SCIENCE FOUNDATION IRELAND

Science Foundation Ireland-National Science Foundation I-Corps@SFI

Entrepreneurial Training Programme (ETP) 2023 Call

Application Handbook

KEY DATES

There are <u>four application deadlines</u> associated with this programme.

- **Call A**   Launch: October 9th, 2023

  Application Deadline: January 19th, 2024, 13:00 Dublin Local Time

- **Call B**   Launch: January 22nd, 2024

  Application Deadline: March 15th, 2024, 13:00 Dublin Local Time

- **Call C**   Launch: March 18th, 2024

  Application Deadline: May 24th, 2024, 13:00 Dublin Local Time

- **Call D**   Launch: May 27th, 2024

  Application Deadline: July 19th, 2024, 13:00 Dublin Local Time

Applications open on SESAME from October 16th, 2023

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INTRODUCTION

1   The SFI-NSF I-Corps@SFI Entrepreneurial Training Programme (ETP)

The SFI-NSF I-Corps@SFI Entrepreneurial Training Programme (ETP) supports researchers based at Eligible Research Bodies[1] to undertake training in entrepreneurship and innovation as part of the National Science Foundation (NSF) Innovation Corps (I-Corps™) Teams programme[2]. The NSF I-Corps Teams programme is a world-renowned, fast-paced, immersive seven-week training programme that provides research teams with skills in evidence-based entrepreneurship to assist them in identifying and validating economic and societal impact opportunities for their research. Participation can significantly enhance the quality of evidence in assessing opportunities and can, in turn, de-risk and accelerate the translation of ideas to impact.

The *I-Corps@SFI Partnership* is a unique bi-lateral collaboration between SFI and the NSF which focuses on exploring and supporting collaborative opportunities aligned to innovation and entrepreneurship training and knowledge exchange under the NSF I-Corps programme. Since its launch in 2011, the NSF I-Corps programme has supported training for 1,315 teams (3,745 individuals) and has supported the formation of 644 start-up businesses[3]. The follow-on funding leveraged from the programme now exceeds $300M broken down into approx. $140M and $160M from public and private sources, respectively. To date, NSF has expanded access to its I-Corps programme through partnerships with eight U.S. federal agencies, one U.S. state and one country outside the U.S. (i.e., Ireland)[4].

In addition to the SFI-NSF I-Corps@SFI Entrepreneurial Training Programme, SFI has developed the I-Corps@SFI Academy in collaboration with I-Corps South[5] based at Georgia Tech. The I-Corps@SFI Academy provides researchers with introductory experience of the NSF I-Corps evidence-based entrepreneurship methodology and gives them an opportunity to learn and apply it to their research ideas. It is expected that researchers who have participated in the I-Corps@SFI Academy will be strongly positioned to apply to the SFI-NSF I-Corps@SFI Entrepreneurial Training Programme. The I-Corps@SFI Academy also provides other training supports including training for Research Body staff wishing to develop and deliver evidence-based entrepreneurship training within their institutions.

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[1] https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/eligibility-related-information/
[2] https://www.nsf.gov/news/special_reports/i-corps/teams.jsp
[3] https://www.nsf.gov/news/special_reports/i-corps/pdf/I-CorpsReport--6_4_19FINAL_508.pdf
[4]https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-Nexus-between-Entrepreneurship-and-Economic-A-Stoica-Rom%C3%A1n/c9d6cd9861765abb621b14fc32a030a04b336791
[5] https://www.icorpssouth.com/

2   SFI Strategy 2025 – Shaping Our Future

Entrepreneurship is the motivation, attitude, and skill to realise new opportunities and create economic and societal impact from them. Entrepreneurship is a powerful driver of economic growth and societal prosperity. The set of skills that constitute an entrepreneurial mindset (e.g., creativity, resilience, life-long learning and leadership) is increasingly important today and will be critical in the future if we are to realise transformative approaches to address the complex societal challenges we face.

SFI's Strategy 2025 – *Shaping Our Future*[6] recognises the need to foster entrepreneurial thinking and highlights the need to maximise the impact of publicly funded research by providing researchers with the supports to engage early and often with beneficiaries and end-users of research to understand the problems they are trying to solve and to develop solutions that are sustainable and can deliver tangible benefits. Shaping Our Future also highlights the need for broader access to such supports as well as the need to develop innovative approaches that deliver outcomes more quickly.

3   Impact 2023

Impact 2030 – *Ireland's Research & Innovation Strategy*[7], highlights the importance of entrepreneurship in the context of transversal skills and research commercialisation. Participation in the SFI-NSF I-Corps@SFI Entrepreneurial Training Programme will support researchers to develop knowledge and skills in entrepreneurship and innovation that will, in turn, create opportunities for personal and career development, supporting them to realise their potential. Entrepreneurial and innovation skills will also enable researchers to realise opportunities for their research and to advance impact from publicly funded research.

