



The SFI ARC Hub programme is co-funded by the Government of Ireland and the European Union through the ERDF Northern and Western Regional Programme 2021-27.

## SFI ARC Hub Programme 2024

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# Frequently Asked Questions

Queries should be directed to: [arc@sfi.ie](mailto:arc@sfi.ie)

### Terms of Reference

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All responses to this Call for Submission of Proposals will be treated in confidence and no information contained therein will be communicated to any third party without the written permission of the applicant except insofar as is specifically required for the consideration and evaluation of the proposal or as may be required under law, including the Industrial Development (Science Foundation Ireland) Act, 2003, the Industrial Development (Science Foundation Ireland) (Amendment) Act 2013 and the Freedom of Information Acts 1997 and 2003.

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## 2. Programme Details

### 2.1 If successful in the SFI ARC Hub Programme Call 2024, when is the award expected to start?

SFI expects the award will commence from June/July 2025.

### 2.2 What is the award duration?

The duration of the SFI ARC Hub award is 54 months.

## 3. Remit

### 3.1 While the Hub may be regional in basis, I assume there is an expectation for the funded Hub to have a national reach?

Yes. Though the SFI ARC Hub must operate in a specific thematic area aligned with the existing and emerging sectoral areas of strength of the **Northern and Western (NW) Region** (location of the host Research Body), we would ask Applicant Teams to consider the national reach of the Hub as well as the benefit the Hub will bring to the host region. The Hub would be encouraged to collaborate with institutions across Ireland, in an effort to provide individuals with the appropriate expertise in the specific thematic area the opportunity to engage with the Hub.

### 3.2 What if our proposed research aligns with more than one of the S3 thematic areas?

It is recognised that a proposed Hub may align with more than one of the thematic areas outlined in Ireland's National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022-2027 (S3) and this is not discouraged. When applying, applicants should select the area of primary alignment from the drop-down menu which best aligns with the focus of the SFI ARC Hub. There will be an opportunity as part of the body of the proposal to articulate the other areas the Hub might be relevant to, when describing how the Hub will align with the Smart Specialisation Strategy and will contribute to regional needs.

### 3.3 After choosing an S3 specialisation for the region in the SESAME drop-down, applicants must then choose primary and secondary National Research priority areas - must these be a subset of the S3 area? e.g., if AgriFood and Agritech is selected as S3, can ICT (which can underpin agrifood/agritech) be selected as a primary research area?

When selecting one of the 14 Research Priority Areas, applicants should choose the area which best describes the proposed research (as outlined in the report of the refreshed Research Priority Areas 2018-20231). Alternatively, applicants may select "Other". It is also possible to detail Secondary Priority Areas that the research will be relevant to.

Primary alignment should be considered when selecting the National Research priority areas as well as selecting the S3 thematic area, so it seems likely that they will align, though the National Research priority area does not specifically need to be a subset of the S3 area.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/Publications/Publication-files/Research-Priority-Areas-2018-to-2023.pdf>

### **3.4 How do the ARC Hubs relate to SFI Research Centres and is partnership encouraged?**

The primary aim of the overall national SFI ARC (Accelerating Research to Commercialisation) Hub Programme is to drive regional development by accelerating novel, cutting-edge research, towards commercial impact readiness, in areas aligned with Ireland's Smart Specialisation Strategy, and to develop a cohort of entrepreneurial scientists and engineers with the skills to realise commercial opportunities from research activities. The ultimate outputs of the Hubs will be new spin-outs created dependent on intellectual property (IP) from HEI. There is also the possibility for licensing opportunities, where appropriate. However, partnership with industry is not a mandatory component of activity in the SFI ARC Hub and there are no specific targets in relation to the number of collaborations with industry or co-funding secured.

The purpose of SFI Research Centres is to support a cross-institutional team of leading academic researchers to undertake excellent, fundamental excellent research that underpins a programme of deep, engaged research with industry and other key stakeholders.

Although both programmes have separate missions, there is potential for complementarity between the SFI ARC Hubs and Research Centres. For example, a researcher that has been funded through a Research Centre and has an interest in following an entrepreneurial path could receive funding through a Hub to accelerate the commercialisation of their research project, availing of the dedicated supports and training available to accelerate the path to commercialisation. A dedicated Operations Team will be available through the Hubs to provide commercialisation expertise, as well as active and expert management and support of this cohort of researchers, which will ensure projects are accelerated along the commercialisation pathway.

## **4. Hub Structure**

### **4.1 Can a Co- or Deputy Director role be considered as part of the ARC Hub management structure?**

Yes. The proposal should include a description of the Executive Management structure of the proposed Hub. This should include setting out the role of the Hub Director and, where relevant, the roles of any Co- or Deputy Directors.

### **4.2 Is there a minimum number of partner institutions (e.g., universities) that have to be included in the Hub at proposal stage?**

No, there is no set minimum. The SFI ARC Hub will be hosted by a lead Research Body (RB) located in the Northern & Western Region, but the Hub is encouraged to be multi-site, involving collaboration with other Research Bodies both in the Programme Area and in other Programme Areas in Ireland.

Ultimately, it is up to the Applicant Team to propose what the most appropriate number of partner Research Bodies is, given the research area and available expertise within the system.

#### **4.3 Can the ARC Hub be co-led by 2 HEIs?**

No, the Hub is encouraged to collaborate and be multi-site, but the SFI ARC Hub will be led by one Hub Director (Lead Applicant) located in the Hub's host Research Body in the Northern and Western Region. The grant will be administered through the Research Body of the Lead Applicant.

