SFI Research Centres Programme

Open for
collaboration

2023 Call Information Webinar

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26th September 2023

Webinar details

- This webinar consists of a presentation with key information on the call, followed by answers to submitted questions.

- Submit questions via the Q&A function on Zoom. **Please submit questions throughout the presentation.**

- Webinar recording and **slides will be available** on the call webpage in coming days: www.sfi.ie/funding/funding-calls/sfi-research-centres

- FAQ will also be updated with any significant or outstanding questions. Any further questions welcome: centres@sfi.ie
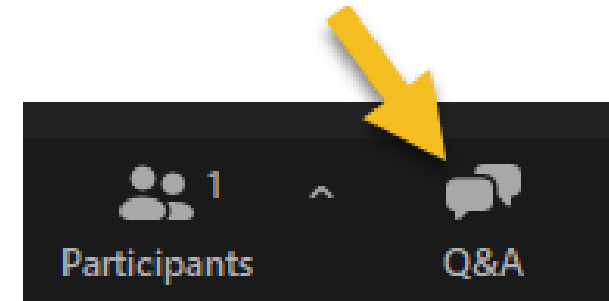
Presentation overview

- **Background**

- **Programme objectives**

- **Call themes**

- **Research Centre structure**

- **Research Centre team & eligibility**

- **Equality, diversity & inclusion**

- **Research Body participation & eligibility**

- **Proposal scale**

- **Cost share**

- **Application steps & review process**

- **Key dates**

SFI Research Centres

- SFI Research Centres are **virtual Centres** that allow experts from diverse fields across Irish Research Bodies to come together to create a **critical mass of researchers**.

- SFI Research Centres aim to **exploit opportunities in science, engineering, and technology** where the complexity of the research agenda requires the advantages of **scope, dynamism, synergy, duration, and facilities** that a Centre can provide.

- As well as undertaking world-class academic collaborations, Centres also engage in deeply **collaborative research partnerships with industry**.

- Centres deliver impactful **Education and Public Engagement**, and embed practices into the culture of their research teams.

National context

- Science Foundation Ireland's Strategy 2025: Shaping Our Future aims to position Ireland as a **global innovation leader** in scientific and engineering research for the advancement of Ireland's **economy and society**.

- SFI Research Centres play a key role in achieving this, as well as objectives in **Impact 2030** and the **National Development Plan 2018-2027**.

- Over a number of years, SFI has worked to develop a new SFI Research Centres programme.

- This new programme has been developed in **consultation with stakeholders** including Government and the public sector, industry, and the higher education and research system.

Timeline

Key Dates:

Call announcement	14th September 2023
Webinar	26th September 2023
Deadline for submission of Expression of Interest	1st November 2023, 13:00
Deadline for submission of Pre-Proposal	13th December 2023, 13:00
Deadline for submission of Full Proposal	25th September 2024, 13:00
Panel Review	January 2025
Funding Decision	April 2025

While we will make every attempt to adhere to the timetable and deadlines outlined above, SFI retains the right to modify the timetable, if necessary, for operational reasons. In such an eventuality, SFI will advise all applicant teams as soon as possible. Note that all times referred to are Dublin, Ireland local time.

SFI Research Centres programme vision

The development of a **dynamic, cohesive and streamlined ecosystem** of SFI Research Centres that are international beacons of **scientific excellence**.

Bringing together a critical mass of **outstanding researchers** to collaborate at a scale that will yield national and international impact.

In **partnership with industry, government and civil society**, Centres will deliver **systemic impact**, providing talent and innovative solutions to Ireland's **economic, societal and environmental challenges**.

Programme objectives

The primary objective of the SFI Research Centres programme is:

1. To deliver a programme of internationally-leading, **excellent research**, at both oriented basic and applied levels, led by a team of **world-leading PIs and rising stars**.

Additional specific objectives include:

2. A **collaborative, dynamic, cohesive and streamlined ecosystem** of Centres.

3. **Collaborative research partnerships with industry**, and support SMEs.

4. **Deep, purposeful Education and Public Engagement** in the culture of research teams.

5. **Systemic impact**, in partnership with industry, government and civil society.

6. Foster **excellent, diverse and interdisciplinary research teams**.

7. Improve **equality, diversity and inclusion.**

8. Reduce the **climate and environmental footprint of research**.

9. Leverage **investment in research**, and grow **Ireland's international presence**.

Call themes

1. **Digital Technologies**

2. **Energy, Climate Action and Sustainability**

3. **Food**

4. **Life Sciences and Health**

5. **Manufacturing and Materials**

6. **Services and Business Processes** (strong STEM focus required, aligned with SFI remit)

- Primary theme alignment required. Secondary theme alignment may be indicated.

- A proposed Centre is not expected to work across the entirety of the theme they are aligned to, e.g. if the Centre is focused on a specific sub-topic within that theme.

- **Interdisciplinary research** is strongly encouraged, as are the inclusion of **Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences** (AHSS) research and researchers.

Research Centre duration and structure overview

- SFI Research Centres funded through this call are expected to begin operating in **January 2026**.

- Funded Centres will **operate for 8 years**, and all proposals must plan for this duration.