4   Objectives of the SFI-NSF I-Corps@SFI Entrepreneurial Training Programme (ETP)

The SFI-NSF I-Corps@SFI Entrepreneurial Training Programme is intended to support SFI grant holders, and associated team members, based at Eligible Research Bodies to develop entrepreneurial and innovation skills that will enable them to realise new economic and societal impact opportunities for their research. The programme is intended to support research teams that have progressed their research to the point that an output is protected by IP (or is at an advanced stage toward protection) and/or have conceptualised how this output or IP can be utilised as part of a new product, technology, process or service. In addition to supporting the translation of research to impact, the programme aims to foster entrepreneurial culture within Research Bodies by raising awareness of entrepreneurship and promoting entrepreneurial thinking

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[6] https://www.sfi.ie/strategy/SFI-Strategy-2025.pdf
[7] https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/27c78-impact-2030-irelands-new-research-and-innovation-strategy/

and skills amongst researchers at different career stages.

> **Note**: SFI may consider applications from awardees who hold grants from other funding agencies. In these cases, prospective applicants should contact SFI at i-corps@sfi.ie in advance of application preparation.

The objectives of the SFI-NSF I-Corps@SFI Entrepreneurial Training Programme are to:

- Support researchers to develop skills in entrepreneurship and innovation.
- Enable researchers to realise economic and societal impact opportunities from publicly funded research.
- Accelerate the translation of publicly funded research to impact.
- Raise awareness of entrepreneurial thinking and skills amongst researchers at different career stages.

The primary focus of activities under this programme is to support the identification of economic and societal impact opportunities for research and to support validation of problem-solution fit. It is anticipated that the outputs of the programme (i.e., opportunity/need identification, skills development) will be directly relevant to the preparation of applications for follow-on research supports such as, for example, SFI Challenge programmes, the Enterprise Ireland Commercial Case Feasibility Grant and Commercialisation Fund[8] and European Innovation Council (EIC) programmes[9].

PROGRAMME STRUCTURE

5 Funding and Training

Applicants can request funding of up to **€35k direct costs** (no overheads are awarded under this programme) for a period of up to **6-months**[10]. Funding will be awarded on a competitive basis and requests must be fully justified.

Teams successful at application stage must participate in the NSF I-Corps Teams[11] programme which is an intensive 7-week training programme delivered by the NSF during which teams will receive training in evidence-based entrepreneurship and undertake extensive opportunity (e.g., stakeholder, beneficiary, customer) discovery activities. Through participation in the programme, teams will gain valuable insights

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[8] https://www.enterprise-ireland.com/en/funding-supports/researcher/funding-to-commercialise-research/
[9] https://eic.ec.europa.eu/eic-funding-opportunities/eic-accelerator-0_en
[10] See Section 9 for further details on application tracks.
[11] https://beta.nsf.gov/funding/initiatives/i-corps/about-teams

on unmet needs, problem-solution fit and the impact potential of their idea. Teams will benefit from mentoring provided by highly experienced NSF instructors. Teams will also learn from other research teams participating in the programme as key components of training are delivered using a cohort model. Once the training component has been completed, teams may use any remaining funding over the remaining duration of their grant to undertake further opportunity discovery or problem-solution fit validation activities. Based on learnings from the training, teams may also consider initial prototyping activities.

Applicants should note that <u>participation in this 7-week training component represents a significant time commitment.</u> Each team member is expected to contribute to in-depth preparation and attendance. It is expected that team members will make appropriate time commitment to the programme (approx. 15 hours per week for participating and preparing for the I-Corps events, opportunity discovery and problem-solution fit validation activities). The training component of the programme is delivered online and comprises a kick-off meeting (over 2-3 days), followed by frequent check-in sessions where teams present updates to the NSF training team and other participating teams. Training concludes with a "lessons learned" session. <u>Team members are required to attend all elements of the training programme</u> (i.e., initial kick-off meeting, update meetings and the "lessons learned" closing session).

Teams participating in the programme undertake training as part of a cohort, with the programme operating several cohorts per year. Trainers and mentors come from across the United States innovation ecosystem and have extensive experience in research commercialisation, innovation, investment and entrepreneurship. Demand for places on training cohorts is high, so teams are advised to apply to the SFI-NSF I-Corps@SFI Entrepreneurial Training Programme well in advance and to plan for attendance at training (subject to successful application). Flexibility will be offered to teams in selecting cohorts to attend.

PROGRAMME REQUIREMENTS

6   Programme Remit

Applicants should note that this programme is intended to support the discovery and validation of economic and societal impact opportunities for publicly funded STEM research. As such, it is expected that participating teams will be strongly committed to exploring these opportunities and participate fully in the training provided. It is expected that the Principal Investigator (PI) on an application will be active in STEM research and will have a demonstrable track record of research in a relevant STEM area. It is expected that the research will be at a sufficiently advanced stage and protected by IP (or at an advanced stage of protection), such that the team will already have undertaken conceptualisation of how it may be utilised in a new product, technology, process or service.

7   State aid and SFI Grant funding

All SFI funding granted under this call is subject to, and must comply with, State aid law. Accordingly, 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. In that regard, applicants are referred to guidance provided in Section 2 of the European Commission's 2022 Framework for State aid for research and development and innovation (2022/C 414/01)[12] (the "Framework").