However, Co-Applicants have a well-defined, critical and continuing role in the SFI ARC Hub and for the purposes of eligibility, reviewing and monitoring, a Co-Applicant applying for funding under the SFI ARC Hub Programme will receive equal evaluation to the Lead Applicant and will hold equal accountability for the delivery of the proposed research objectives. A Co-Applicant may be located at a different eligible Research Body to the Lead Applicant.

#### **4.4 Can members of the Operations Team be located in partner institutions?**

Though the Operations Team should predominantly be located in the host Research Body in the Northern and Western Region, it could be advantageous to have some members (e.g. Programme Managers) located in other RBs associated with the Hub. SFI would typically expect a senior member of the Operations Team (e.g. Manger of the Operations Team) to be located in the host RB to ensure effective oversight. However, exceptions would be made if justification can be provided. If a dispersed Operations team is being proposed, it is imperative that the applicant group have a clear vision as to how this team will be managed to ensure efficiency. The communication channels, connectivity and mobility of the team will be critical.

### **5. Translational Research Budget**

#### **5.1 Is there a minimum number of Translational Research Projects per application?**

The number of Translational Research Projects included at the application stage is at the discretion of the applicant team. As well as describing each project, the applicants should describe, at a high level, the portfolio of projects being included in the proposal, including their quality, novelty, timeliness and commercial potential and how they are aligned with the goals of the Hub.

The number of Translational Research Projects included should be a sufficient number to demonstrate that there is demand in the research system for a Hub in this thematic area. It should show that the applicant team has engaged with suitable researchers to encourage participation and has selected high-quality projects that have potential for commercialisation outputs.

#### **5.2 Is there an expected balance between the upfront pre-assigned budget for the Translational Research Budget versus the unassigned?**

No, there is no prescribed balance between the amount of the Translational Research Budget assigned vs un-assigned at the application stage. The number of Translational Research Projects included at the application stage is at the discretion of the applicant team. The number of Translational Research Projects included should be a sufficient number to demonstrate that there is demand in the research system for a Hub in this thematic area. It should show that the applicant team has engaged with suitable researchers to encourage

participation and has selected high quality projects that have potential for commercialisation outputs.

### **5.3 How much of the budget is allocated for Translational Research projects?**

Broadly, the budget for the SFI ARC Hub is divided between operations costs (e.g. Operations staff salaries, IT equipment, events and outreach and training) and the budget for Translational Research Projects. The Operations component of the SFI ARC Hub Budget is capped at a maximum of 20% of direct costs and the remaining budget is available for the Translational Research Budget. This will be divided between the budget assigned to the portfolio of Translational Research Projects defined at the application stage and the 'unassigned' Translational Research Budget, which will be used to fund additional projects during the Hub 's lifetime.

### **5.4 What TRL level are the translational projects expected to be? Should there be a range?**

Under the SFI ARC Hub Programme, all Translational Research Projects funded by SFI must align with SFI's legal remit and that of the ERDF. The ERDF Regulation limits the scope of support from the ERDF to activities for applied research and innovation, including industrial research and experimental development.<sup>2</sup>

#### Industrial Research:

- planned research or critical investigation aimed at the acquisition of new knowledge and skills for developing new products, processes or services or for bringing about a significant improvement in existing products, processes or services in any area, technology, industry or sector (including, but not limited to, digital industries and technologies, such as super-computing, quantum technologies, block chain technologies, artificial intelligence, cyber security, big data and cloud technologies).
- comprises the creation of component parts of complex systems and may include the construction of prototypes in a laboratory environment or in an environment with simulated interfaces to existing systems as well as of pilot lines, when necessary for the industrial research and notably for generic technology validation.

#### Experimental Development:

- means acquiring, combining, shaping and using existing scientific, technological, business and other relevant knowledge and skills with the aim of developing new or improved products, processes or services in any area, technology, industry or sector (including, but not limited to, digital industries and technologies, such as for example super-computing, quantum technologies, block chain technologies, artificial intelligence, cyber security, big data and cloud or edge technologies).
- this may also include, for example, activities aimed at the conceptual definition, planning and documentation of new products, processes or services.
- may comprise prototyping, demonstrating, piloting, testing and validation of new or improved products, processes or services in environments representative of real-life

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<sup>2</sup> Regulation (EU) 2021/1058 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 on the European Regional Development Fund and on the Cohesion Fund [the "ERDF Regulation"]

operating conditions, where the primary objective is to make further technical improvements on products, processes or services that are not substantially set.

- this may include the development of a commercially usable prototype or pilot which is necessarily the final commercial product, and which is too expensive to produce for it to be used only for demonstration and validation purposes.

experimental development does not include routine or periodic changes made to existing products, production lines, manufacturing processes, services and other operations in progress, even if those changes may represent improvements.

The Translational Research Budget should be used to support projects that have a clear potential to be progressed to commercial impact. Ultimately the ARC Hub needs to reach its targets for the performance indicators (including the creation of spin-outs, licenses, patents etc.) and help boost regional innovation and economic development. The TRL level may vary from project to project and will be somewhat dependent on the thematic area of the Hub, but ultimately it needs to be appropriate given the goals of the ARC Hub Programme.

#### **5.5 What is the proposed turnaround time for projects over €150k?**

The Hub will have autonomy to approve Translational Research Projects seeking a budget below the €150,000 threshold.

For those Translational Research Projects which are seeking a budget greater than €150,000 from the SFI ARC Hub, the Executive Management Committee of the SFI ARC Hub will submit the relevant documentation to SFI for international scientific peer review. Funding will be approved by SFI for high-potential projects, as determined by the international expert reviews. SFI will notify the SFI ARC Hub of the outcome.