- An SFI Research Centre has the following main components:
    - Platform research
    - Targeted projects
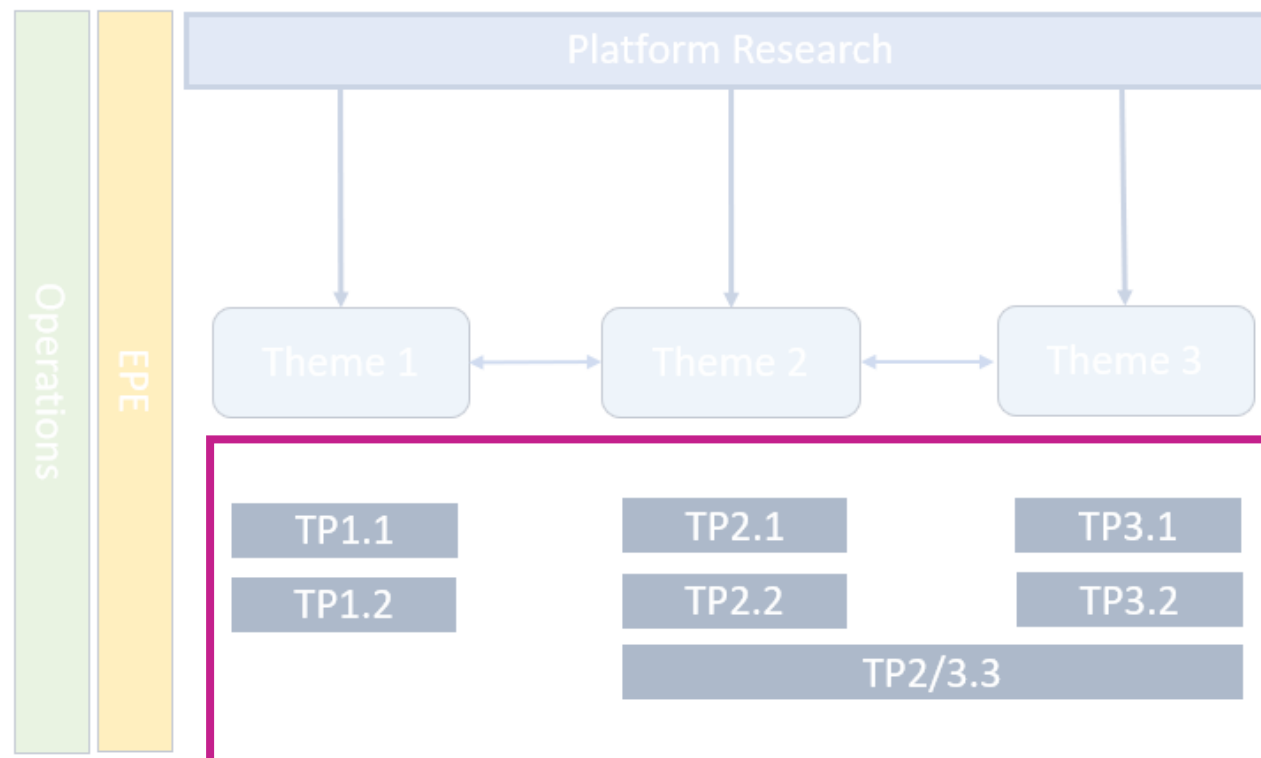   - Education and Public Engagement
    - Operations
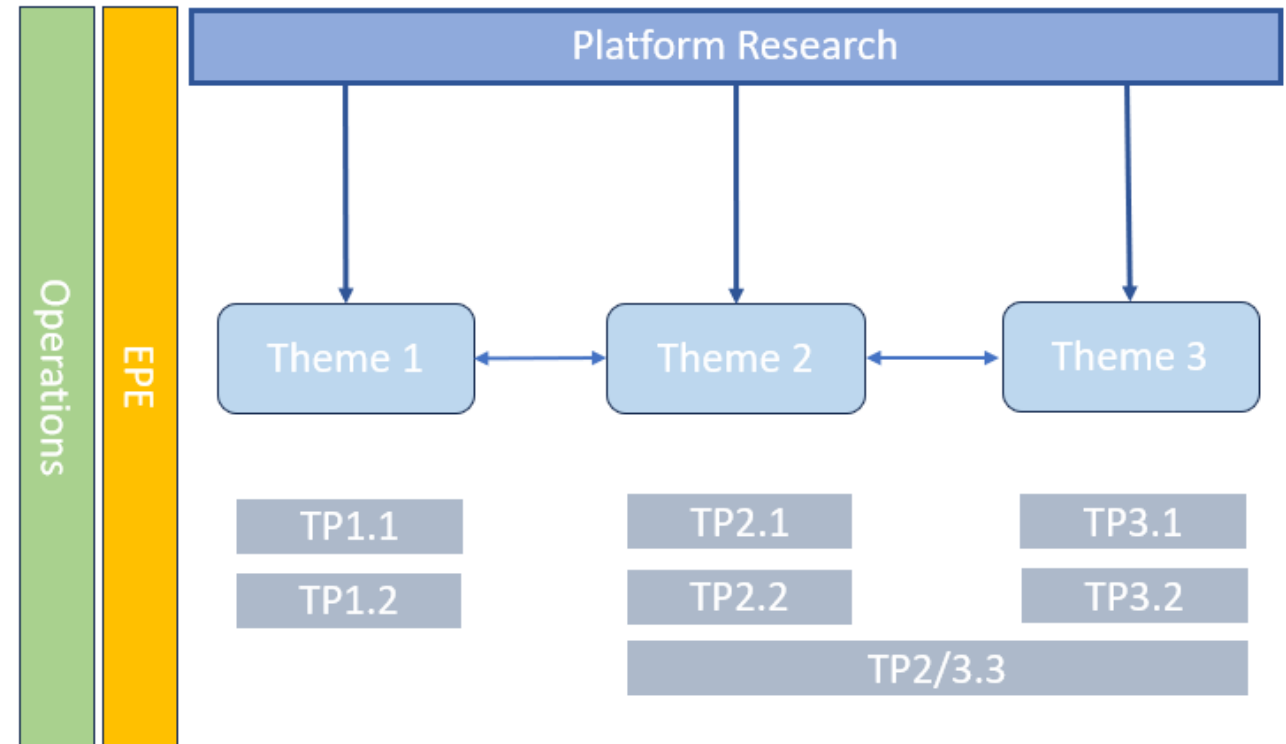
Platform research

- Platform research is the **core academic research of the Centre**.

- It is **divided into a number of themes** with a clear rationale.

- These themes should facilitate coordination of the Centre, and each theme is **led by one Theme Lead who must be a co-Applicant**.

- An important component of the platform research is the **cohort-based PhD training** programme.