In particular, research activities undertaken as part of a Grant awarded under this call must be "non-economic" in nature (see Section 2.1.1 of the Framework in that regard). Where an application for funding under the SFI-NSF I-Corps@SFI Entrepreneurial Training Programme concerns a project that involves collaboration with an industry party for all or part of the term of the Grant, applicants will be required to demonstrate that the collaboration complies with the conditions of "effective collaboration" as well as the associated conditions concerning the allocation between the parties of the results and/or intellectual property rights arising from the collaboration (see Section 2.2.2 of the Framework in that regard). This is to be achieved through completion of an "Industry Collaboration Form" (ICF). The ICF will assist applicants in defining the relationship with the relevant industry partners to ensure compliance with the conditions of Section 2.2.2 of the Framework. SFI requires that a fully completed ICF is returned to it on or before the date that the Collaborative Research (or Intellectual Property Rights) Agreement has been signed by all the relevant parties. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that the submitted ICF is complete, accurate and adequately demonstrates compliance with Section 2.2.2 of the Framework before entering into an agreement.

In accordance with the SFI General Terms & Conditions, a signed copy of each Collaborative Research (or Intellectual Property Rights) Agreement relating to the Grant must be held on file by the relevant Research Body. SFI may request that a copy of the signed agreement be provided which can be held on file by SFI for audit purposes, including for the purposes of ex-post State aid verification checks (i.e., on-going checks after the granting of funds / partial funds).

As noted elsewhere, contribution to costs of up to a maximum of €5k to procure an independent expert to act as Entrepreneurial Mentor on a team may be requested. The process of procuring the services of an expert should adhere to public procurement rules (see Section 2.3 of the Framework in that regard).

The template ICF, inclusive of an FAQ document, further information on SFI's ex-post State aid verification

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

checks and further sources of State aid guidance, including guidance developed by Knowledge Transfer Ireland, can be found on the SFI website.[13] If in any doubt as to the interpretation or application of this guidance or the State aid rules more generally, applicants are advised to seek independent legal advice.

WHO CAN APPLY

8   Team Structure

Applications to the SFI-NSF I-Corps@SFI Entrepreneurial Training Programme should be submitted from teams seeking to explore economic and societal impact opportunities from research supported under an SFI award.

Teams <u>must</u> comprise three members:

i.   a **Principal Investigator** (PI) – It is expected that the PI will provide administrative and technical leadership on the grant and oversee project management. The PI should have appropriate technical expertise and currently work in a STEM-related discipline. Upon successful application, the PI will be the grant holder.

ii.   an **Entrepreneurial Lead** (EL) – The EL is expected to have the necessary technical expertise relating to the proposed technology along with the motivation to lead the opportunity discovery/validation activities of the team during the programme and progress translation of the technology following completion of the programme. The EL plays a critical role in the team and is expected to have a deep commitment to discovering impact opportunities. Postgraduate and postdoctoral researchers interested in technology entrepreneurship are encouraged to participate as Entrepreneurial Leads.

iii.   an **Entrepreneurial Mentor** (EM) – The EM is expected to bring independent entrepreneurship, industry or relevant domain expertise to a team and to serve as a mentor to the PI and EL, assisting in the identification of stakeholders and advising on technology disposition. In addition to providing mentorship to the PI and EL, it is expected that the EM will play a significant role in advising the team on the translation strategy (e.g., commercialisation) based on the learnings from the programme. Ideally, the EM would be willing to continue their engagement with the EL and PI following completion of the programme.

In certain cases, it may be appropriate for non-academic staff members responsible for the translation or commercialisation of research to act as EM. In such cases, the EM should have a business/commercial development role in, or associated with, a Research Body. This could be, for example, a member of staff within the Technology Transfer Office (TTO) or Research Office (RO) of a Research Body. Note that the EM is an independent advisory/mentoring role and should support the PI and EL in accessing networks,

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analysing and assessing information gathered as part of the training provided in the programme. Teams may, as part of their budget request, include costs of up to a maximum of €5k, to procure an independent expert to participate as EM (see Section 10.6 for further information).

> **NOTE**: Requests for salary support for non-academic staff members participating in the role of EM is not permitted.
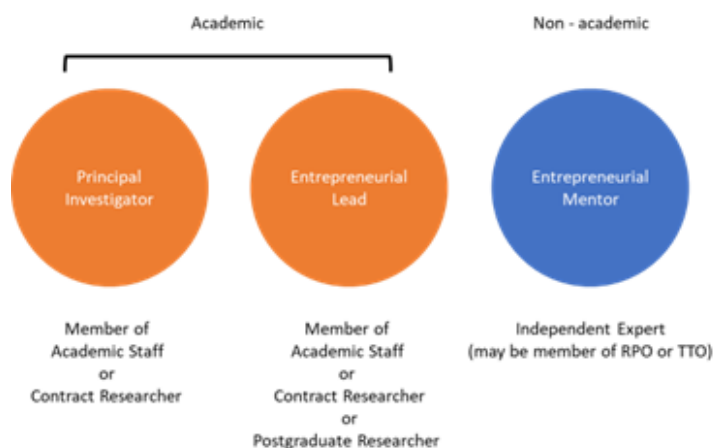
Figure 2. Composition of SFI-NSF I-Corps@SFI ETP team.

> **NOTE:** <u>All team members</u> (Principal Investigator, Entrepreneurial Lead and Entrepreneurial Mentor) <u>must</u> attend and participate in training activities as required under the NSF I-Corps Teams Programme.

