Guidance for Applicants document states the following: “Please specify any changes or comments in the Full Proposal programme document made in relation to feedback from the Pre-Proposal submission”. Do changes need to be noted in each section of the proposal?

It is important for Full Proposal reviewers to understand where a decision, such as that of structure, direction or planned activities, has been taken in response to feedback received at the Pre-Proposal stage. It is for Applicants to determine how best to note this in their proposal.

3.3 There appears to be no separate section in which to outline the strategy of the Research Centre, prior to the Research Programme section?

Applicants may wish to consider using the Executive Summary for such an outline. This section has a page limit of two pages. If this is not suitable, Applicants should assess which section or sections would be best placed to include the strategy of the Research Centre.

3.4 In regard to the proposal needing to be distinct from “other funded entities”, is that just Research Ireland funded entities, or is it across all funded initiatives? Is there a way that Research Ireland can help Centres to identify potential overlaps, such as with other applications?

All Applicant Teams are asked in their proposal to discuss how their proposed Research Centre would be suitable as a national research centre, its added value to the existing national research ecosystem, and its contribution to a cohesive research environment. It would be expected that Applicants would consider this holistically when looking at their proposed place in the national research ecosystem. Research Ireland are unable to share information on individual Full Proposals, but welcome communication and/or coordination between Applicant Teams and Research Bodies.

3.5 If the Pre-Proposal reviewers commented that a budget request was low, is this an allowable exception to the requirement that budget requests not be increased from Pre-Proposal stage?

No. Applicants may modify their budget between Pre- and Full Proposal stages. However, this must result in the same or lower total budget than the Pre-Proposal submission, and Applicants must not enter a higher budget request than the Pre-Proposal submission.

3.6 Regarding the feedback from the Pre-Proposal EPE reviewers to consider an EPE academic lead – can this individual also lead a theme across the research programme?

This and other feedback from the Pre-Proposal EPE reviewers is for consideration by all Applicant Teams, and to aid them in the development of their proposed Research Centre. Applicants can choose to follow, or not follow, this feedback as they wish. This feedback is optional and advisory in nature, and does not constitute new requirements for the call. In this specific example, if the Applicants determine that a theme lead is the most appropriate academic lead for EPE then they may do so, as long as this does not result in this individual leading more than one theme.

3.7 Is it intentional that the cap on the Operations budget is 20% of the Research Ireland direct costs, and does not also include 20% of the industry cash cost share target?

Yes, this is intentional.

3.8 What PhD stipend rate should be used for the Full Proposal budget submission?

Following recent measures announced for Budget 2025, applicants are advised to prepare Full Proposal budgets using a PhD stipend of €25,000.

3.9 What is the definition of a small and medium-sized enterprise (SME)?

For the call Research Ireland is using the SME definition available on the European Commission website:

https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/smes/sme-fundamentals/sme-definition_en

3.10 What does the following extract from the Full Proposal Guidance for Applicants refer to?

Extract from the Full Proposal Guidance for Applicants:

Total Funding Request Amount (in €) – Applicants may modify their budget between Pre- and Full Proposal stages. However, this must result in the same or lower total budget than the Pre-Proposal submission, and Applicants must not enter a higher budget request than the Pre-Proposal submission.

This extract refers to the “Total Funding Request Amount (in €)”, which is a SESAME field that is completed for each application, which constitutes the total budget request **from Research Ireland**. It is this budget that cannot be increased. If other cost share components (industry, NE-NC, exchequer) are increased which then results in a higher final Centre budget, then this is ok if the Research Ireland component of the budget is the same or lower than the pre-proposal.

3.11 Has there been an update to the Full Proposal programme document template?

Yes. An error was spotted in the guidance text under section 1. Budget, on the last bullet point. This bullet point previously read as follows:

- A table showing the percentage of the total budget attributed to Industry Cash, Industry In-Kind, Non-Exchequer Non-Commercial, and Exchequer

This bullet point has been removed as it does not correspond to the Full Proposal Budget template. The Programme Document template was updated on 30th January 2025 to remove this bullet point.

3.12 The Budget Justification section has a 5 page limit. How can we effectively address points related to researcher roles and justifications in this space?

In all sections it is for Applicants to take the guidance provided in the Full Proposal Programme Document template, and to determine what content would best present their proposed Research Centre and provide information to the reviewers to address the review criteria.

In this specific section an excerpt of the relevant guidance is as follows:

The Applicant Team should outline the required expertise for each requested researcher and justify the researcher's role in the research project. Include the salary scale (as per Research Ireland Grants Team Member Budgeting Scale) for each team member. Clear and explicit justification is required for any request for an experienced post-doctoral researcher, i.e. one who will be appointed higher than Level 2A, Point 1 of the Research Ireland team member budgeting scales. Justification should also be provided for requested equipment, consumables and travel, and the requested duration of funding.

Applicants do not have to list each researcher individually, and can instead present at a high level the roles, numbers and reasons for those roles, while highlighting where certain roles diverge from the standard salary scales as outlined above, and the reasons for requiring those roles.

4. Review Process

4.1 Will the reviewers be the same between Pre-Proposal and Full Proposal postal stages?

No, the Full Proposal postal reviewers will be different to those at Pre-Proposal stage.

4.2 Will reviewers be provided with the Pre-Proposal Panel Reports?

No.

4.3 How many Pre-Proposals were received, and how many made it through to Full Proposal stage?

Twenty-five Pre-Proposals were received. Fifteen Pre-Proposals were invited to the Full Proposal stage.

4.4 How will “past performance” be considered as part of the call?

As stated, the final funding decisions will be at the sole and exclusive discretion of the Board of Research Ireland. In reaching this final decision, the Board of Research Ireland will include consideration of factors such as:

- The ranked list of fundable proposals prepared by Full Proposal Interview Panel.
- Additional perspectives and comments from the Full Proposal Interview Panel.
- Strategic input from other national funders and government departments.
- The objective of a collaborative, dynamic, cohesive and streamlined ecosystem of Centres in areas of national importance.
- Past performance of Research Ireland awards that are considered relevant to the ability of the Applicant Team to lead and manage the proposed Centre, including a Research Centre award.

4.5 When will the identity of reviewers and Panel members be provided?

The identities of the postal reviewers will not be provided. The identities of the Full Proposal Interview Panel members will be included in the additional details that will be provided closer to that stage.

4.6 Do you have an indicative number of Research Centres that may be funded in the call?

No. This will depend on a number of factors, including excellence, available budget, scale of budget requests, and Research Ireland’s desire for a cohesive and streamlined ecosystem.

4.7 Will there be dedicated EPE postal reviewers for each application?

Yes.

4.8 How will value for money be included in the evaluation?

Value for money is a critical and cross-cutting consideration. Overall strategic value for money is explicitly called out as part of the “Execution and Delivery” review criterion. In addition, value for money would also feed into reviewer considerations of other Review Criteria, such as “Impact” and “Research Programme”.

4.9 Which members of the team will be invited to the interview?

This information will be included in the additional details that will be provided closer to the Full Proposal Interview stage.

4.10 How will reviewers fairly compare existing Research Centres and “new-entrants”?

Equality between applications has been a core design principle from the outset of this call, and Research Ireland has worked to incorporate this to every extent possible. All Applicant Teams have the opportunity to put forward the vision and strategy for their proposed Research Centre, and the key strengths and experiences that enable the team to deliver significant impact. Reviewers will assess each proposal on its own merits, based on the Review Criteria outlined.