Whilst precise timelines are not yet available, SFI is developing processes to ensure a fast turnaround of these reviews and notification on the outcome will be issued in a timely fashion.

#### **5.6 Can the projects that were proposed at the application stage be adapted or updated once the Hub is active and the Advisory Committee has reviewed and inputted?**

Yes. The projects should be set up for success through support and guidance from the Advisory Committee as well as the Operations Team, once the Hub is established. There should be agility built into the Hub so that Projects can be adapted and improved as they progress and develop.

#### **5.7 If a lot of the proposed projects have a budget greater than the €150K threshold, what will the role of the Advisory Committee be, as they won't be the ones approving the projects?**

The Advisory Committee will provide advice and guidance to the Executive Management Committee of the Hub on strategy, operations and performance, as well as provide independent peer review in relation to the selection of the Translational Research Projects

with a budget of less than €150,000. For those projects which are seeking a budget greater than €150,000 from the SFI ARC Hub, the Advisory Committee should still plan an active role in selecting which projects progress to submission to SFI.

**5.8 Is the threshold for the Translational Research Projects cumulative? If a project received €100K of funding and then required follow-on funding of €100K, would that second tranche of funding require SFI approval?**

Yes, the threshold is cumulative. If additional funding is required for a particular Translational Research Project that results in the total budget being greater than €150K, the SFI ARC Hub will submit the relevant documentation on that project to SFI for international scientific peer review. For projects that involve follow-on funding, the proposal to SFI will explain the progress that was made in the initial project and how this can be further developed.

**5.9 For the successful ARC Hub, will SFI approve all the Translational Projects submitted, or is there a possibility that some Translational Projects will be approved by the review panel and others rejected?**

There is the possibility that following review, some Translational Research (TR) Projects may be deemed ineligible or not approved as part of the ARC Hub budget. For an ARC Hub application that is successful under the programme, if a selection of the submitted TR projects is not approved following review, it is envisaged that applicants would need to revise their budget accordingly, before the commencement of the award. This could involve reallocating the 'assigned' Translational Research Budget (from non-approved TR projects) to the 'unassigned' Translational Research Budget, where necessary.

## **6. Indicators**

**6.1 If research, knowledge or technology developed in an SFI Research Centre is commercialised through an ARC Hub through a spin out company, patent or other output, either through agreement between the Centre and the Hub or even without prior knowledge, will this KPI be counted by the Research Centre and the Hub or only the Hub?**

In these cases, SFI will allow both the ARC Hub and the Research Centre to report on outputs and count KPIs that they have jointly supported.

Although both programmes have separate missions, there is potential for complementarity between the SFI ARC Hubs and Research Centres. For example, a researcher who been funded through a Research Centre and has an interest in following an entrepreneurial path, could receive funding through a Hub to accelerate the commercialisation of their research project, availing of the dedicated supports and training available to accelerate the path to commercialisation. This collaboration is encouraged and therefore, both the ARC Hub and the Research Centre would be able to report the output and count it as part of their KPI metrics.



**6.2 For the indicator, ‘Research organisations participating in joint research projects’, what constitutes a research organisation that would contribute towards the targets set?**

This indicator is defined as the number of supported research organisations that cooperate in joint research projects. A joint research project includes at least one research organisation and another partner (such as an enterprise, another research organisation etc). Cooperation in R&D activities may be new or existing, and it should last at least for the duration of the project supported. The indicator covers active participation in joint research projects, and it excludes contractual arrangements with no active cooperation in the supported project (i.e., excludes cases where partners in a framework contract do not all participate in a specific joint research cooperation).

For example, any Translational Research Project supported in a Research Body outside of the Host Research Body (A) will be considered as a ‘joint research project’ for the purposes of this indicator. For example, TRP#1, which involves a Translational Researcher hosted in Research Body (B), would count as one research organisation (B) participating in a joint research project with (A) (any additional TRPs that involve (B) would not increase the total).

## **7. Eligibility**

**7.1 Is it correct that Directors and Co-PIs of current SFI Research Centres and Co-Centres cannot be the Lead Applicant of an ARC Hub application?**

Directors of currently funded SFI Research Centres, Co-Centres, or ARC Hubs are not eligible to apply to the SFI ARC Hub Programme as a Lead Applicant or Co-Applicant but are eligible to contribute to a proposal as either a Translational Researcher or Academic Collaborator.

Co-Principal Investigators of currently funded SFI Research Centres and Co-Centres are not eligible to apply to the SFI ARC Hub Programme as a Lead Applicant, but are eligible to apply as a Co-Applicant, Translational Researcher or Academic Collaborator.

Co-Principal Investigators of currently funded ARC Hubs are not eligible to apply as Lead Applicant or Co-applicant, but are eligible to apply as a Translational Researcher or Academic Collaborator. The rules on ARC Hub eligibility are outlined in the table below.

In all cases where the Lead or Co-Applicants are already in receipt of significant research funding from SFI, the evaluation process will examine the commitment and workload of the Lead-/Co-Applicant in determining the suitability of such an arrangement. Such applicants must include strong justification for their role in the applicant group.

Please contact [arc@sfi.ie](mailto:arc@sfi.ie) for any specific eligibility queries.