> **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy**
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> The SFI Strategy: *Shaping Our Future* underscores SFI's commitment to building equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) within the Irish research and innovation sector[14]. SFI recognises that excellent research stems from diverse and inclusive teams which reflect our society and the communities we serve. As such, SFI aspires to pro-actively lead in driving the EDI agenda forward through the research and research teams that it funds.
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> In the SFI EDI Strategy (external), increasing the number of women and members of Historically Underserved Communities[15] in Applicant Teams are key objectives. <u>As such, women and members of</u>

Historically Underserved Communities are strongly encouraged to apply to this programme either in the role of PI, EL or EM. Further details on SFI's data concerning application submission and success rates by gender (binary) can be found on the SFI website.[16]

Furthermore, as part of its EDI Strategy, SFI aims to increase awareness of the sex and gender dimension in research, by requesting that researchers demonstrate that they have considered any potential biological sex and/or socio-cultural gender aspects in their proposed research (see Section 10.5.1).

8.1 Applicant Team Eligibility

Under the programme, applications will only be accepted from teams comprising a Principal Investigator and Entrepreneurial Lead based at an Eligible Research Body meeting the criteria below.

8.1.1 Principal Investigator

Under this call, Principal Investigators <u>must</u> meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Be a **member of academic staff** at an Eligible Research Body (permanent or with a contract that covers the period of the award),
  and

- Be a **Principal**, **Co-Principal** or **Funded Investigator** on a currently active SFI-funded grant or a grant active in the last 3-years (at the time of application).

8.1.2 Entrepreneurial Lead

The Entrepreneurial Lead <u>must</u> meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Be a **member of academic staff** at an Eligible Research Body (permanent or with a contract that covers the period of the award),
  or

- Be a **contract researcher** (incl. postdoctoral researcher or Fellow) at an Eligible Research Body with a contract that covers the period of the award,

  or

- Be a **postgraduate researcher** registered on a whole time Masters or Doctoral programme at an Eligible Research Body at the time of application submission.

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[16] https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/gender/

8.1.3 Entrepreneurial Mentor

There are no specific eligibility criteria associated with the role of Entrepreneurial Mentor (EM). The suitability of an EM will be assessed as part of the review of proposals to the programme. Prospective applicants are encouraged to discuss any queries in relation to a potential mentor with SFI in advance of proposal submission. Ideally, an EM should come from outside academia, have significant innovation, entrepreneurial, industry or other relevant experience appropriate to this role, and be capable of supporting the team during participation in the programme.

8.2 Eligibility of Research Body

The Research Body is the body responsible for the overall financial and administrative co-ordination of research programmes supported by research grants from SFI. Host Research Bodies must be situated in the Republic of Ireland. A list of Eligible Research Bodies is available on the SFI website.[17]

HOW TO APPLY

9 Application Track

Under the SFI-NSF I-Corps@SFI Entrepreneurial Training Programme 2023 Call, there are two application tracks.

9.1 Standard Track

The *standard track* is open to researchers (Principal, Co-Principal or Funded Investigators) who currently hold, or are funded by, any active SFI grant or an SFI grant active in the past 3 years. Applications to the standard track must be submitted via SESAME. Following submission, applications are checked for eligibility.[18] Applications that are not deemed eligible under the programme call will be notified and their application will be withdrawn.

The review of eligible proposals involves two stages:

- **Application Review** - All eligible proposals are reviewed by a sitting panel composed of SFI staff and at least one independent expert engaged by SFI. This panel convenes to discuss each proposal against the criteria outlined in Section 12. Only proposals demonstrating a strong potential to leverage the programme to develop entrepreneurial skills and to translate research to impact are recommended to progress to the next stage of review by the sitting panel. Proposals not

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

[18] 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.

recommended to progress will be provided with feedback from the sitting panel.

- **Interview** – Following review by the sitting panel, applicant teams will be invited to attend an interview with SFI and NSF programme staff. The purpose of this interview is to inform a final assessment of the appropriateness, preparedness and commitment of the team to participate in the programme. Following this interview, a final recommendation will be made. Proposals not recommended for funding will be provided with feedback.

Under the standard track, applicants can request funding of up to €35k for a duration of 6-months. Further details are provided in Section 10.6.

Following successful application, teams will be offered a place on the NSF I-Corps Teams cohort subject to the availability of places. SFI will liaise with teams in planning for attendance. Teams may need to provide a preference of cohorts for attendance and placement in the most immediate cohort cannot be guaranteed.

9.2   Accelerated Track

The *accelerated track* is open to researchers (Principal, Co-Principal or Funded Investigators) who currently hold, or are funded by, any active SFI grant awarded under an *affiliated* SFI programme. Prospective applicants interested in applying to the accelerated track should contact their relevant SFI Programme Manager/Officer and the I-Corps@SFI programme team (at i-corps@sfi.ie) in advance of application preparation. Following discussion, an accelerated track application form may be made available to prospective applicants.

Current affiliated SFI programmes include:

- SFI Challenge Programmes, including the National Challenge Fund;
- SFI Research Centres Programme;
- SFI ARC Hubs Programme.

As affiliated programmes may change, prospective applicants are encouraged to consult the programme website for the most up to date information.

