

SFI Research Infrastructure Programme 2023 FAQs

Terms of Reference

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Eligibility

Is an SFI Frontiers for Future Award Co-PI eligible to lead an SFI Research Infrastructure application?

Yes, FFP co-PIs can be the lead applicant on the Research Infrastructure application. Please refer to section 2.4 in the call document; “The applicant must hold, or have held, a significant peer-reviewed, independent research grant or award. This is typically a multi-annual (≥ 3 years in duration) grant or fellowship that provides support for research costs and may support the salaries and/or stipends of staff/team member(s) in addition to the Applicant”.

Can there be co-applicants besides the lead applicant on the SFI Research Infrastructure application?

No, but there can be collaborators listed as key users.

Is the ≥ 3 -year grant criteria a strict cut-off? Would 3 years of cumulative peer-reviewed, independent research funding be eligible, where a PI may have multiple awards of shorter (12-18 month) duration?

Typically, we seek PIs to have experience handling large multi-year grants. No, 3 years of cumulative peer-reviewed, independent research funding will not be eligible, where a PI may have multiple awards of shorter (12-18 month) duration. Also, the grant should support the salaries and/or stipends of staff/team member(s) in addition to research costs. In addition to the information provided in the call document, we would also advise you to revert to your research office to confirm eligibility; SFI cannot ascertain eligibility without having the full documentation.

Are collaborations across STEM/AHSS disciplines permissible, and are AHSS academics eligible as lead applicants (as for other programmes, eg NCF)?

Any collaboration should be within the RI programme remit. Please refer to the programme objectives and programme remit in the call document. It is important to note that SFI cannot ascertain the eligibility of STEM/AHSS collaboration without having the full documentation at the submission stage.

Could a Lead Applicant use an IRC Postgraduate Scholarship or Postdoctoral Fellowship, on which they acted as Supervisor, to be eligible to act as a Lead Applicant on an SFI Research Infrastructure 2023 programme application? This would be their only qualifying award.

The applicant is only eligible where they hold or have previously held the award in question. A named collaborator or supervisor on an award would not be eligible to apply, regardless of the number of awards they are listed on as collaborator.

Equipment

Can you include costs to use cloud computing services as an eligible cost in this call?

Data infrastructure may be eligible under the Research Infrastructure call, however, it is not possible for SFI to say whether a particular concept or potential proposal would be eligible until submission stage, when we can determine if the proposal fits the remit of the call.

When preparing an application, applicants should ensure that it is clear how the proposed research satisfies the following, outlined in Section 2.1 of the call document: “For this call, proposals must either be aligned to one of the 14 Refreshed Priority Research Areas for 2018-2023, or to any other area under SFI’s legal remit where there is convincing evidence that there will be significant potential for economic and/or societal impact.”

For cluster applicants, do the individual items need to be closely related to each other?

As stated in Section 2.5 of the call document, "Multiple items of equipment can be grouped together to reach the €500,000 cost threshold, so long as they contribute to a single, shared infrastructure request (e.g., a testbed or distributed cluster)."

Are the costs associated with the Software installation for Infrastructure also covered?

Yes. Software license requests are covered for 2 years in line with service and maintenance costs.

Budget/Procurement

If there is only a single supplier of the instrument, can one quote be supplied with a single source justification?

SFI acknowledges that some equipment may have specific technical capabilities making it unique and possibly only available from one supplier. In that case, a clear justification should be provided that there is only one supplier.

Can you elaborate further on the Green Procurement plan?

Green Public Procurement (GPP) is a process where public authorities seek to source goods, services or works with a reduced environmental impact. Ireland has committed to implementing GPP in all tenders using public funds by 2023. All the applicants to Research Infrastructure 2023 Call are required to submit a 1-page Green Procurement Plan. It is anticipated that in the process of procurement, applicants will consider green suppliers or sustainable sources. Please refer to the Office of Government Procurement (<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/972e3-ogps-go-green-campaign/#>) and Environment Protection Agency guidance (<https://www.epa.ie/our-services/monitoring--assessment/circular-economy/green-public-procurement/>) on Green Public Procurement. Applicants should also consult their Research Bodies Sustainable Procurement Policy.