## ARC Hub Programme Eligibility

I am currently a:	I can apply as a:		
	Translational Researcher	Co-Applicant	Hub Director
Director of a currently funded 2023 ARC Hub, Co-Centre, 2012/2013/2016 Phase 2 Research Centre (or lead applicant to 2023 Research Centres Programme)	YES	NO	NO
Co-PI of a currently funded 2023 SFI ARC Hub	YES	NO	NO
Co-PI of a currently funded 2012, 2013 or 2016 Phase 2 Research Centre	YES	YES*	NO
Co-Applicant on a proposal to the 2023 Research Centres Programme	YES	YES **	NO
Co-PI of a currently funded Co-Centre	YES	YES*	NO
Translational Researcher of a currently funded 2023 SFI ARC Hub	YES	YES*	YES
FI of a currently funded 2012, 2013 or 2016 Phase 2 Research Centre, or Co-Centre	YES	YES*	YES
Other Centre PI on a proposal to the 2023 Research Centres Programme	YES	YES*	YES
Postdoctoral Researcher	YES †	NO	NO

\*Investigator may be a named Co-Applicant on a maximum of one submission to the SFI ARC Hub Programme

‡ If a co-applicant on proposals to the 2023 Research Centres Call and 2024 ARC Hub Call is awarded funding for both, they will either need to withdraw from one of these applications, or change to a non-Executive Management Committee (EMC) role in the Research Centre (i.e. Other Centre PI for the 2023 Research Centres), as they can only sit on one EMC for awards of this scale.

† Must have commitment from a suitable mentor. Please see call document

NOTE: All applicants must meet the individual eligibility criteria set out in the call document.

**7.2 Can an Experienced Researcher be involved in a number of Hubs initially?**

This is dependent on how the researcher in question wishes to engage with the Hub. An individual is only permitted to be the Lead Applicant or Co-Applicant on one SFI ARC Hub proposal but is eligible to contribute to additional proposals as a Translational Researcher or Academic Collaborator.

There are also specific rules relating to those who are Lead or co-PI on a Research Centre or are Lead or Co-applicant on a Co-Centre application (See question 7.1 and the table above)

Please contact [arc@sfi.ie](mailto:arc@sfi.ie) for any specific eligibility queries.

**7.3 If you are an existing PI in an SFI Research Centre can you apply as a lead for the ARC Hub?**

Co-Principal Investigators of currently funded SFI Research Centres or Co-Centres are not eligible to apply to the SFI ARC Hub Programme as a Lead Applicant but are eligible to apply as a Co-Applicant, Translational Researcher or Academic Collaborator.

**7.4 In the call document, it states that SFI Centre Directors or Directors of Co-Centres are ineligible for Lead Applicant or Co-Applicant status in the ARC. In some SFI Centres there is a 'Deputy Director' position. I would just like to confirm that this position would still be considered eligible as ARC co-applicants?**

For determining eligibility, Deputy Directors of current Research Centres will be treated as per Co-Principal Investigators of the Research Centres. Therefore, they are not eligible to apply to the SFI ARC Hub Programme as a Lead Applicant but are eligible to apply as a Co-Applicant, Translational Researcher or Academic Collaborator.

**7.5 Is the Lead Applicant of an SFI professorship eligible for the role of ARC Hub Lead Applicant and Director?**

Current Research Professors are not precluded from applying to the ARC Hub Programme as a Lead Applicant or Co-Applicant. However, in all cases where the Lead or Co-Applicants are already in receipt of significant research funding from SFI, the evaluation process will examine the commitment and workload of the Lead/Co-Applicant in determining the suitability of such an arrangement. Such applicants must include strong justification for their role in the applicant group.

Please contact [arc@sfi.ie](mailto:arc@sfi.ie) if you have any specific eligibility queries.

**7.6 Can a co-director of one of the SFI CRT Centres apply as the main applicant for an SFI ARC Hub? We note that the documentation says that directors and co-PIs of existing SFI Research Centres cannot go forward as Hub Director, but it isn't clear if this also applies to the co-PIs on the CRTs.**

Co-PIs on CRTs are not precluded from applying to the ARC Hub Programme as a Lead Applicant or Co-Applicant. However, in all cases where Lead or Co-Applicants are already in receipt of significant research funding from SFI, the evaluation process will examine the

commitment and workload of the Lead/Co-Applicant in determining the suitability of such an arrangement. Such applicants must include strong justification for their role in the applicant group.

Please contact [arc@sfi.ie](mailto:arc@sfi.ie) if you have any specific eligibility queries.

**7.7 Can researchers from outside the NWR region engage in a Hub? For example, a SEMR-located PI engaging as a PI in an NWR-led bid.**

Co-PIs, Translational Researchers and Academic Collaborators can come from any eligible research body in Ireland (where they meet all other eligibility criteria); they are not restricted to being from the same region as the Lead Applicant.

The SFI ARC Hub will be hosted by an eligible lead Research Body located in Northern & Western Region and that is where the Lead Applicant (Hub Director) will be located. But the Hub is encouraged to be multi-site, involving collaboration with other Research Bodies both in the Programme Area and in other Programme Areas in Ireland. This is inclusive of the leadership/Executive Management team.

**7.8 Can a Postdoctoral Researcher be listed as a Translational Researcher on an SFI ARC Hub Application?**

Yes, a postdoctoral researcher, meeting the relevant eligibility criteria, may engage in the SFI ARC Hub as a Translational Researcher. However, they must have a commitment from a suitable mentor (an established researcher from their Host Research Body, or, a Co-Applicant of the SFI ARC Hub) at the application stage. Of note, postdoctoral researchers who will have the title 'Translational Researcher' in the SFI ARC Hub may request up to 100% of their salary in line with their time commitment to the project.

**7.9 How do you define a senior author?**

A senior author is listed as first or joint first author, reflecting the fact that they have provided the greatest intellectual contribution, have held the primary responsibility for collecting and analysing data, and for the writing of the manuscript and associated drafts. The last author will also be considered as a senior author since this position generally reflects their overall responsibility for the study and suggests that a level of mentorship has been provided.

