

SFI Research Infrastructure Call 2018 FAQs

Version 1 15th March 2018

Category A: H2020 RI Advanced Communities Aligned submissions

- 1. Q: Do you need to submit the letter of support from the EU Advanced Community at the Expression of Interest stage or only at full submission?**

A: This letter of support is only required at the full submission stage; however, the EoI does require you to indicate who the EU Research Infrastructure Advanced Community(s) is/are in the field – Statement on H2020 submission (250 words max).
- 2. Q: Will a letter of support be accepted from an ESFRI funded project consortium instead of from an EU Advanced Community?**

A: Applications under Category A must include a letter of support from an EU Research Infrastructure Advanced Community. See the call document for more information. All other H2020 aligned bids (LEIT, Societal Challenges etc.) should apply under Categories B.
- 3. Q: We are unsure as to whether a particular Advanced Community and associated H2020 aligned bid is within SFI's legal remit. Can you advise?**

A: Please email infrastructure@sfi.ie and a member of the team will confirm eligibility.
- 4. Q: If an institution is submitting multiple Expression of Interest (EoIs) applications under Category A, should they be submitting as separate emails submit them as separately emails or all together in one email?**

A: Please submit these as one email including the cover letter outlining the number of EOI bids and the corresponding EoI templates as an attachment. At the full proposal stage these requests will also be submitted through Sesame as separate infrastructure requests.
- 5. Q: Which deadline would SFI expect applicants to target- the 2018 or 2019 deadline Advanced Community Call?**

A: Given that the 2018 deadline is imminent, SFI propose that applicants will target the March 2019 INFRAIA-01-2018-2019 deadline call.
- 6. Q: What information would be provided in the Letter of Support from a lead project coordinator of the relevant Advanced Community consortium?**

A: Ideally, the letter of Support should provide a strong statement of support for the Irish partner and their SFI infrastructure request indicating that this investment would address an infrastructural gap in the consortium's planned application. The letter should also include any other information that could help strengthen the justification for investment, e.g., engagement of the applicant with the consortium/research committee.
- 7. Q: Will funding priority be given to applications under Category A?**

A: Where there is insufficient budget to support all proposals that are recommended for funding by SFI, proposals will stay live on a reserve list for at least two years in the event that additional budget becomes available. In light of the March 2019 deadline for the INFRAIA-01-2018-2019 call, there may be a temporal priority to fund applications under Category A.

Category B: Strategic infrastructure requests

1. Q: For Category B, can you clarify further the purpose of the letter of commitment for H2020 bids (participation)?

A: The inclusion of this type of letter is not mandatory. However, such a letter may strengthen an application where support can be secured from a *lead project coordinator of an existing consortium, or a European academic leader* who is either planning to submit a H2020 proposal or would be interested in joining a consortium led by the Lead Applicant. As stated in the call document, this letter could outline how the SFI infrastructural bid could strengthen such a H2020 proposal. The relevant calls in this case would be the *H2020 Future & Emerging Technologies* call or a call under the *H2020 Industrial Leadership or Societal Challenges Pillars*.

Budget:

1. Q: Is there a maximum budget request?

A: No, there is no maximum budget request.

2. Q: Does the minimum request of €500,000 mean the overall cost of the infrastructure or the requested amount from SFI?

A: It is a minimum request of €500,000 direct costs from SFI. This does not include the minimum cash cost share of €50,000 from other sources including Research Body/industry etc. Therefore, the minimum infrastructure request should have total costs of at least €550,000 direct costs. This does not include the highly desirable 30% in-kind cost share.

Submission Process

1. Q: Will proposals be submitted through SESAME?

A: Expressions of Interest (Category A and B) should be submitted by email to infrastructure@sfi.ie. Full proposals for Categories A and B will be submitted through SESAME (see the call document for detailed instructions). Please refer to the call document for submission deadlines for each of these submission stages and categories.

2. Q: Is there a template available for the Expression of Interest (EoI) documents listed in the Appendices of the call document?

A: The templates are in the word document version of the call document which is provided on the programme call web page on the SFI website.

3. Q: Can information provided in the EoI regarding the budget estimate and the list of collaborating Research Bodies be changed in the full proposal submission?

A: Yes, the EoI is for informational purposes only, as negotiations between vendors and collaborators will be on-going after the EoI is submitted, changes are considered reasonable.