Are import custom duties (i.e., for equipment by non-EU suppliers), where required, eligible costs?

Yes, import customs duties from non-EU suppliers are eligible costs.

Cost share

Can the trade-in or sale of existing equipment be used as cash cost-share?

Cash through the sale of fully depreciated equipment may be used as a cash contribution. It should be noted that Section 21.3 of SFI's General Terms and Conditions states that: SFI permits the Research Body to sell any SFI-funded Programme Asset but with the *prior written consent of SFI*. 21.3 (b) sets out who must be made available for use in order of priority. The Research Body is permitted to treat the receipts from the sale as income of the Research Programme and notify SFI.

Is there a minimum for in-kind vendor contribution?

No, there is no minimum for in-kind contribution.

If a technical member of staff is already available to take part in the proposal, can this be considered an in-kind contribution?

Technical staff already employed at the research body can be in-kind cost share (as stated in section 2.6 of the call document).

Is the 10% cost share a percentage of the total cost, or cost after discount?

The percentage of cash cost share is a percentage of the total direct costs (including VAT) of the infrastructure request to SFI (i.e., 10% of \geq €500,000 direct costs request to SFI). Please refer to pages 12 and 13 in the call document. For example, in case the total cost of the Research Infrastructure is €2,200,000. The 10% cost share of the SFI budget request of €2,000,000 is €200,000. The cost share can be more than 10% but never less than 10%.

Is it possible to change the cost share percentage on an application between the EoI and full proposal? So if an EoI was submitted with a 10% cost share would it be possible to increase that percentage at the full proposal stage?

Yes. SFI should be notified of any budget or cost share changes and it should be justified in the full proposal.

Access Charge Plan

Do you need multiple Access Charge Plans for distributed equipment?

Multiple items of equipment can be grouped together to reach the €550,000 cost threshold, so long as they contribute to a single, shared infrastructure request (e.g., a testbed or distributed cluster). An access charge plan should be provided for each item of infrastructure requested.

How do you calculate the industry rate (full market rate) if no such equipment already exists in Ireland? Do you use international best practice?

The industry rate must include an allowance towards the depreciation of infrastructure. In case no such equipment exists in Ireland, International best practices should be consulted.

Letters of support

About the Letters of Support, is a Letter of Support by a collaborating Research Body mandatory, i.e., is it mandatory to submit an application in collaboration with other Research Bodies?

A key objective of the Research Infrastructure 2023 call is: “To facilitate broad usage across Ireland and to encourage partnerships and collaboration between different cohorts of researchers in Ireland; for example, between Universities, Technological Universities, Institutes of Technology, other Eligible Research Bodies, researchers in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, and between different cohorts of researchers in Ireland”.

As a result, the inclusion of letters of support from collaborating research bodies is mandatory. This is to ensure that applications demonstrate there will be maximum sharing of the infrastructure and commitment from collaborating Research Bodies. The letters should detail the key users for the collaborating Research Body; the selection of LoS from collaborating research bodies that are included in the application is at the discretion of the applicant. The letters of support may be provided by the key users themselves or an institutional representative.

The “Key users” (Section 3.5.2 of the call document) should be a description of all groups of users who will access the infrastructure. This section has been increased from 2 to 3 pages to ensure applicants have sufficient space to detail as many key users as required. Please enter the key users in bullet point format.

To summarise - the key users section describes all potential users of the proposed infrastructure, and the LoS are from collaborating research bodies to highlight involvement, sharing and collaboration through the proposed infrastructure.

Review process

Are suites of equipment reviewed more or less favourably than single pieces of equipment in terms of how the infrastructure will result in impact?

No, there is no difference in how a proposal with a single infrastructure item is reviewed compared to a proposal containing multiple infrastructure items

Other

Do personnel to manage the equipment have to be recruited on a full-time basis? Should the dedicated staff member to manage the equipment be a full-time role on the project?

The dedicated staff member must be a full-time staff member. However, they can dedicate part of their time to managing the proposed infrastructure.

Is there a list of all the equipment that was awarded under the 2021 SFI Research Infrastructure call?

You can find the complete list of the 2021 RI award from the last year's award announcement here - <https://www.sfi.ie/research-news/news/research-infrastructure/>.