- Costs include research staff, cohort-based PhD training programme, materials, travel, and equipment.
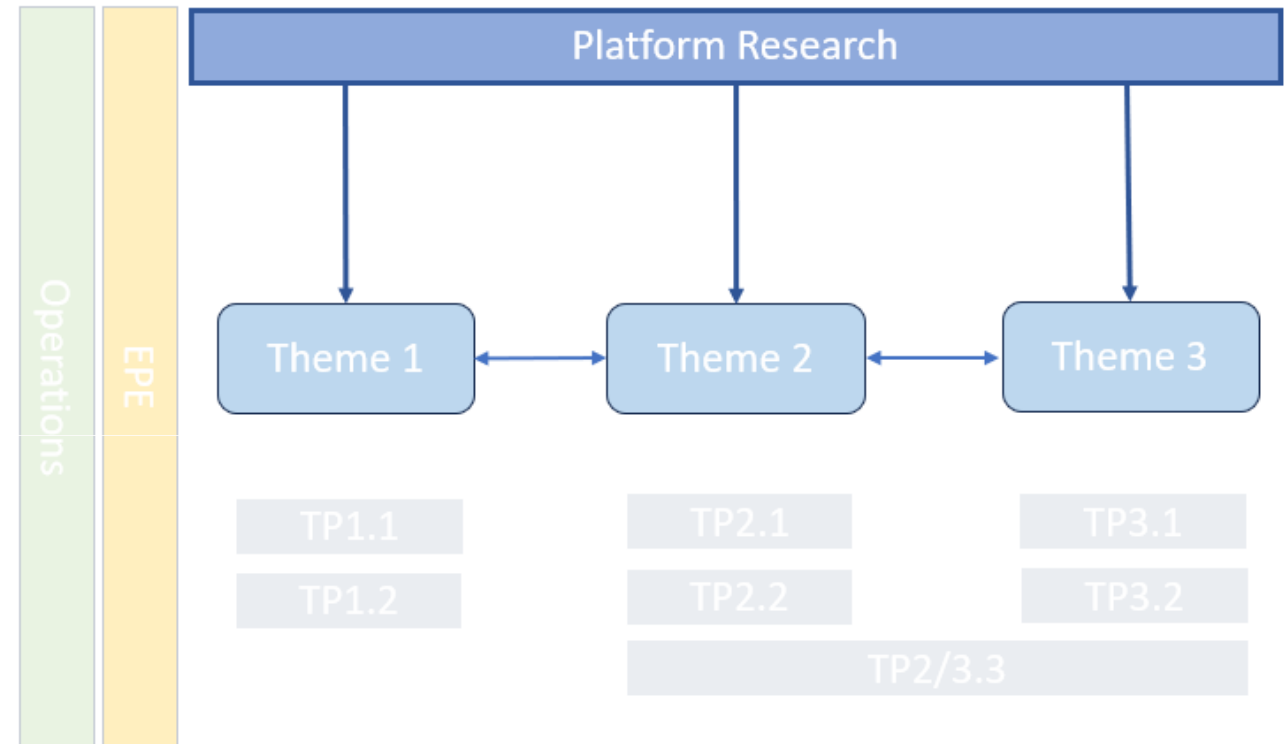
Targeted projects

- Targeted projects are **collaborative research projects** between the Centre and:
  - ○ industry partners, and/or
  - ○ Irish non-commercial public sector bodies.

- Can sit under **one or multiple themes**.

Education and Public Engagement

- EPE should be **cross-cutting across the full Centre team and activities**.

- Engagement should be **an integral part of being a researcher** and researchers should be encouraged and facilitated to participate in EPE related work.

- As a guideline, **at least 5% of the SFI budget** should be allocated to the EPE programme. Costs may include:
  - Direct costs of EPE activities
  - Travel
  - EPE training
  - Engagement in EPE-related partnerships
  - *Personnel

  * **Please note that personnel costs required to run the EPE programme should be included in the operations budget on the budget excel.**
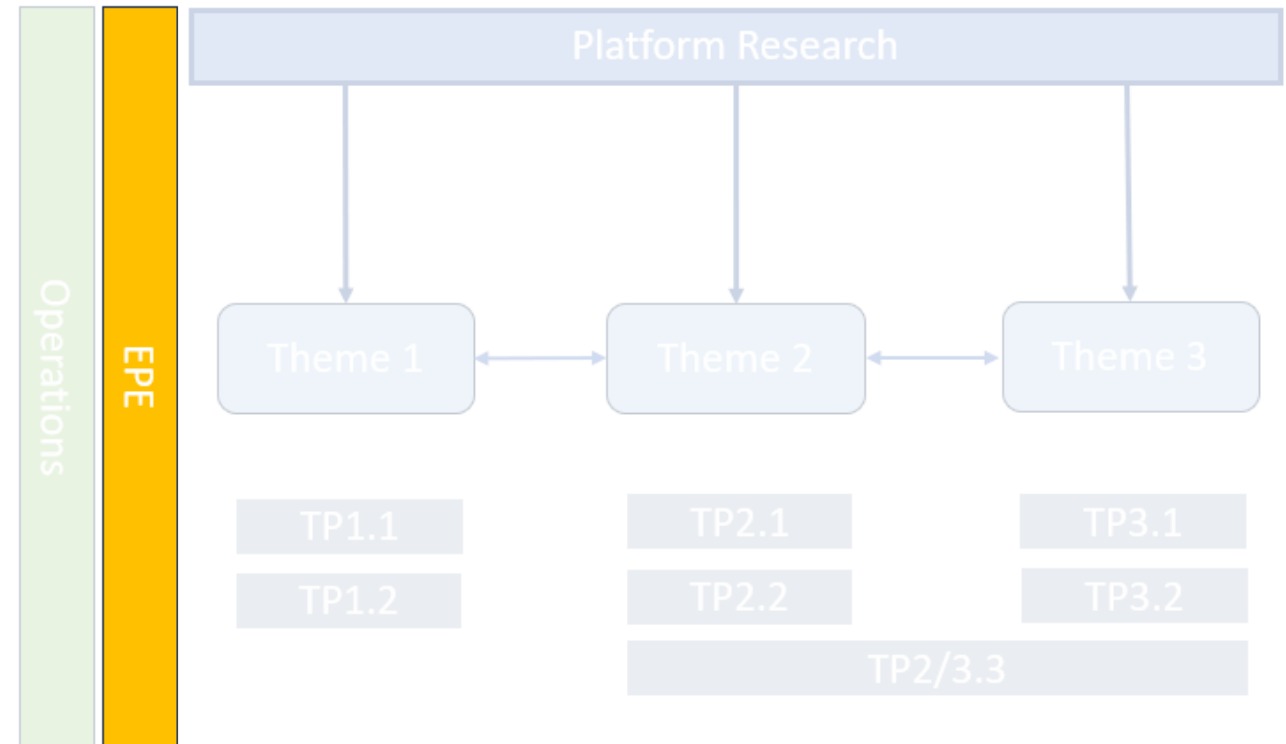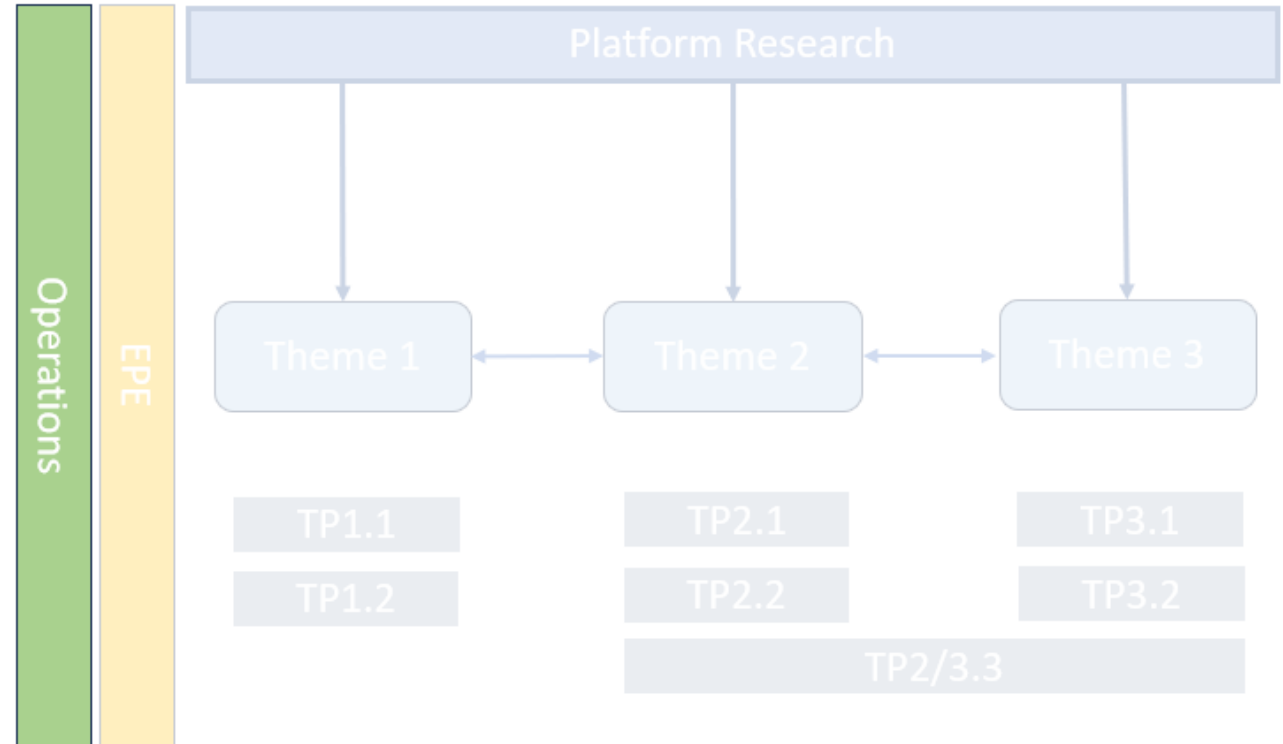
Education and Public Engagement