It will be noted that different publishers have differing rules on how the senior authorship is indicated (e.g., by using asterisks, underlining, placing the name first or last in the list of authors, etc.); of overriding importance however, is that the applicant should be able to convince and reassure reviewers that they are the key author on these publications.

Please note that senior authorship does not necessarily mean that they were responsible financially for the research that was reported.

**7.10 Are Systematic Reviews considered eligible publications?**

Systematic reviews (with their close alignment with meta-analyses) can be considered as eligible publications where all other eligibility criteria are met (e.g. Senior author), and *only*

when the applicant provides a short accompanying narrative that presents how the systematic review publication is considered original research.

#### **7.11 What qualifies as an independent research grant?**

Eligible research grants would be expected to support at least one full-time equivalent, excluding the applicant(s), and include research team costs e.g. materials and consumables. This excludes smaller awards such as travel grants, equipment grants, post-graduate fellowships, post-doctoral fellowships, and awards of short duration (12 months or less). Laboratory fit-out/start-up funding, and awards that have not been subject to external international peer review are also excluded. You will be required to provide evidence to support the validity of an award if required. If you are uncertain regarding the eligibility of funding you have received, please contact SFI at [arc@sfi.ie](mailto:arc@sfi.ie).

#### **7.12 On page number 17 of the call document, it is written: "A Translational Researcher may be either an academic member of staff or independent researcher employed by an eligible Irish Research Body, or a postdoctoral researcher that has relevant experience that deems them suitable to lead a Translational Research Project." What is the definition of "independent researcher"?**

The definition of independent researcher is:

*A contract researcher with a contract that covers the period of the grant, who is recognised by the Research Body as an independent investigator and will have an independent office and research space at the host Research Body for which the researcher will be fully responsible for at least the duration of the SFI grant*

#### **7.13 Can a researcher be a Co-PI if they are currently in receipt of SFI funding and what level of funding (€) would make them ineligible?**

The amount of funding a Lead or Co-Applicant is currently in receipt of from SFI has no bearing on their eligibility. However, in all cases where a Lead or Co-Applicant is in receipt of significant research funding, their time commitment and workload will be examined in order to determine the suitability of the proposed arrangement. A strong justification for their role in the applicant group would be needed within the application if they have a significant amount of their time already committed.

## **8. Training**

### **8.1 For the leadership skills development, is the Academy intensive training mandatory, or can other training be chosen?**

Under the I-Corps@SFI Academy we provide i) an introduction to evidence-based entrepreneurship to researchers by applying the NSF methodology to their ideas and ii) training people on how to mentor researchers in using evidence-based entrepreneurship. This training is very beneficial and aligns with the goals of the ARC Hub Programme. Therefore, the Hub leadership and Operations teams are required to engage with this training in the context

of a broader training programme defined by the Hubs. The budget does not need to be allocated for this training.

More broadly, as part of the proposal, applicants should detail how training will be provided to both the Hub Leadership and Operations Team, and to the Translational Researchers to enable them to identify and validate opportunities for commercialisation. SFI ARC Hubs are strongly encouraged to leverage existing training supports, utilising the availability of I-Corps training through SFI, as well as training programmes available through the Research Bodies and other training providers active in the research, innovation and commercialisation landscape.

### **8.2 Who from the Hub is expected to undertake I-Corps@SFI Academy training?**

The I-Corps@SFI Academy will be a specific requirement for the Hub leadership (Lead PI and Co-PIs) and Operations teams. SFI is currently working with Georgia Tech to develop a bespoke training programme, designed specifically for the ARC Hub Leadership Team, which SFI will roll out to all Hubs within the first number of months of establishment, giving the Hubs time to hire their Operations Team first. The I-Corps@SFI Academy training will provide the Leadership Team with a better understanding of the SFI-NSF I-Corps@SFI Entrepreneurial Training Programme (ETP), so that they are well-placed to advise researchers on their suitability to undertake the US training.

The exact details of the structure of the training are currently being determined (in person vs online etc) but will be communicated to the successful Hubs once the awards are made.

Although it will not be a requirement, the I-Corps@SFI Academy will be available for ARC Hub-funded researchers to participate in. As part of the proposal to the ARC Hub Programme, the applicant team may wish to include the engagement of researchers with the I-Corps@SFI Academy as part of the training plan.

### **8.3 Is the Training budget part of the Operations budget?**

There is scope to include training costs in both the operations budget and the budget for a specific Translational Research Project, as appropriate. This will depend on the nature of that training – training that is being organised on a Hub-wide level for the Operations/Leadership Team or a large number of Translational Researchers should be covered by the Operations budget. Training being undertaken by a specific Translational Researcher and their team should be included in the budget for their specific project.

### **8.4 Is the cost of the use of I-Corp programmes covered by SFI outside of the ARC, or should it be included in Ops Costs?**

Currently, there are no costs for participants who engage in the I-Corps@SFI Academy.

To participate in the I-Corps@SFI Entrepreneurial Training Programme (ETP), the National Science Foundation requires an administrative fee of €5,000 per team. Therefore €5,000 should be budgeted from the Operations Budget for any project at the application stage where the team is expected to participate in the ETP. When predicting demand in future years, a suggested benchmark is 10 teams per year (i.e. €50,000 per year).

Further information on the ETP is available [here](#).