Following submission, applications are checked for eligibility.[19] Applications that are not deemed eligible under the programme call will be notified and their application will be withdrawn.

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[19] 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.

The review of applications to the accelerated track follows a similar but more agile process to that of the standard track. As the PI and EL will already have been funded under an affiliated programme, the proposal undergoes review by SFI staff to ensure that it is strategically aligned to the objectives of the affiliated programme award. The review of eligible proposals involves:

- **Review of Strategic Alignment** - All eligible proposals are reviewed by SFI staff from the affiliated programme and ETP management teams to ensure that the proposal aligns to the objectives of both programmes. Only proposals demonstrating strong alignment are recommended to progress to the next stage of review. Proposals not recommended to progress will be provided with feedback.

- **Interview -** Following recommendation from the SFI programme staff, applicant teams will be invited to attend an interview with SFI and NSF programme staff. The purpose of this interview is to inform a final assessment of the appropriateness, preparedness, and commitment of the team to participate in the programme. Following this interview, a final recommendation will be made. Proposals not recommended to progress will be provided with feedback.

Under the accelerated track, applicants may not request funding. Costs for participation in training (e.g., NSF I-Corps administration costs) and prototyping/travel to undertake training/opportunity discovery activities may be re-allocated from the current affiliate grant subject to approval from SFI. Applicants holding grants funded under an affiliated programme may also opt to apply under the standard track but will be subject to the full review process.

NOTE: Applications to the *accelerated track* may be submitted at any time and will be reviewed over shorter periods outside the schedule set by the programme application deadlines.

Teams successful at application will be offered a place on the NSF I-Corps Teams Programme subject to the availability of cohort places. SFI will liaise with teams in planning for attendance.

10   Application Procedure

Applications to the SFI-NSF I-Corps@SFI Entrepreneurial Training Programme through the *standard track* must be submitted through SESAME, SFI's online grants and awards management system in advance of the application deadline. Applying through SESAME involves completion of an online form with details including team members, alignment to remit and requested budget. In addition, applicants will be required to upload information in PDF documents. Theses uploaded documents must use the templates provided on the programme website. Applications to the programme include multiple sections detailed below. Applications to the accelerated track must be submitted via email to i-corps@sfi.ie.

10.1 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.[20]

10.2 Alignment to Programme Remit

This section must be used to outline how the proposed research aligns to the Programme Remit as described in Section 6. Applicants are advised to review this section carefully. This statement will be used to determine the eligibility of the application.

10.3 SFI Grant Lineage

This section of the application allows you to describe how the proposed application relates to research being undertaken as part of a current SFI grant or previously funded SFI grant. This section should provide an overview of how the research outputs of the current or previously funded grant relate to this application.

10.4 Team, Problem, Solution & Impact

This section provides you with the opportunity to provide more detailed information on the team, the problem you have identified, how you propose to solve this problem and the potential impact that your solution will deliver. Please use the template available from the programme 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**: Briefly and clearly describe the team, its expertise and the rationale for its formation. Provide a clear description of how the team has the necessary experience, skills and motivation to solve the problem identified. Reference any technical or entrepreneurial skills/experience relevant to the commercialisation of this technology. Briefly and clearly describe the respective roles of the team members, in particular, describe how the Principal Investigator and Entrepreneurial Mentor will support the Entrepreneurial Lead.
- **Problem**: Briefly and clearly describe the specific problem or unmet need identified. Provide information on activities you have undertaken to validate this need. Who is affected by this

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problem or unmet need? Describe any key insights/evidence to support why this problem or unmet need should be addressed.

- **Solution**: Briefly and clearly describe the innovation you propose and how it will address the problem or unmet need identified. How will it create value and for who? Describe how the proposed innovation is novel or represents a new approach to solving this problem (refer to state of the art where appropriate)? Describe how this innovation can form part of a product, process, technology or service. What is the status of Intellectual Property (IP) protection?

- **Impact**: Briefly and clearly describe the impact (e.g., economic, societal) of addressing this problem or unmet need. Describe a potential route to impact (e.g., commercialisation) for this solution. What evidence do you have that this approach will be successful? Describe any key insights/evidence to support this. Also, describe how participating in this programme can benefit the team and what impact can this have on developing this solution.

10.5 Ethical and Scientific Issues

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

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

In accordance with the SFI Gender Strategy (Strand 3: Integrating Gender in Research and Innovation)[21], all applicants must complete a statement articulating the consideration of biological sex and/or social gender variables in their research programme. Please consult the Guidance for Applicants on Ethical and Scientific Issues[22] for resources on how to address the sex and/or gender dimension of research in your grant.

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

To complete this section, please consider the following questions:

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

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[21] https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/gender/
[22] https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/ethical-and-scientific-issues/

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

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

10.5.2 Opportunity Discovery and Problem-Solution Fit Validation Activities

Engagement with stakeholders (incl. potential beneficiaries or customers) undertaken to discover opportunities or unmet needs, or to develop sectoral insights is considered *consultation*. These activities are undertaken to gain knowledge that is typically general in nature and informs understanding of a problem/unmet need as well as assisting in solution conceptualisation/refinement. Engaging with stakeholders at this early stage of research does not generally raise any ethical concerns because they are not acting in the same way as research participants. At this stage, stakeholders act as advisers, providing valuable knowledge and expertise based on their experiences. While consultation does not generally require ethical approval, it is advised that you seek advice from your Research Office in advance of commencement of such activities.