- Applicants should refer to the **EPE Framework and Impact** guidance document when designing their EPE programme.

- This document includes guidance on:
  - SFI's vision and expectations for EPE
  - The different types of EPE
  - Approaches to funding EPE
  - Leadership and management of EPE

Operations

- The Operations Team **supports the Centre in delivering on its vision**.

- The team will include responsibilities such as management, business development, administration, EPE, and training (please see call for more details).

- However, the exact structure and responsibilities of the Operations Team should be bespoke to each Centre.

- The Operations component of the Centre budget is capped at a **maximum of 20% of the SFI budget**.

Centre team/eligibility

Centre Director(s)

Research Theme Leads*

Centre PIs

Post Doctoral Researcher and PhD Students
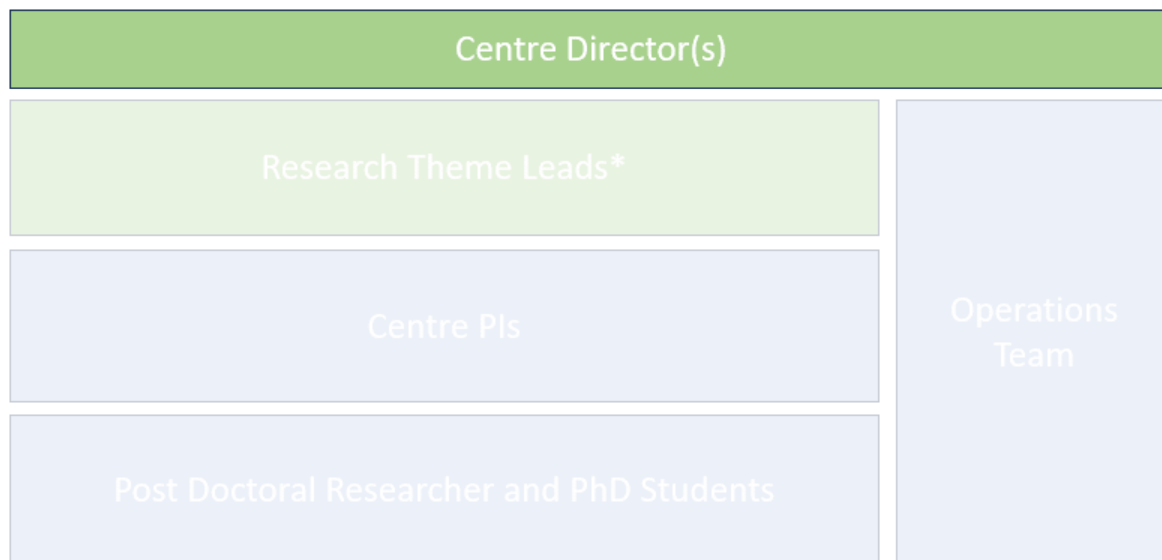
Operations Team

Applicant Team

*Including Deputy Director
Note: PIs may be removed or added to the centre throughout its lifetime

- **Please note:** Applicant Teams intending to change their Lead Applicant/Co-Applicants/Centre PIs must contact SFI in advance of submission of the Pre/Full Proposal and have received **approval in writing from SFI**.

Centre team/eligibility – Director(s)

Science Foundation Ireland
For what's next

Centre Director(s)

Research Theme Leads*

Centre PIs

Operations Team

Post Doctoral Researcher and PhD Students

Applicant Team

*Including Deputy Director
Note: PIs may be removed or added to the centre throughout its lifetime

- The Centre Director is the **scientific and technical lead** of the Centre and applies as **the Lead Applicant**.

- A Centre may be led by two co-Directors. Here, one Director will apply as a co-Applicant but **must meet all eligibility requirements** of the Lead Applicant.