**8.5 Is there any additional information available on the course content for the SFI-NSF I-Corps@SFI Entrepreneurial Training Programme (ETP) to ensure we are not duplicating the content?**

There does not need to be concern about the overlap between the ETP and any additional training that the Hub may propose, as the ETP can be thought of as a rigorous testing of the team's idea, rather than a traditional training course. The teams will be prepped for interviews of potential customers, partners and other industry stakeholders to gain direct, hands-on experience in customer discovery. They will gain mentorship from highly experienced entrepreneurs who have worked in the US innovation ecosystem. I-Corps is seen very much as a rite of passage in the US, with many investors looking to it as a measure of quality.

**8.6 For the US-based SFI-NSF I-Corps@SFI Entrepreneurial Training Programme (ETP), how will it be determined who attends?**

There will be an SFI application process for the selection of teams. It would be expected that a subset of Translational Research Projects will result in an application to SFI for the ETP and that the Hub Leadership would play a role in helping teams decide if they are ready/suitable to apply to SFI for the ETP.

Note that applications to the ETP require a team to have a lead PI (e.g., Hub Lead, Co-PIs or Translational Researchers), an Entrepreneurial Lead (e.g., postdoctoral researcher) and an Entrepreneurial Mentor (e.g., Hub Operations team member, member of staff within the Technology Transfer Office or Research Office of a Research Body). Therefore, the Hubs also have an important role in supporting teams, through facilitating suitable Entrepreneurial Mentors.

## **9. Budget**

**9.1 Are overhead costs covered?**

In addition to direct costs, SFI also makes an indirect or overhead contribution to the host Research Body, which is reflected as a percentage (30%) of the SFI direct costs (excluding equipment). Overheads are payable as a contribution to the Research Body for the indirect costs of hosting SFI-funded research programmes and are intended to enable the Research Body to develop internationally competitive research infrastructure and support services.

**9.2 Are subcontracting costs eligible under the Translational research budget and to what level?**

Yes. Sub-contracting or outsourcing of research, where required, is an eligible cost as part of the Translational Research Budget. This should be justified in the budget justification. There is no limit to the level of budget assigned to this cost, once adequately justified.

### **9.3 Are post-doc salaries an eligible cost?**

Salaries of post-doctoral researchers are an eligible cost. The post-docs could be part of the research staff working on a Translational Research Project, or they may be leading the project as the 'Translational Researcher'. Up to 100% of salary can be requested in line with their time commitment to the project.

### **9.4 Are PhD stipends an eligible cost?**

Although PhD stipends are not an ineligible cost, it is likely that funding through an ARC Hub is not the correct vehicle for a PhD project. It is expected that Translational Research Projects will be shorter than the typical PhD duration and will have 'Go/No Go' points built in to ensure only those reaching set milestones receive continued funding.

### **9.5 Regarding the budget, would equipment maintenance be eligible costs?**

In accordance with SFI's Grant Budget Policy<sup>3</sup>, equipment maintenance or service charges are allowable as an eligible cost under the Materials and Consumables category. Maintenance or service charges must be supported by a maintenance or service contract with the supplier in relation to the specified item of equipment. Maintenance or service charges must relate to equipment which is clearly identifiable and funded by SFI. This can be either new equipment which is being requested as part of an SFI Grant application or equipment previously funded by SFI. Maintenance or service contracts will be funded over the term of the relevant SFI Grant awarded.

### **9.6 For inter-institutional collaborations on a Translational Research project, should the budget be itemised by the institution in the Excel spreadsheet?**

It would be preferable if the budget for Translational Research Projects involving multiple researchers from different Research Bodies could be broken down by institution in the Excel spreadsheet.

## **10. Submission and Review**

### **10.1 If abstracts are submitted in similar areas from different institutions, will SFI accept proposals which merge these concepts into a full proposal?**

Pre-abstract submission deadline, we encourage open dialogue across research bodies as to potential areas of interest and applications in development. SFI will not be directing these conversations and will not dictate mergers of applications with similar areas of focus or publicly share the submitted abstract. Hubs will be hosted by a particular research body but should be nationally-focused and bring together relevant researchers from across the system. Therefore, any potential mergers of applications should happen pre-abstract submission.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/budget-finance-related-policies/SFI-Grant-Budget-Policy-March-2023-\(5\).pdf](https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/budget-finance-related-policies/SFI-Grant-Budget-Policy-March-2023-(5).pdf)



### **10.2 How will the abstract be assessed?**

The abstract will not undergo any evaluation, and no applicant groups will be eliminated from the process on the basis of their abstract. The abstract is a short summary of the proposed Hub (maximum 200 words) to provide an overview of the proposed ARC Hub and its area of focus. This will provide information to SFI on the number of proposals to expect in September and the thematic areas of those proposed Hubs.

### **10.3 Can the submitted abstract be modified as the proposal is developed between the abstract and the full proposal submission date?**

Yes. Proposals can be further developed and refined within the remit of the programme between the abstract submission and proposal submission. However, substantive information surrounding the application should remain the same, i.e. Lead and Co-Applicant information and the general mission of the SFI ARC Hub.

### **10.4 Are letters of support required?**

Yes, at the full proposal submission stage. A letter of support from the Research Body of the Lead Applicant, each Co-Applicant, and each Translational Researcher named in the proposal, must be provided as part of the full proposal. Additionally, a letter of support is required from each Academic Collaborator and each Industry Partner (if relevant). Letters of support are not required at the abstract submission stage.

Further details on the information to be included in the letters can be found in the call document.

### **10.5 Should applications for the SFI ARC Hub Programme be submitted through SESAME?**

Yes, full proposals must be submitted via SESAME, SFI's online grants and awards management system. Abstracts should be submitted by email to [arc@sfi.ie](mailto:arc@sfi.ie)

### **10.6 When I preview my proposal in PDF format in SESAME, I do not see the Excel budget spreadsheet.**

As the budget spreadsheet is not in a PDF format, it is not incorporated into the final PDF preview. However, there are inbuilt validations within SESAME to ensure that the Excel spreadsheet file has been uploaded. Applicants should ensure that their Research Body's finance/research office reviews the budget file prior to submission of the proposal.