10.6 Budget and Budget Justification

This section should be used to describe the budget (direct costs) and resources you will need. Under this programme, it is expected that requested costs will relate to participation in the NSF I-Corps Teams programme and activities to be undertaken by teams associated with participation. In addition, applicants may request funding for small scale prototyping/demonstration to assist in opportunity discovery activities. Applicants may also request support for costs associated with procuring independent expertise to the team (i.e., Entrepreneurial Mentor) or associated expenses for participation in the training activities.

Please also refer to the SFI Grant Terms and Conditions[23] and the SFI Grant Budget Policy[24].

- **Contribution to Postdoctoral Researcher Salary**
  Postdoctoral researchers based in any Eligible Research Body who are acting as the Entrepreneurial Lead may include a contribution to their salary as part of the budget request in line with their time commitment to the project.

- **Teaching Buyout**
  The requirement to participate in scheduled cohorts, attend training sessions and undertake interviews as part of the NSF I-Corps Teams programme means that a defined time commitment is

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[23]SFI Grant General Terms and Conditions
[24] SFI Grant Budget Policy

associated with participation. Under these circumstances, academic staff wishing to participate will likely be supported to do so by their host institutions in a number of ways (e.g., rescheduling of teaching etc) but there may be situations in which this may not be possible and additional support of teaching buy-out may be needed. As such, it is proposed that in appropriately justified cases, teaching buy-out of up to €15k could be applied for by the lead applicant (PI). The Letter of Support from the Host Research Body must confirm that the lead applicant (PI) will be supported to participate in the programme. In cases where teaching buy-out is requested, a detailed description and justification must also be provided in the Letter of Support.

- **Materials and Consumables**

  Some prototyping may be permitted. Details of all materials and consumables that will be used during the award should be provided. Access charges may be requested under the programme.

- **Travel**

  Travel costs associated directly with undertaking training and opportunity discovery activities may be requested. The applicant should detail estimated travel expenses directly related to activities under the programme (incl. opportunity discovery activities). Rates sought for subsistence and other allowances may be no more than those which the Host Research Body's permanent staff may claim.

- **Entrepreneurial Mentor**

  A contribution of up to a maximum of €5k to secure an independent expert to act as Entrepreneurial Mentor (EM) on a team may be requested. The process of procuring the services of an expert should adhere to public procurement rules. Travel expenses associated with participation of the Entrepreneurial Mentor may also be requested as part of the overall request for the team.

NOTE: Contribution to NSF I-Corps administration costs is circa €5k per team. This administrative cost should be included under the **Materials and Consumables section** of the budget as "*Contribution to NSF I-Corps Admin Costs*". This will be paid from a grant to the NSF.

NOTE: No requests for funding should be included as part of applications submitted through the accelerated track of this programme.

10.7 Curricula Vitae

A Narrative CV for the Principal Investigator and Entrepreneurial Lead using the templates available on the programme website, must be completed and uploaded **(upload; max. 3 pages). Please click on "Save**

Draft" after upload. 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 key achievements in research and impact. The current Narrative CV template allows for the provision of additional information such as that relating to periods of leave from research, where relevant.

The Entrepreneurial Mentor (EM) is not required to use the CV template provided on the programme website. However, the length of this CV should also not exceed 3-pages and should be uploaded to SESAME.

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

San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)

SFI became a signatory of the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)[25] in 2019 and as such, is aligning its review and evaluation processes with DORA principles. In January 2022, SFI reinforced its existing commitment to the core principles by joining DORA as a member[26]. To this end, all types of research output are recognised, and SFI is committed to assessing the quality and impact of research through means other than journal-based metrics and research performance-based metrics such as impact factors and H-index. In the spirit of supporting open research and as a signatory of Plan S,[27] SFI will also consider a commitment to making data and other types of research open and accessible. SFI is also a signatory to Ireland's National Action Plan for Open Research 2022-2030[28]. To complement these activities and further reinforce SFI's commitment to the overarching objectives of the Narrative CV, during 2022, SFI became a signatory to the Agreement on Reforming Research Assessment[29] and thus became a member of the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA)[30].

10.8 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 Principal Investigator (and Entrepreneurial Lead). If the Principal Investigator and Entrepreneurial Lead are not based at the same Host

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[25] https://sfdora.org/read/
[26] Contributor level membership.
[27] https://www.coalition-s.org/
[28] https://norf.ie/national-action-plan/
[29] https://coara.eu/app/uploads/2022/09/2022_07_19_rra_agreement_final.pdf
[30] https://coara.eu/

Research Body then separate letters should be submitted as part of the application. The Letter(s) of Support should confirm the eligibility of the applicant(s), comment on the significance of the proposal and confirm support for participation of the team in the programme. The Host Research Body Letter of Support should also contain a description of the institutional policy regarding management of conflicts of interest. Given the nature of the programme, the Letter of Support from the Host Research Body must confirm that the lead applicant (PI) and Entrepreneurial Lead will be supported to participate in the programme. In cases where teaching buy-out is requested for the PI, a detailed description and justification must also be provided in the Letter of Support.