- Eligibility criteria:
    - Employment status (see call document)
    - ≥ 8 years since PhD
    - ≥ 40% time commitment
    - ≥ €100k minimum budget from SFI direct costs

Centre team/eligibility – Theme Leads

Centre Director(s)

Research Theme Leads*	Operations Team
Centre PIs	
Post Doctoral Researcher and PhD Students	

Applicant Team
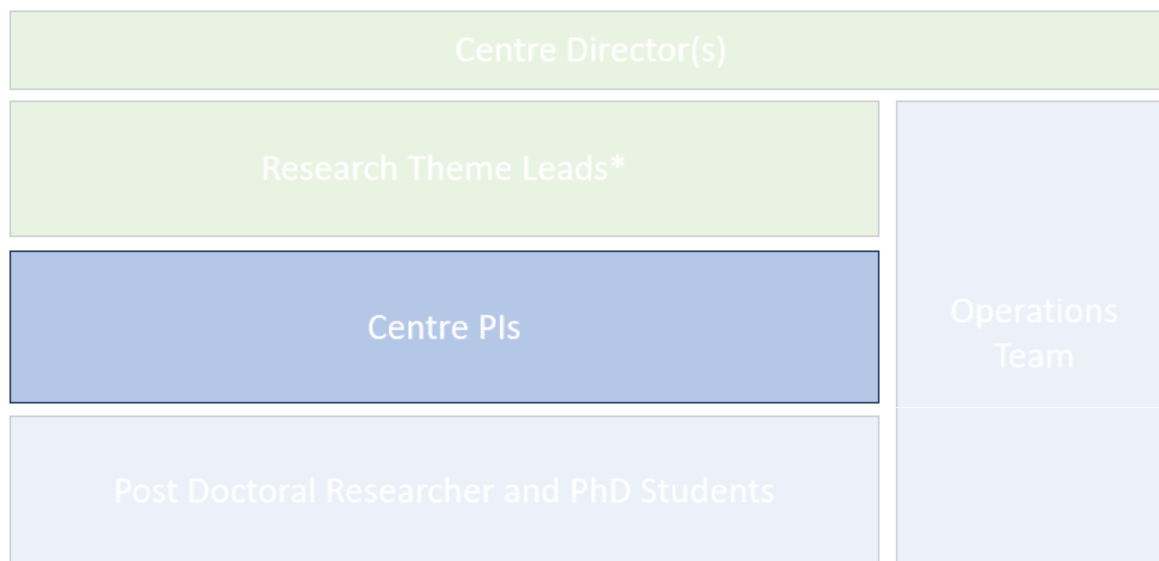
*Including Deputy Director

Note: PIs may be removed or added to the centre throughout its lifetime

- One Co-Applicant will be designated as **Research Theme Lead** for each research theme.

- Further management and leadership structures can be put in place for each theme.

- One Theme Lead will serve as the **Deputy Director**.

- Eligibility criteria is same as for Centre PIs (next slide).

Centre Team/Eligibility – Centre PIs

Centre Director(s)	
Research Theme Leads*	
Centre PIs	Operations Team
Post Doctoral Researcher and PhD Students	

Applicant Team

*Including Deputy Director
Note: PIs may be removed or added to the centre throughout its lifetime

- A Centre PI would be expected to **lead one or more platform and/or targeted projects**, including holding budget as part of that project.

- PIs may also have other roles in supporting the delivery of the proposed research programme.

- Each PI serves under the direction of a Research Theme Lead.

- Eligibility criteria:
  - Employment status (see call document)
  - ≥ 3 years since PhD
  - ≥ €100k minimum budget from SFI direct costs

Equality, diversity and inclusion

- SFI recognises that excellent research stems from diverse and inclusive teams.

- Commitment to EDI, including gender balance, must be described in a Research Centre EDI Action Plan, and in the Research Body Letter of Support.

- Centres will be expected to improve EDI through the 8 years, including **diverse gender representation at all levels** of the team.

- As a **minimum eligibility criterion**, an Applicant Team may only have a **maximum of 70% of any one gender**.

Multiple applications and programme eligibility

- It is essential that individuals joining a proposal have a strong connection to the proposed Centre, and have the time to devote to its success.

- Individuals can join a **maximum of two submissions** to the 2023 Centres call.

- Individuals can join a **maximum of one Applicant Team** for the 2023 Centres call.

- Similar limits apply to overlaps with ARC Hubs, Co-Centres and other SFI Research Centres. Please see Appendix A for more details.

I am currently a	PI	PI on Applicant Team	Director
Director of a 2012/2013 Phase 2 SFI Research Centre	YES	YES	YES
Director of a 2016 Phase 2 SFI Research Centre which is not applying to this call and continuing to Phase 2	YES (1 application)	NO	NO
Director of a Co-Centre or ARC Hub, or Lead Applicant on a proposal to the ARC Hubs or Co-Centres Programme	YES (1 application)	NO	NO
Co-PI of a currently funded 2012, 2013 or 2016 Phase 2 Research Centre	YES	YES	YES*
FI of a currently funded 2012, 2013 or 2016 Phase 2 Research Centre	YES	YES	YES
Co-PI of a Co-Centre or ARC Hub, or Co-Applicant on a proposal to the ARC Hubs or Co-Centres Programme.	YES	YES	NO
Translational researcher in ARC Hub or FI in Co-Centre	YES	YES	YES

I can apply as

*PIs in a 2016 Centre, which is not applying to this call and continuing in Phase 2, will need to step down to FI and provide a letter of support from the Director of the 2016 Centre.

Research Body eligibility

- Research Bodies eligible to apply to SFI research programmes can be found on the SFI website: https://www.sfi.ie/funding/sfi-policies-and-guidance/eligibility-related-information/

- **Please note:** The consortium of Research Bodies **must include** at least one Technological University or Institute of Technology.

Research Body consortium

- The **active collaboration and coordination of Research Bodies** is a crucial component of Centre success.

- Different Applicant Teams may have different circumstances due to sectoral, institutional, strategic or other reasons. Proposals should clearly justify the structure they have chosen for their consortium of Research Bodies, and how all partners will work together.

- A **Coordinating Partner Research Body** is a Research Body that takes a leading role in the consortium. The Research Body of the Lead Applicant must be a Coordinating Partner, but there can be any number of Coordinating Partners.

- A **Partner Research Body** is a Research Body that has at least one PI as an active team member.

- The Research Body of the Lead Applicant is also considered the **Administrative Lead Research Body** that leads the submission of the proposal on behalf of the consortium.

Proposal scale

- SFI expects to fund a **range of Centre sizes**.

- Proposal scale should be:
  - Optimised to the **research capacity** in the domain proposed
  - In line with **excellence** of the proposal
  - Streamlined and deliver **value for money**
  - **Coherent** across the proposed Centre

Cost share

- Proposals will need to present a plan to leverage additional funding, according to the programme cost share model.

- All funded Centres will operate under the same cost share model.