Review Process:

1. Q: When will successful applicants be notified?

A: The review process will be completed before the end of the year and SFI plan to notify successful applicants in November 2018. In addition, where there is insufficient budget to support all proposals that are recommended for funding by SFI, proposals will stay live on a reserve list for at least two years in the event that additional budget becomes available.

Eligible Costs

1. Q: Are maintenance / service contracts funded in this call?

A: Yes, for up to two years. On any sophisticated item of infrastructure, there is often a maintenance / service contract included from the date of purchase. However, we would ask applicants to negotiate strongly with the vendors to ensure the best deal is secured. Clear justification of the service contract will need to be part of the application.

2. Q: Can this award be used to fund upgrades on existing equipment?

A: Yes. If it is more appropriate and economical to upgrade an existing piece of equipment to enhance its capability rather than purchase a replacement piece of equipment then this should be clearly justified within the application.

3. Q: Once funded, can different equipment / infrastructure be purchased with the award?

A: No. Only the infrastructure requested in the original proposal can be purchased with the funds awarded by SFI and must be purchased within one year of the start date of the award.

4. Q: Will costs such as access to high performance computing be considered eligible as part of a budget request?

A: Yes, where sufficient justification is provided SFI will cover costs such as access to high performance computing resources (e.g., ICHEC) and network connectivity (e.g., HeaNET). However, such costs will only be covered for up to two years of the award. After such time it is expected that the infrastructure would become self-sustainable through the implementation of its access charge plan.

5. Q: Are refurbishment costs eligible in order to change the use of an existing building to create a new facility?

A: No, refurbishment costs are not eligible under this call.

6. Q: Are installation costs eligible under this call?

A: Installation costs which are essential for the set-up and efficient running of the research infrastructure may be permitted, where sufficient justification is provided.

Lead Applicants

1. Q: Do all Lead Applicants need to be SFI-funded?

A: No. However, non SFI-funded Lead Applicants must have demonstrated research independence through the securing of at least one independent research grant as a lead investigator or as a co-investigator. The grant must have been competitively awarded and internationally peer reviewed. Eligible research grants must support at least one full - time equivalent, excluding the applicant(s), and include research team costs (e.g., materials and consumables). At least one full-time equivalent funded by an eligible research grant must be under the supervision (or co-supervision) of the key responsible investigator. Eligible research grants exclude smaller awards such as travel grants, equipment grants, post-graduate fellowships, postdoctoral fellowships and awards of short duration (12 months or less). Laboratory fit-out / set up funding, awards from the applicant's research body, and awards that have not been subject to external international peer review are also excluded. Please note that eligible grants must be active at the time of submission of the infrastructure request.

2. Q: If an investigator is not an active SFI award holder, what do you mean by holding an active award?

A: An “active” award is one which is active at the date of submission.

3. Q: Will preference be given to SFI funded investigators?

A: Whilst no preference will be given to SFI funded investigators, strong justification will be required in all cases to show that the infrastructure is needed and that its acquisition will aid not only existing programmes of research but also will aid in funding leverage – including leverage of funds from both SFI and other sources. All applications must be within SFI’s funding remit and it is expected that most bids will have many potential users from the SFI funded community.

4. Q: Can a Lead Applicant be part of several requests?

A: Yes. An investigator may be associated as a Lead Applicant and/or as a key user on more than one request. However, given the strategic nature of the call and associated objectives, SFI do not anticipate Lead Applicants to submit multiple applications. We encourage applicants and institutions to communicate with each other to submit the most strategically important and well justified bids.

5. Q: Are SFI TIDA award holders eligible as Lead Applicants?

A: As TIDA awards are of short duration they are not directly eligible. However, it is anticipated that most holders of TIDA awards would be eligible by virtue of holding other active awards (SFI or non-SFI awards).

6. Q: Are there circumstances whereby a Lead applicant would not have to have a PhD? For example, could a senior director in a research organisation, with current responsibility for a large scale (European) research infrastructure qualify as an investigator?

A: Yes. As for other SFI Calls, we state that an investigator should hold a PhD or equivalent qualification. Please see SFI’s website for further clarification on [PhD equivalence](#).

7. Q: Can you clarify the request for information on the *key users of infrastructure* in Section 3.5.2 (ii) of the call document?