- A **Letter of Support from the Technology Transfer Office** outlining the strategic importance of the grant and its support for the application including a description of how it will support the team as they progress through the programme (e.g., assisting the team with making connections during the opportunity discovery process). The Letter of Support should also confirm that participants have been briefed on the importance of maintaining confidentiality of any commercially sensitive information, including any intellectual property (IP) associated with the project. In the Letter of Support, the TTO should indicate if any of its staff have received training as part of the I-Corps@SFI Academy[31].

- A **Letter of Support from the Entrepreneurial Mentor** outlining the relevance of their experience and how they will support the Entrepreneurial Lead in determining the technology disposition and advise on the development of a translation strategy based on the learnings from the programme.

- If the **Entrepreneurial Lead** is a postdoctoral researcher or postgraduate student, a **Letter of Support from their current mentor/supervisor** confirming that they agree to act as mentor to the Entrepreneurial Lead for the duration of the grant. In cases where the Principal Investigator on the grant is not the current mentor/supervisor, the Letter should confirm that the Principal Investigator on the grant and the mentor/supervisor of the postdoctoral researcher or postgraduate student have agreed an approach to manage participation of the postdoctoral researcher or postgraduate student in the programme. This Letter of Support should be countersigned by the current mentor/supervisor of the postdoctoral researcher or postgraduate student.

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

10.9 Authorisation

For an application to be accepted, it must be submitted by an authorised representative of the Host

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[31] https://www.sfi.ie/funding/funding-calls/i-corps@sfi-academy/

Research Body and it should be noted that submission of an application represents the Host Research Body's approval of the application. In particular, the Research Body is approving:

- The eligibility of the applicants;
- That the requested budget including salaries, travel and materials/consumables are in line with accepted institutional guidelines;
- 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.
- The availability of infrastructure within the institution as outlined by the applicant in the research proposal;
- That the proposed activity 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 (where appropriate);
- 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.
- That reasonable effort has been made by the TTO Office to ensure that participants in the Programme are briefed as to the importance of maintaining confidentiality of commercially sensitive information, including any intellectual property.

NOTE: Science Foundation Ireland or the National Science Foundation is not responsible for any disclosure by participants of any confidential or commercially sensitive information to third parties whilst participating in the SFI/NSF I-Corps@SFI Entrepreneurial Training Programme.

NOTE: 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.

REVIEW PROCESS

11   Eligibility Checks

Following the submission of proposals by the application deadline, all proposals will be checked for compliance with: non-technical mandatory criteria (e.g., all sections complete, page numbers not exceeded, all letters of support included where applicable); technical mandatory criteria (e.g., employment/qualification status, and all other relevant eligibility criteria); and any other requirements

outlined in the call document. Proposals identified as not meeting these criteria will be deemed ineligible and will be declined without review.

12 Application Review and Criteria (Standard Track)

Applications deemed eligible will be reviewed by a panel of SFI programme staff. All applications submitted through the standard track of the programme will be assessed against the following equally weighted criteria:

- **Quality, experience and ambition of the team -** Consideration will be given to the team's experience, technical expertise, ambition and commitment. This will be drawn from the quality, significance and relevance of the individual team members' track records and key achievements, where described under the following headings[32]: 1) Generation of Knowledge, 2) Development of Individuals and Collaboration, 3) Supporting Broader Society & the Economy and, 4) Supporting the Research Community.[33] The review will make note of individuals' career stages and research disciplines, taking into account any periods of leave.

- **Quality of problem understanding** – Consideration will be given to the significance of the problem identified, the understanding of the problem articulated along with the quality of evidence provided.

- **Quality of the solution** - Consideration will be given to the quality of the solution in terms of novelty, the comparison to state-of-the-art presented and how it can be developed as part a product, process, technology or service to address the problem.

- **Quality of the impact opportunity** – Consideration will be given to the case presented for the type and scale of impact envisaged.

NOTE: The Sex and Gender Dimension Statement will be evaluated as part of **Quality of problem understanding**, **Quality of the solution** and **Quality of the impact opportunity** components of the review, if relevant.

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13 Application Review and Criteria (Accelerated Track)

For applications submitted through the accelerated track of the programme, consideration will be given to the strategic alignment of the application with the objectives of the affiliated programme. All applications submitted through the accelerated track of the programme will be assessed against the following equally weighted criteria:

- **Quality, experience and ambition of the team -** Consideration will be given to the team's experience, technical expertise, ambition and commitment. This will be drawn from the quality,

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[32] The Entrepreneurial Mentor is not required to use the Narrative CV format.
[33] Examples are provided in the Applicant CV template, which is available on the Programme website.

significance and relevance of the individual team members' track records and key achievements, where described under the following headings[34]: 1) Generation of Knowledge, 2) Development of Individuals and Collaboration, 3) Supporting Broader Society & the Economy and, 4) Supporting the Research Community.[35] The review will make note of individuals' career stages and research disciplines, taking into account any periods of leave.

- **Quality of alignment to objectives of the affiliate programme** – Consideration will be given to the strategic alignment of the application to both the objectives of the affiliate programme and those of the SFI-NSF I-Corps@SFI Entrepreneurial Training Programme. Consideration will also be given to the benefits of participation for the team and its overall impact potential on the affiliate programme award under which the team is funded.