- It is mandatory for all proposals to meet the minimum/maximum limits of each category.
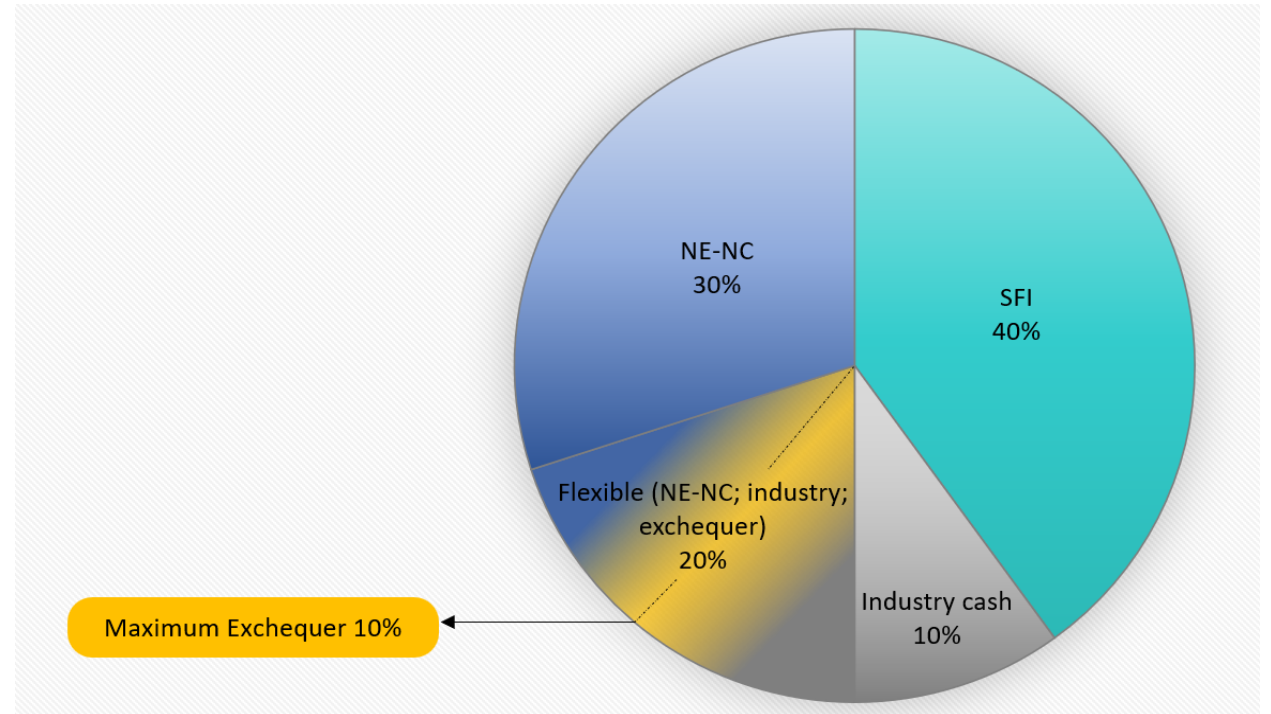
State aid and SFI grant funding

- Research activities undertaken as part of a grant awarded under the SFI Research Centres programme, and subject to SFI's Grant Conditions, must be "non-economic" in nature and be designed to ensure that any funding received does not, directly or indirectly, give rise to the granting of State aid.

- Applicants must take full consideration of the State aid provisions set out in the call document when designing their industry collaborative programmes.

SFI direct costs

- The SFI direct costs contributing to the cost share model must be a **maximum of 40%**.

NE-NC
30%

SFI
40%

Flexible (NE-NC; industry; exchequer)
20%

Industry cash
10%

Maximum Exchequer 10%
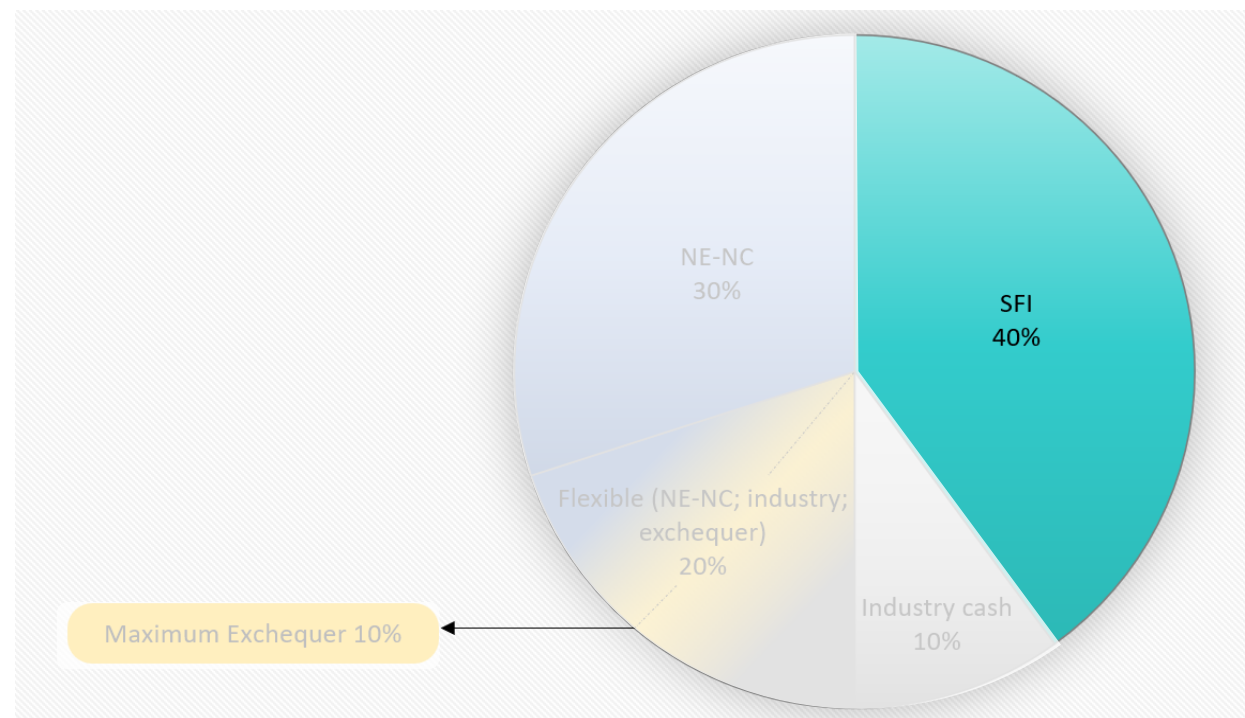
Non-exchequer non-commercial

- Funding for Centre activities that is received from sources other than the Irish state or industry, such as:
  - research funders (EU, Wellcome)
  - charities
  - not-for-profit organisations
  - donations from individuals

- NE-NC must be a **minimum of 30%** of total Centre cost share.

