

## Additional Guidance for Applicants on SFI Remit

When applying to SFI, applicants are required to justify the alignment of the proposed research with the Call or Programme specific themes and/or to describe the alignment of the proposed research or activities with SFI's legal remit. Eligible research areas or themes may vary according to the scope of an individual programme or call and are described in the relevant call documentation.

For thematic calls, applicants need to provide a statement justifying alignment of their research with the relevant theme or other strategic area of opportunity (with the underlying requirement in all cases for alignment with SFI's remit). For calls that are not theme based, applicants will need to justify their alignment with SFI remit. The majority of SFI's calls require research to be in a STEM area. Unless specifically stated (as for example under the SFI Discover Call), primary alignment with STEM *Education, Public Engagement or Policy* is not alone sufficient to meet required eligibility criteria.

SFI's legal remit requires that research funded by the Foundation is carried out for the advancement of knowledge whilst also demonstrating potential for long or short term economic and/or societal benefits. As defined by the OECD Frascati<sup>1</sup> definitions, proposals submitted to SFI need to demonstrate how the proposed research endeavours could be expected to produce a broad base of knowledge likely to form the background to the solution of recognised, or expected, current or future problems or possibilities (oriented basic) and/or could be applied to a specific practical aim or objective (applied research).

## FAQs

### **Q: What is the relationship between Science Foundation Ireland's legal remit and the National Research Priority (NRP) areas?**

In all cases proposals to SFI must first and foremost align with SFI's broad legal remit of oriented basic and applied research in all areas of STEM. In 2012 the report of the [National Research Prioritisation \(NRP\) Steering Group](#) was published and in 2015 the Irish Government strategy [Innovation 2020](#) was published. These reports describe how the majority of competitive public research funding will be focused on the fourteen priority areas positioned within six broad enterprise themes. SFI describes in call documentation where alignment is required with these areas, with specific thematic areas or other areas of strategic importance. Priority areas are defined by Government and are not specific to SFI.

---

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/science-and-technology/frascati-manual-2002\\_9789264199040-en](http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/science-and-technology/frascati-manual-2002_9789264199040-en)

**Q: Does Science Foundation Ireland accept proposals in the area of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (AHSS)?**

In general, SFI does not accept proposals in the broad area of AHSS. Exceptions may potentially arise in context of the SFI Discover Call or where funding may pertain to the specific mission of the Foundation – for example, through the use of targeted instruments in which case SFI may support the development, assessment and publication of research to assess the impact of funded research activities, STEM teaching, etc. These exceptions do not apply to SFI's broad portfolio of research funding schemes.

In certain cases and in the context of a larger award such as those funded through the SFI Research Centres, Strategic Partnerships or Spokes Programmes, SFI may consider providing a small proportion of funding for research that includes an aspect of AHSS. In this context, SFI will only consider funding AHSS research in cases where it directly informs the development of scientific and technological aspects of the overarching programme of research and where strong justification is provided that these activities are required for the delivery of the scientific/engineering programme of research. In addition, in order to be competitive for an SFI award the applicant leading the research would be expected to have a demonstrable track record in the relevant STEM area. Examples of activities include the generation and analysis of survey data, developing platforms/tools to analyse end user behaviour in relation to technology adoption, or the development of new policies to facilitate the implementation of new technologies etc. It is important to note however that such activities will not typically be permitted, either in whole or in part, within smaller awards.

SFI has in the past partnered with the Irish Research Council to fund AHSS activities associated with an SFI award and any such opportunity would be detailed in the relevant call documentation.

**Q: Does Science Foundation Ireland accept proposals in the area of psychology?**

In the majority of cases SFI does not support psychology research, as much of this discipline sits under the umbrella of social sciences which is outside SFI's remit, even where this involves laboratory-based research. Social sciences would be considered within the remit of the Irish Research Council, whilst clinical psychology would be considered within the remit of the Health Research Board.

However, types of research that SFI would consider for funding may include an aspect of psychological science, where this research informs the development of new software or other technology which is directly associated with the overall proposed programme of research. Examples of this might exist in a number of SFI Research Centres, for example, under areas of research such as those in Digital Platforms, Content and Applications.

Additionally, SFI funds a broad range of research under the umbrella of neuroscience and neural disorders including neurobiology, neuropharmacology, neuroimaging, systems neuroscience, neurological and psychiatric disorders, where there may be some overlap with psychological sciences.

**Q: Does Science Foundation Ireland fund Education and Public Engagement (EPE) activities under its broad suite of research programmes?**

The mission of Science Foundation Ireland's education and public engagement (EPE) programme is to catalyse, inspire and guide the best in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) education and public engagement. Ultimately this mission is to enable Ireland to have the most engaged and scientifically informed public, which is one of four strategic goals outlined for Science Foundation Ireland (Agenda 2020). In support of this objective the purpose of the Discover Programme Call is to support and develop the STEM EPE sector. This is therefore Science Foundation Ireland's primary mechanism for direct funding of EPE activities. In addition, direct funding of EPE activities are permitted and expected under SFI Research Centres as detailed in the relevant call documentation. Direct funding of *significant* EPE activities as part of other awards including for example IvP, SIRG and CDA is not currently permitted although nominal costs for small scale activities may be permitted where relevant and justified. Examples might include collaborations with festival organisers, artists or similar to create greater understanding and interest amongst the public in your research; smaller scale citizen science where the outputs or data collected informs your research.