14 Interview

Eligible applicant teams (under both tracks) will be invited to attend a videoconference interview with members of the SFI and NSF programme teams. The purpose of this interview is to inform an assessment of the appropriateness of the team as well as assessing the team's preparedness and commitment to participate. Further details on interview duration and scheduling will be shared with teams at the appropriate time.

> **NOTE**: All proposed team members must participate in the interview. If all members are not available to participate in the interview, the application will be withdrawn without further review.

Teams that are not successful in their applications may be recommended to participate in the I-Corps@SFI Academy if they have not done so already.

15 SFI Policies and Positions

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

Clinical Trials

Research programmes that include clinical trials as part of the study must adhere to the **SFI Clinical**

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[34] The Entrepreneurial Mentor is not required to use the Narrative CV format.
[35] Examples are provided in the Applicant CV template, which is available on the Programme website.

Trial and Clinical Investigation Policy,[36] 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**,[37] and should also ensure that their studies align 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**[38]; that is, all institutions and SFI award holders are expected to abide by this statement and the **European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity**,[39] in addition to their respective institutional policies and procedures for handling research misconduct allegations.

Doctoral Education

For postgraduate students funded by SFI, the host Research Body is expected to adopt the principles, standards and good practice for doctoral education described in the **National Framework for Doctoral Education (2023)**.[40]

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**[41] and must comply with EU State aid rules (see Section 7 above). 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).

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[36] http://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/ethical-and-scientific-issues/
[37] http://www.sfi.ie/resources/SFI-Policy-on-the-Use-of-Animals-in-Research_June_2016.pdf
[38] https://www.iua.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/National-Policy-Statement-on-Ensuring-Research-Integrity-in-Ireland.pdf
[39] http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/other/hi/h2020-ethics_code-of-conduct_en.pdf
[40] https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2023/02/National-Framework-for-Doctoral-Education-2023.pdf
[41] http://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/national-policies-sfi-positions/

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

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

SFI has already demonstrated leadership in improving the representation of women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) research more broadly in the entire education talent pipeline. Whilst gender will remain a central tenet of the new EDI Strategy, SFI will now proactively consider other areas of inequality or disadvantage to support an intersectional approach, in keeping with our values and best practice.

In the SFI Strategy 2025 *Shaping Our Future*,[42] targets are set for 35% of SFI's funded leadership positions (PIs & Co-PIs) to be women and for research teams to be composed of at least 40% of the underrepresented gender by 2025. As such, applicants should consider and describe how these targets can be achieved at all levels of the research team.

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

Maternity Supplement

SFI is committed to removing and mitigating any existing or perceived factors that may limit the participation of women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) careers. SFI invites its award holders to apply for a supplemental discretionary allowance to support their SFI-funded award when either an SFI Awardee or a team member, including PhD students funded by an SFI award, takes a period of maternity or adoptive leave.[43]

Appeals Process

The Appeals Process Policy establishes procedures and responsibilities for the appeal of the declination of a proposal by SFI.[44]

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[42] https://www.sfi.ie/strategy/.
[43] https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/gender/
[44] https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/review/

State Aid

See Section 7 above.

Child Protection

> Where relevant, applicants and Research Bodies are required to comply with the provisions of the **Children First Act 2015**,[45] and the **National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children 2017**.[46] 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**[47] is a legal framework that sets out guidelines for the collection and processing of personal information of individuals within the European Union.[48] 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**.[49]

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

> During the application process or at any time thereafter, SFI may contact the Research Body, the Principal Investigator, or any member of the Research Team with regard to funding opportunities, activities or events organised by SFI or other relevant bodies, or for the purposes of monitoring and

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[45] https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2015/act/36/enacted/en/pdf
[46] http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Children_First_National_Guidance_2017.pdf
[47] https://www.dataprotection.ie/
[48] https://www.eugdpr.org/
[49] http://www.sfi.ie/privacy/

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**.[50]

Open access

In line with the principles espoused by Plan S[51] and as a signatory of the National Action Plan for Open Research 2022- 30[52], SFI is committed to ensuring that all publicly funded research articles are openly available. Where a research publication arises in whole or in part from SFI-funded research (i.e., where at least one of the researchers concerned receives SFI funds in support of their endeavours), the researcher(s) should adhere to **SFI's Open Access policy.**[53] SFI monitors compliance with this policy through scientific and financial reporting, financial audits and other reviews, and data gathered through Research Outputs.

Data Management

Good data governance and stewardship are key components of good research practice. Science Foundation Ireland is part of an initiative for the voluntary international alignment of research data management policies.[54] 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.[55] Applicants should review individual programme funding call requirements regarding data management plans and timelines as to when they are required to be submitted.

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[50] http://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/national-policies-sfi-positions/
[51] https://www.coalition-s.org/principles-and-implementation/
[52] https://norf.ie
[53] https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/open-research
[54] https://www.scienceeurope.org/our-resources/practical-guide-to-the-international-alignment-of-research-data-management/
[55]https://www.scienceeurope.org/our-resources/guidance-document-presenting-a-framework-for-discipline-specific-research-data-management/

NOTE: 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.