Pie chart:
- NE-NC 30%
- SFI 40%
- Flexible (NE-NC; industry; exchequer) 20%
- Industry cash 10%
- Maximum Exchequer 10%
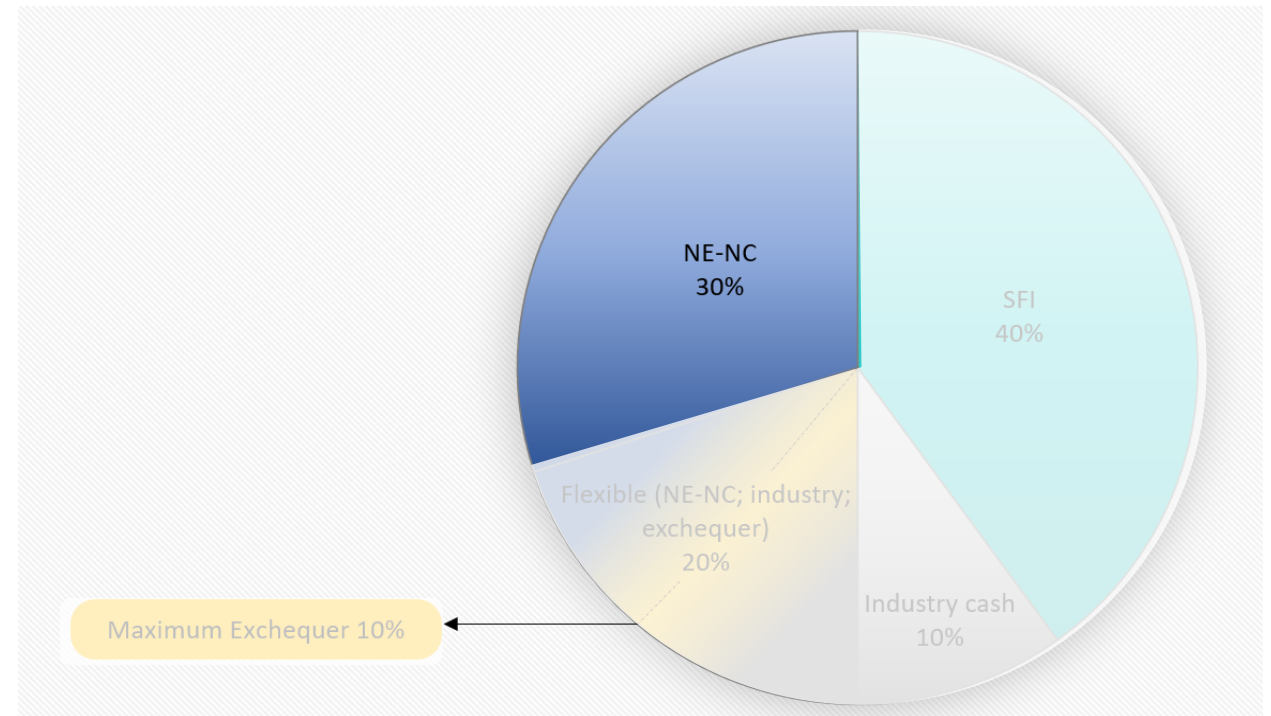
Industry cash

- **Industry cash** is direct funding received by a Centre for collaborative research projects with an industry partner, or via donations or unencumbered research grants from industry.

- Industry cash must be a **minimum of 10%** of total Centre cost share.*

*SME multiplier:

- Each € of SME cash cost share counts towards industry cash received, as normal. However, each € from SMEs also **reduces the industry cash cost share target** by the same amount.

- The end result is an effective doubling of the value of SME cash cost share.
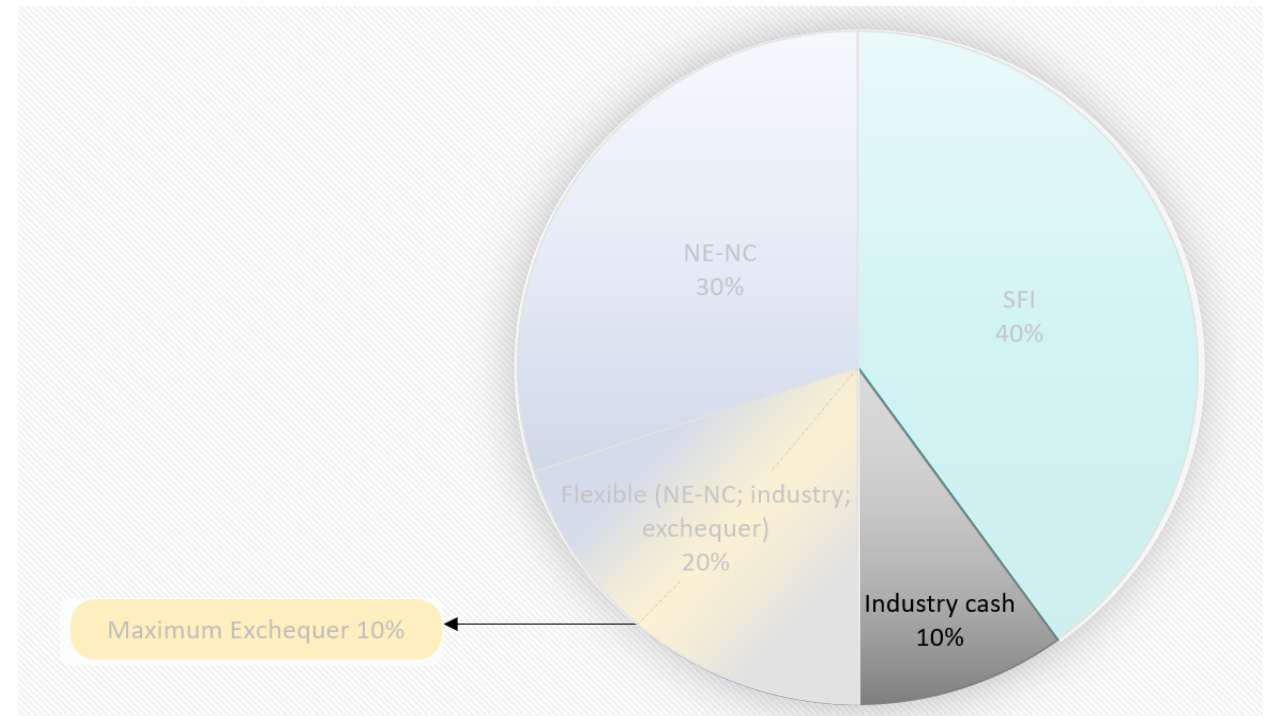
Flexible portion of cost share