The required elements to complete the budget requirements are as follows:

- 1) A detailed budget should be prepared using the 'SFI ARC Hub Budget Template' Excel document, which breaks down the requested costs between Operations costs and the Translational Research Budget. This budget spreadsheet should be uploaded to SESAME under the Budget section.
- 2) Applicants are required to complete a budget within SESAME, summarising the requested SFI contribution to the project. This budget should include the high-level costs under each

of the headings of staff, equipment, materials and travel. The 'SFI ARC Hubs Budget Template' includes a tab ('Summary Budget for SESAME') that provides the required totals to input to SESAME, once the more detailed sections of the template have been completed. To complete the budget table in SESAME, press open in the 'Prepare Budget' section and input the costs under each category heading.

- 3) The summary tables from this Excel template ('Summary Budget for proposal'), which include both the SFI, and industry budgets (if applicable) are to be included as part of the Programme Document, alongside a detailed budget justification, as described in Appendix I of the call document.

**10.7 How long after the application submission do you expect the interview process to take place?**

The panel review is expected to take place in late January 2025.

**10.8 Approximately when will successful applicants be notified?**

It is anticipated that successful applicants will be notified by April 2025.

**10.9 Can the list of Co-Applicants be expanded between the abstract and main submission?**

Yes, it is possible to add additional Co-PIs to the full proposal application that were not included at abstract stage. If changes to the applicant group are required in advance of the full proposal submission deadline, the Lead Applicant is asked to notify SFI via email ([arc@sfi.ie](mailto:arc@sfi.ie)) once the list of named Co-Applicants has been finalised.

**10.10 Question 1.8 of the Translational Research Project template, asks applicants to 'Please confirm that no aspect of this project has been funded, is being funded, or is under review from another source.' Does this question cover prior funding obtained (from any source) to bring the technology to a suitable readiness for ARC funding?**

This question does not refer to funding obtained previously to bring the proposed project to its current position (suitable readiness for ARC funding). The question is asking that the proposed Translational Researcher confirms that the body of work that they are proposing to receive ARC Hub funding is not already being funded through another source or is not currently under review (i.e. that the ARC funding would not result in double funding of the specific proposed research project).

**10.11 Can the Translational Research Project template be amended by successful Hubs for subsequent calls, to request additional information to better aid the selection of the best projects?**

The current template for Translational Research Projects was designed for inclusion in the ARC Hub full proposal. Successful Hubs will be provided with a separate, template suitable for use post-award. Any suggested amendments can be discussed with SFI at that stage.

**10.12 Is the 'Unique Translational Research Project ID' on the Translational Research Project template a reference number that we assign ourselves?**

Yes, the Unique Translational Research Project ID is a reference number that the applicant team are to assign themselves. It should be referenced on both the Translational Research Project template and on the associated worksheet (e.g. TRP 1 or TRP-IP1) within the budget template, in order to link the details of the proposed project with the budget for that project.

**10.13 In the case where there are inter-institutional collaborations at the level of a Translational Research Project, should a 'Lead-Researcher' and 'Lead-Institution' be nominated?**

In the case of a Translational Research Project that has multiple Translational Researchers from different research bodies, we would request that there be a lead Translational Researcher and lead institution. There can then be others listed as additional or 'Co-Translational Researchers' in the Translational Research Project template.

**10.14 Will the SFI ARC Hub abstracts be shared at the VP level prior to full proposal submission?**

SFI is not planning to formally share the abstracts amongst the teams or the VPDoR group. However, applicants are free to share their abstracts informally at VP level and ask for others to do the same.

**10.15 Can the Translational Research Project template be modified by applicant groups to include additional sections?**

When submitting the proposal to SFI, the template *must* be used as provided, without any additional sections added. Teams may decide that they require additional information from proposed Translational Researchers when making decisions on which projects to include in the proposal and may decide to use a modified version of the template for that purpose, but this additional information cannot be included in the official submission to SFI if it does not fit within the original template.

**10.16 Does SFI expect that the full membership of the Governance and Advisory Committees be known and detailed at the application stage?**

No, the applicants should describe the proposed governance and advisory committee structures for the SFI ARC Hub and the proposed role of these committees in the full proposal application. SFI will provide a more detailed stand-alone guidance document on SFI's expectations for the various committees to the successful Hubs. More detailed information about the committees, including exact membership, will then be requested by SFI post-award.

## 11. Intellectual property

### 11.1 Licensing and assignment metrics are more traditionally aligned with industry collaboration knowledge transfer goals. Can you help us understand the need for licensing and assignment targets in the context of an ARC hub?

Industry collaboration, although not mandatory, is possible under the SFI ARC Hub Programme which has been structured to allow for industry collaboration on Translational Research Projects, where appropriate. Some projects funded through the SFI ARC Hubs may involve collaboration with industry, if this is deemed by the SFI ARC Hub to be the most effective way to progress the research towards a commercialisation output, which could be via a new company formation.

For any given project, technology transfer (licences, assignments) from the academic partner to industry may ultimately be deemed to be a more appropriate route towards commercialisation than a spin out. Applicants will be expected to set targets for each of the indicators as part of their SFI ARC Hub application. Different Hubs may choose to set higher targets for particular indicators compared to others, based on their area of research and expected level of industry partnership.