A: Key users of the infrastructure may be based at the host research body, the research body of the collaborator or may be based elsewhere in Ireland (including Northern Ireland). Industry partners should also be listed once it can be demonstrated that they are very likely to use the infrastructure, and could be considered as "key users". Reference to other users who cannot be included in this section of the proposal, owing to space limitations, may be referenced elsewhere in the proposal.

8. Q: Can a Co-Principal investigator of a SFI Research Centre be a Lead Applicant on an application?

A: Yes. Co-PIs on SFI Research Centres are eligible as Lead Applicants, however, Funded Investigators are not.

9. Q: Can SFI Research Centres submit more than one application?

A: Yes, it is possible for SFI Research Centres to submit more than one application. Please refer to Lead Applicant FAQ no.4 above.

Collaborating Research Bodies & Multiple Component Infrastructures

1. Q: Under the SFI Research Infrastructure Call 2018, what is the definition of a Collaborating Research Body?

A: In the current call, a **collaborating research body** refers to: a proposed major user of the infrastructure requested, where the sharing of resources by the collaborating research body can be clearly measured; or in the case of a *distributed infrastructure* the collaborating research body may host part of the infrastructure. It is recognised that collaborating research bodies will play a significant role in the shared oversight and management of the research infrastructure in certain cases. In an effort to avoid duplicate bids, where these are not justified, SFI would recommend that research bodies engage in discussion of proposed bids in advance of submission. The collaborating research body must also be an eligible research body.

2. Q: For multi-institutional, distributed infrastructure requests should all components of the infrastructure requested be included in a single application led by one of the research bodies even though some of the infrastructure will be located in the partner research bodies and not in the lead research body?

A: Yes, this would represent a single infrastructure request to this call. In such a multi-institutional collaborative application, a lead research body must be nominated. Note that the lead research body and the Lead applicant will still have primary fiduciary responsibility for the infrastructure, and for all SFI reporting requirements even when the infrastructure is distributed in this way.

3. Q: How does SFI define a *multi-component infrastructure request, e.g., a distributed infrastructure request*?

A: Please note that SFI only permits the grouping of infrastructure items into a single, multi-component infrastructure request where the integration of the individual components is well justified.

4. Q: For a multi component application, can individual components be less than €500,000 but collectively be €500,000 or greater?

A: Yes, as long as the multi-component request fits the definition as per FAQ no3. above, and is sufficiently justified in the request proposal.

5. Q: For the purposes of populating Appendix A and B – are the collaborating research body(s) eligible research bodies only those listed on the SFI website? Or can this section also include other bodies or industry partners?

A: In this infrastructure call a collaborating research body is only an eligible research body as indicated on the SFI website. In order to capture that other bodies including industry partners will be major users of the infrastructure requested, we would ask that you include this relevant information within the main body of the application (under the description of the item or description of key users, where relevant), and where appropriate include a letter of support from this key user, if you believe this information will significantly strengthen your proposal.

6. Q: Are Letters of Support required from each collaborating research body?

A: A letter of support from collaborating research bodies is optional and may strengthen the application. Where a collaborating research body will receive an element of the *infrastructure* requested such as would be the case in a *distributed infrastructure* request, it is advised that the letter of support should contain information on which infrastructural element will be hosted in the research body and the cost share arrangement, if applicable.

7. Q: Can letters of support be included from non-eligible Research Bodies including non-Irish Research Bodies?

A: Letters of support from other research bodies *may* be included, but are not mandatory and should only be included where it is anticipated that these research bodies would be a major user of the requested infrastructure.

8. Q: Does the Lead Research Body have to submit a letter of support as part of the full proposal?

A: Yes. A letter of support is required from the Lead Research Body. This letter should comment on the infrastructure and services available to support the management of the research infrastructure request, and in addition should include the level of financial (cash, in-kind or both) contribution to the infrastructure. The letter should identify collaborating research bodies who will be key users of the infrastructure and highlight their contribution (financial or otherwise) to the requested infrastructure.

Cost Share

1. Q: With respect to cash cost-sharing, are any sources of funding eligible?

A: Many sources of research body funds other than funds already committed for research programmes (i.e. National, EU or other research awards) are eligible as part of cost-sharing. Funding from industry and/or philanthropic donations is also eligible. There needs to be clear definition of the source of the cost sharing funds in the budget justification.