- The remaining portion of cost share can be from any of these sources:
  - Industry cash
  - Industry in-kind
  - NE-NC
  - Eligible exchequer sources
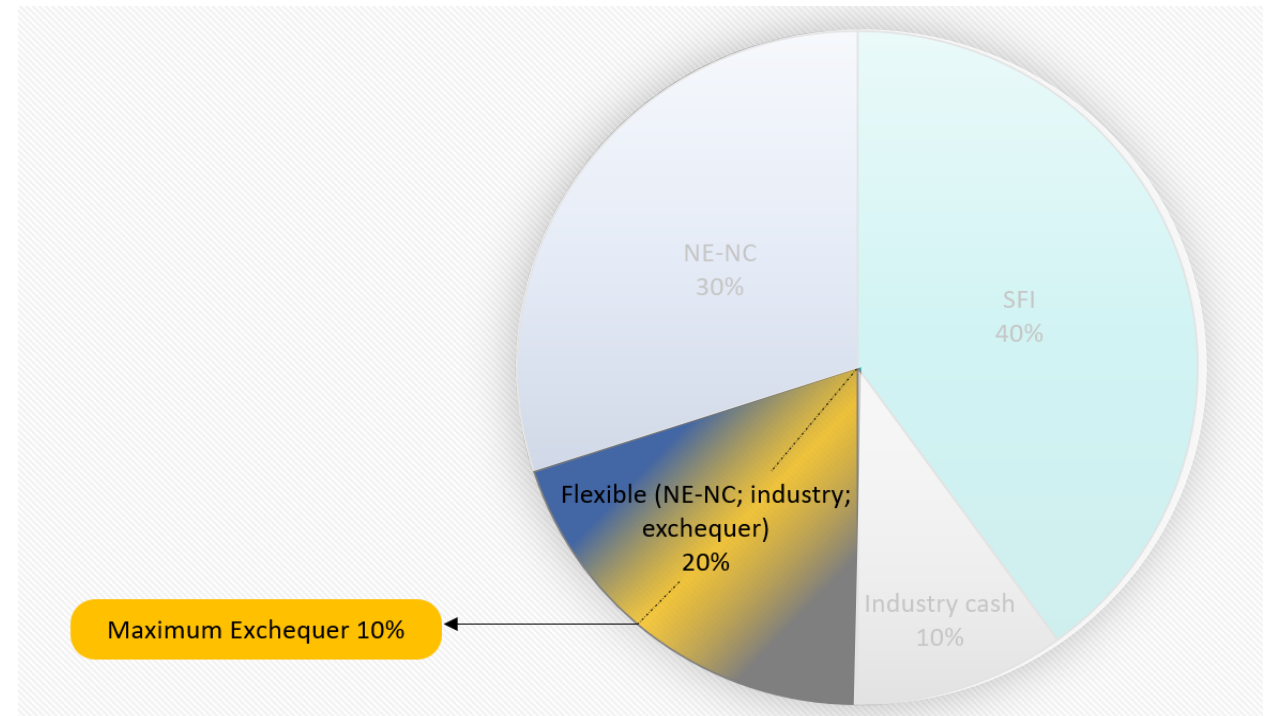
Exchequer funding as cost share

- Collaborations with the public sector are an important aspect of a Centre's research programme, and its societal impact.

- Eligible exchequer funding may be up to a **maximum of 10%** of total Centre cost share.

- Please see the call document for more details, including specific eligible categories (section 5.6.3).

Cost share – budget request

- Certain budgets sit outside of the cost share model. This means that those costs are not used to calculate the cost share targets for the proposed Centre.

- These are:
  - **Non-staff EPE costs**
  - **Equipment up to a maximum of 5% of the total SFI direct costs**

- Expected cost share is entered into the provided budget templates, and the required cost share proportions must be met.

Total Research Centre Budget in Cost-Share									
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Total
SFI Cost-Share Contribution (populated from table above)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Industry Cash Commitment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Industry In-Kind Commitment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Non-Exchequer Non-Commercial Cash Commitment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Exchequer Cash Commitment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Centre Strategic Fund

- **Flexibility and dynamism** of an SFI Research Centre is very important.

- The Centre Strategic Fund is SFI funding held in reserve for strategic opportunities, challenges, or to develop and change over time.

- An example list of potential uses are indicated in the call document.

- The Centre Strategic Fund requires a transparent mechanism for deciding where funding is assigned.

CENTRE STRATEGIC FUND BUDGET									
Centre Strategic Fund									
Category	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Total
Centre Strategic fund	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Supporting Information	
Proposed use of Centre Strategic Fund	Brief justification or additional relevant information

Key dates

Key Dates:

Call announcement	14th September 2023
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Application steps & review process

1. **Expression of Interest** (Not subject to review)

   - EoI template must be used

   - Submission via e-mail (centres@sfi.ie)

   - Pre-Proposals submitted where an EoI has not been provided will be rejected without review

2. **Pre-Proposal**

   - Submission via SESAME → SESAME form + uploads (CVs, Programme Document, Budget Excel, Letters of Support)

   - Reviewed and discussed by an expert panel

   - Proposals demonstrating a high-level of excellence, based on the review criteria, will progress to Full Proposal stage

3. **Full Proposal** (invitation only)

   - Submission via SESAME → SESAME form + uploads

   - Postal review → Proposals demonstrating a high-level of excellence, based on the review criteria, will progress to Full Proposal interview

   - Panel evaluation & interview, includes a presentation from Applicant Team

Review Criteria

☐ Applicant Team (weighting of 25%)

  ❖ Leadership, collaborative, expertise, experience, cohesive, national research centre, EDI

☐ Research Programme (weighting of 25%)

  ❖ Originality, novelty, timeliness, value, innovative

☐ Education and Public Engagement (weighting of 10%)

  ❖ Purposeful public engagement, engaged research culture, strengthen research through collaboration and engagement

☐ Impact (weighting of 20%)

  ❖ Economic, societal and environmental impact, cohesive national research environment, enterprise competitiveness, systemic

☐ Execution and Delivery (weighting of 20%)

  ❖ Quality of plans, effective management plan, inter-institutional co-operation

Applicants should bear in mind the programme objectives throughout.

Thank you

Slides and webinar recording will be uploaded to call webpage.

Consult the Centres programme call documents and FAQ.

Any further questions:
centres@sfi.ie