**Q: Does Science Foundation Ireland fund research in all areas of STEM, including the areas of astronomy, high energy physics and mathematics?**

Yes, SFI funds research in all areas of STEM. In all cases however it is important that applicants describe the *oriented* basic or *applied* nature of their research as defined above. It is important to note that research proposals in certain STEM areas have previously been withdrawn without review by SFI based on a failure to demonstrate how the proposed research endeavours could be described as being either oriented basic and/or applied in nature. Rather the focus of these proposals have been fundamental research which is experimental or theoretical in nature and is undertaken primarily and solely to acquire new knowledge of the underlying foundations of phenomena and observable facts.

**Q: If my proposed programme of research cannot be described as being oriented basic or applied research as defined in the definition of SFI's remit, can the potential impact of research be used to justify alignment with SFI's legal remit?**

No, all proposals submitted to SFI's main suite of programmes must align with the definition of SFI's legal remit (oriented basic and/or applied research in all areas of STEM). Research in other areas may of course demonstrate impact including for example education and training of students and public engagement. In isolation, however, this does not justify alignment with SFI's remit. Applicants to many of SFI's calls are requested to provide a description of how their research aligns with SFI's legal remit and are also requested to provide an impact statement. Outreach activities should be described in the impact statement and not in the remit alignment section.

**Q: If I am applying to one of Science Foundation Ireland's co-funded partnership programmes, does my research need to align with SFI's remit?**

In order to enhance the reputation of research being performed in Ireland and to maximise the opportunities available for the Irish research community, SFI has entered into a number of co-funded partnerships with international research funders. In a number of these partnerships, SFI is not acting as the Lead Agency. This means that the calls are being implemented and proposals evaluated by the partner funder. Current examples include *The Wellcome Trust*, *The Royal Society*, *The US National Science Foundation (NSF)* and *the US National Institutes of Health (NIH)*. In a number of these cases it should be noted that SFI has been granted Ministerial approval to fund, specifically through these partnerships, in areas broader than SFI's legal remit. As a result, unless otherwise specified in the relevant guidance documentation, the remit of the lead agency and relevant call is applied.

**Q: Does Science Foundation Ireland fund economics or financial mathematics?**

Yes, SFI funds research in mathematics, including financial mathematics. SFI funds research in ICT in the financial service industry. SFI does not fund economics research, or finance research, as these fall under the AHSS umbrella and are funded by the Irish Research Council. It is important that proposals carefully detail proposed advances in the *mathematics* or *ICT* state-of-the-art. Proposals which use existing mathematics or ICT tools or techniques to advance the economics or finance state-of-the-art will not be reviewed. It is important to note that research proposals in these and other areas have been previously withdrawn without review by SFI based on a failure to demonstrate sufficient mathematics or ICT content.

**Q: Does Science Foundation Ireland fund clinical trials or clinical investigations?**

SFI permits early stage regulated clinical trials (Phase I or combined Phase I/II) and investigations to be undertaken under the scope of the following SFI programmes: SFI Research Centres, Spokes, and Strategic Partnerships. In addition, such clinical trials/investigations may also be permitted under the SFI Research Professorship Programme in cases where the successful candidate will become a Co-Principal Investigator within an SFI Research Centre. Clinical trials and investigations requiring approval by the Health Products Regulatory Authority (i.e., HPRA) will not be permitted through other SFI funding programmes. However, funding requests for early stage research involving human volunteers and/or human samples that does *not* require regulatory approval may be considered. In all cases the necessary ethical approval will be required. Where there is any doubt, applicants are advised to contact the HPRA prior to submission to ensure eligibility. For more information see [SFI Clinical Trial and Clinical Investigation Policy](#).

**Q: Does SFI's funding of clinical trials and clinical investigations extend to the funding of policy and economic health related research?**

No, SFI does not fund either Health Services Research or Population Health Research (as defined below by the Health Research Board) in any of its current funding schemes. SFI does not fund Health Economics Research with the possible exception of the development of the underpinning mathematical modelling approaches.

**Health Services Research:** *Research with the goal of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of health professionals and the health care system, through changes to practice and policy. Health services research is a multidisciplinary field of scientific investigation that studies how social factors, financing systems, organisational structures and processes, health technologies, and personal behaviours affect access to health care, the quality and cost of healthcare and ultimately health and well-being.*

**Population Health Research:** *Research with the goal of improving the health of the population, or of defined sub-populations, through a better understanding of the ways in which social, cultural, environmental, occupational and economic factors determine health status or through the identification of effective interventions for improving health status and reducing health inequalities (for example - socio-economic determinants of health, epidemiology without a biological component, monitoring and surveillance of population health).*