2. Q: Are salaries for personnel considered as an eligible cost?

A: No. Whilst salaries are not eligible costs under this call, research bodies providing personnel to operate equipment, may be counted as in-kind cost share as detailed in the call document.

3. Q: Can we use existing core technical staff time towards the in-kind cost share?

A: Yes, the reallocation of existing core staff is allowable as in-kind cost share once these individuals are not contracted for other specific conflicting tasks or are funded by other granting agencies. For example, the time of research staff including postdoctoral researchers may not be used as in-kind cost share as their positions are funded to conduct designated research programmes. *For existing core staff, the name and position of the staff member must be included in the budget plan / justification.*

4. Q: If technical staff are to run a research infrastructure and have been funded under PRTL, is that considered double funding if they are a contribution to the overall costs?

A: Yes, this would be double funding – the important point here is that the time of staff designated to a programme of research or a support role cannot count towards the research body contribution, as their appointment has been funded for a previously defined activity. *For existing core staff, the name and position of the staff member must be included in the budget plan / justification.*

5. Q: If staff are funded from a non-exchequer funded research award (e.g. EU or Industry) can they be used as part of the in-kind cost share?

A: The time of staff in research positions which have been funded for a research award may not be used as part of cost share, as this would constitute double counting.

6. Q: Is the full 10% cash contribution required from the lead Research Body or can it be shared between Collaborating Research Bodies in the case of an inter-institutional sharing of a research infrastructure request?

A: The 10% cash cost share can come from a contribution from multiple collaborating Research bodies. In this case, the appropriate *“shared” cost share arrangements* should be worked out between the lead research body and the collaborating research bodies on the infrastructure requested, SFI does not provide any guidance on this point. This should be included in the Lead Research Body letter of Support.

7. Q: Will timesheets be required for those technicians forming part of the research body contribution in-kind?

A: Yes. Timesheets will need to be in place. The operational and access charge plans will need to be auditable.

8. Q: Given that the in-kind contribution of 30% is not mandatory, can you please confirm that SFI may contribute up to a max of 90% of the cost?

A: Yes. Although in-kind cost share is only strongly encouraged, applications without significant in-kind cost share may not be reviewed as favourably. Also, the research body cash contribution of 10% is the minimum required. Again, a request may be reviewed more favourably if this cash contribution exceeds this minimum.

9. Q: Can the cost of providing space for the equipment be deemed as part of the research body's in-kind contribution?

A: The cost of providing space for the equipment cannot be deemed as part of the research body's in-kind contribution. Research body cost share may take the form of cash or technical staff only. Installation costs (excluding construction) are considered as eligible costs.

10. Q: Should VAT be included in industry costs share where relevant?

A: The cost share contribution from industry / vendor should include VAT where relevant please see Section F of the call document for an example.

11. Q: Does the highly desirable 30% in-kind cost share have to come from industry or could it come from state agencies that would use the equipment and could assist in (in kind) installation, delivery etc.?

A: Yes, the 30% (desirable) contribution from industry could come from other sources such as a state agency.

12. Q: Can a vendor discount contribute to the cash cost share?

A: No. Vendor discounts do not qualify towards the mandatory cash cost share.

Sustainability and Access Charge Plans

1. Q: Can depreciation of the value of the item be incorporated into the management and sustainability plan?

A: Whilst the importance of depreciation in sustainability planning is acknowledged by SFI, access fees for SFI funded researchers should cover only maintenance, service, training and essential consumables to operate the equipment, but should not include depreciation of the instrument. This is to prevent double counting of exchequer funding. SFI would however expect to see full economic cost recovery for industrial user access charges.

2. Q: Can access charges be claimed for retrospectively?

A: No, SFI cannot apply access charges retrospectively. Access charges are regarded as eligible costs in other SFI programmes, once SFI-approved access charge plans are in place.

3. Q: Can reasonable estimates of income from the access charge plan to industry be included as industry cost share for the infrastructure?

A: No, however projections of such access charge income should be included in and will strengthen the sustainability and management plan

4. Q: When assessing plans for sustainability, what is meant by expectations of a research body commitment that is "commensurate with the scale of the requested infrastructure"? Isn't this defined by the minimum cash + in-kind contributions to be met? Is there an expectation that research bodies should go beyond this?

A: It is noted that the financial contribution (cash & in-kind) is a critical component in demonstrating commitment. However, in addition commitment must be demonstrated by putting in place a strong management and sustainability plan.