### 11.2 How will IP be handled?

Intellectual Property (IP) should be managed according to the policies set out in the Government publication: **Ireland's National IP Protocol 2019**<sup>4</sup> and must comply with State aid Regulations.<sup>5</sup> 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 detailed in collaborative research agreements (CRAs).

## 12. State Aid/ Industry Engagement

### 12.1 What is an 'Undertaking in difficulty'?

Under State aid rules (General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER)) SFI cannot provide funding for secondments to Industry Partners that are 'undertakings in difficulty'<sup>6</sup>. Industry partners will be required to confidentially provide additional financial information/declarations to SFI (see Section 3.6.2 of the Call Document). These documents will be used by SFI to determine the eligibility of the company to receive State aid. 'Undertaking in difficulty' means an undertaking in respect of which at least one of the following circumstances occurs:

- (a) In the case of a limited liability company (other than an SME that has been in existence for less than three years or, for the purposes of eligibility for risk finance aid, an SME within 7 years from its first commercial sale that qualifies for risk finance investments following due diligence by the selected financial intermediary), where more than half of its subscribed share capital has disappeared as a result of accumulated losses. This is the case when deduction of accumulated losses from reserves (and all other elements generally

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.knowledgetransferireland.com/ManagingIP/National-IP-Protocol/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/national-policies-sfi-positions/>

<sup>6</sup> article 2, no. 18 of COMMISSION REGULATION (EU) No 651/2014 of 17 June 2014

considered as part of the own funds of the company) leads to a negative cumulative amount that exceeds half of the subscribed share capital. For the purposes of this provision, 'limited liability company' refers in particular to the types of company mentioned in Annex I of Directive 2013/34/EU<sup>7</sup> and 'share capital' includes, where relevant, any share premium.

- (b) In the case of a company where at least some members have unlimited liability for the debt of the company (other than an SME that has been in existence for less than three years or, for the purposes of eligibility for risk finance aid, an SME within 7 years from its first commercial sale that qualifies for risk finance investments following due diligence by the selected financial intermediary), where more than half of its capital as shown in the company accounts has disappeared as a result of accumulated losses. For the purposes of this provision, 'a company where at least some members have unlimited liability for the debt of the company' refers in particular to the types of company mentioned in Annex II of Directive 2013/34/EU.
- (c) Where the undertaking is subject to collective insolvency proceedings or fulfils the criteria under its domestic law for being placed in collective insolvency proceedings at the request of its creditors.
- (d) Where the undertaking has received rescue aid and has not yet reimbursed the loan or terminated the guarantee, or has received restructuring aid and is still subject to a restructuring plan
- (e) In the case of an undertaking that is not an SME, where, for the past two years:
  - 1. the undertaking's book debt to equity ratio has been greater than 7,5 and
  - 2. the undertaking's EBITDA interest coverage ratio has been below 1,0.'

## **12.2 Should an Industry Collaboration Form be completed for projects funded under the SFI ARC Hub Programme?**

No, an Industry Collaboration Form is not required as the SFI ARC Hub Programme is run under a State aid exemption and does not require projects to satisfy the requirements for an 'effective collaboration'.

## **12.3 Who determines whether results are widely disseminated? Are there some indicators that can be referenced to ensure that the definition of wide dissemination is met or is it up to the applicant to determine whether results are widely disseminated?**

The funding rate may be increased (up to a maximum aid intensity of 80%) by a further 15% if the results of the project are widely disseminated through conferences, publications, open-access repositories, or free or open-source software. SFI will monitor awards to ensure that outputs are widely disseminated, and awardees will be required to report on this through their annual and final reports. It is up to the applicant(s) in conjunction with their Industry Partner(s) and Research Body(ies) to agree on whether results will be widely disseminated in advance of submission of an application to SFI.

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<sup>7</sup> Directive 2013/34/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 on the annual financial statements, consolidated financial statements and related reports of certain types of undertakings, amending Directive 2006/43/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council and repealing Council Directives 78/660/EEC and 83/349/EEC.

Please note that as members of cOAlition S, SFI has aligned its Open Access Policy with the principles of Plan S, meaning that all publications arising either in whole or in part from SFI funding must be made openly available as soon as it is published and available under a CC-BY licence. Other outputs such as data and software must be made as open as possible and closed as necessary.

SFI expects that outputs of the project should be disseminated to the widest extent possible, on a national as well as EU level. If results can be published on an international level in addition to the national level e.g., by means of internationally recognised journals/magazines or during international conferences, such dissemination routes are preferable. Wide dissemination should take place during or as soon as possible after completion of the project and should be undertaken by the most appropriate means (e.g., through websites, open-access databases and publications) to ensure that its outputs remain continuously accessible for an unlimited time.

**12.4 If an Industry Partner is involved in a Translational Research Project, how much funding will SFI provide?**

Under State aid rules, the SFI funding rate (aid intensity) can vary from 25% to a maximum of 80% of total eligible project costs depending on the size of the Industry Partner company and the type of research involved and whether outputs are widely disseminated. The Industry Partner supports the remaining project costs. The requested SFI budget must not exceed the prescribed aid intensity allowed under State aid rules. Please refer to Appendix III of the Call Document for further details.

**12.5 Does SFI contribution cover the overhead on industry contribution?**

No, SFI will not pay overhead on the industry contribution. Overheads will be paid on the SFI contribution only.

**12.6 Are companies outside of the Irish State eligible Industry Partners for Translational Research Projects?**

Yes. The Hub can partner with a company outside of Ireland on Translational Research Projects. For all Translational Research Projects involving an Industry Partner (Irish or International), funding will be awarded in line with the conditions of GBER and SFI will complete the necessary compliance checks at the application stage.