5. Q: In terms of plans for sustainability, what is SFI's understanding of the phrase "long-term"? Should the institute have, for example, a 5-year plan for support of the infrastructure?

A: Yes, although no limit is given, 5 years for example would be expected.

6. Q: How long would the Research Body have to maintain the infrastructure for?

A: We would expect long term commitment which would vary depending on the type of instrumentation, but as stated in Q.5 above, at least 5 years would be expected. In the current call, maintenance / service costs are allowable for 2 years from the date of purchase. *In addition, two years are included in the access charge plan template, but information regarding additional years (up to 6 years) is strongly recommended.*

7. Q: Is the line item in the table just above 'Other' and which in Appendix D presently shows €0; a summation of annual charges' or the net surplus or deficit, of Total Annual charges - Total Net Cost

A: This refers to the summation of Annual Charges (hourly rate x number of hours anticipated), taking into account that different hourly rates may apply for different types of users. The cost per hour indicated in the access charge plan is that which would be charged to SFI users. Other user charges may be detailed in the notes section, where relevant.

8. Q: If technical staff costs are used as a contribution towards the research body in-kind cost share, can these costs also be included in the access charge plan?

A: No, if a dedicated technician is hired to run the infrastructure and they also form part of the research body's cost share, then these costs cannot be included in the access charge plan for the same time period. However, if for example two years of staff costs formed part of the in-kind cost share, it is possible that in year 3 these costs could be included in the access charge plan.

9. Q: In the access charge plan, can different hourly rates be put in place for local versus other academic users?

A: Different hourly rates for these different user groups may be allowable in certain cases where a strong justification is provided. However, SFI does not see any justification for different rates to be charged to local users compared to other academic users where this is based on staff costs funded by exchequer or non-exchequer research funds. SFI does recognise that rates for industry users may be based on full economic costs.

10. Q: Can we submit the financial details of the access charge plan and a summary justification of 1 page max?

A: Yes, in addition to the access charge template, you may add a 1 page max justification for the access charge plan where relevant.

11. Q: Can the “training costs of users” be included in the access charge plan?

A: Training costs of users may be eligible in certain cases. However, avoidance of double counting is critical – i.e. technical staff already charging their time to operate the equipment or already funded by the exchequer cannot be attributed to training time. This will be scrutinised on a case-by-case basis.

12. Q: Can “equipment downtime (e.g. for maintenance)” be included in the access charge plan?

A: Equipment downtime should not be charged to the access charge plan, but rather downtime should be factored in to the calculation for usable hours. See call document *“This plan should include realistic, specific and quantitative details on the anticipated usage, taking into account downtime of instruments and maintenance costs.”*

13. Q: Could you provide a definition of the rule that SFI will use in deciding if charges included under ‘Other Costs’ in the Access Charge plan will be deemed allowable?

A: “Other Costs” is a miscellaneous category to capture any costs which do not naturally fall into the other categories indicated. Whilst not providing a specific definition, as there will be wide variability in infrastructure being sought, SFI would only expect minimal costs here, if any. All costs in the access charge plan must relate to the operation of the item of equipment, and must not relate to any research being conducted through the use of the instrument or any research that is being undertaken with the use of the instrument. *All access charge plans will be subject to individual scrutiny and must be pre-approved by SFI before access fees can be sought in applications to future SFI programmes.*

14. Q: How many years of charging information should be covered in the access charge plan?

A: Ideally, the plan should provide charging information for the first 6 years of the Research Infrastructure investment.

Vendor Quotes

1. Q: One of our applicants has a very specific set-up/instrument request and there is only one possible supplier, and hence, quote that can be secured. Is there any justification for having only one vendor quote?

A: SFI would expect this only in exceptional circumstances; in these cases an adequate explanation and justification in the budget justification section must be provided.

2. Q: Have SFI considered that some proposals may include vendor quotes for specific equipment, but that what is ultimately procured may come from a different supplier?

A: Yes, it is recognised that a supplier may change. The purpose of the quotes is to provide evidence for estimated costs.

3. Q: Have SFI considered that the quotations included in the proposal may not be the exact cost due to time elapsed between quotes being sought and equipment being procured due to currency fluctuations and import duties etc.?

A: Yes, it is recognised that costs may fluctuate following the tendering process. However, it must be recognised that the amount awarded by SFI will not change.