

Strategic Priority Fund - Physics of Life Programme
Building Collaboration at the Physics of Life Interface
Frequently Asked Questions

Submitting an Application

How do I format my application so as to avoid it being returned for amendment or rejected because the formatting is wrong?

Given the timeline restraints of the call, if your application does not comply with the stated rules including formatting (font and spacing rule), it may not be possible for us to return the submission to the applicant for amendments or corrections and your application may be rejected.

Therefore, please take care to:

- **Only submit 2 documents, namely**
 - o 4-page case for support
 - o Je-S application form
- All documents must be attached as **PDFs** to avoid errors.
- Use single-spaced **Arial 11pt font** or similar-sized **sans serif typeface**
- **Page margins** should be at least 2cm in all directions.
- No more than **4 pages** for your case for support

Preparing your Proposal

Before you submit your proposal

Applications should go through the typical triage process as expected with a Standard Mode Grant, and we expect institutions to take a strategic overview of their applications.

For help and advice on costings and writing your proposal, please contact your research office in the first instance, allowing sufficient time for your organisation's submission process. For other issues, there is guidance on preparing a proposal on the EPSRC website, or you can contact the Je-S helpdesk (contact information on the call web page).

Is there room to add project partners between the outline stage and the full proposal?

Yes, that would be fine.

When adding project partners, please articulate the value they would bring to your research programme, ensuring that ethical issues, where appropriate, have been addressed.

Why is this for 3-year grant and not a 5-year grant? High quality, interdisciplinary science takes time.

We agree that interdisciplinary research can benefit from longer grants. However, we are restricted by the specific finance and timeline limits of this Strategic Priority Fund.

Assessment

Will the Outline Stage be assessed by a panel or UKRI internal staff only?

Outline proposals will be rejected by UKRI staff if applicants:

- request more than £2.95 million funding from UKRI
- do not nominate two joint Co-PIs
- do not adequately demonstrate fit to the scope of this call.

Outline proposals within the remit of the call, will be assessed by an interdisciplinary expert panel, with members from across UKRI's physics and life sciences communities.

Full proposals will be assessed by expert postal peer review, followed by an interdisciplinary expert panel, with members from across the physics and life sciences communities in EPSRC, BBSRC and MRC remits.

How many proposals are likely to be funded?

Depending on the costs involved with each grant, between 6 – 12 proposals will be funded as part of this call.

EDI and Impact isn't profiled strongly in the call beyond support for career stages and doesn't appear in the assessment criteria, will this be updated as the webinar info seems stronger on this?

The documentation on the call website is correct - we will not directly assess ED&I as part of this process.

However, we have included guidance to encourage equality, diversity and inclusion in the grants we fund through this call, including the following:

- Principal Investigators do not need a track record of previous leadership of large grants (they could instead demonstrate their potential to lead and arrangements for support) and we encourage applications from individuals with diverse backgrounds and experience.
- Facility managers and technicians are eligible to apply as Co-Investigators.
- The inclusion of early career researchers is encouraged and we have added a strong emphasis on mentoring and development of researchers at all career stages.

At the outline stage, applicants should seek to demonstrate the ability of their team to deliver their research objectives, including how the grant will give opportunities for the professional development of all researchers.

Impact is very important to this call and to the Physics of Life Programme as a whole. We expect to fund proposals that will lead to a significant advancement in understanding of living systems, combining perspectives and expertise from physics and the life sciences.

Intended outcomes will be part of the assessment criteria of the outline stage and will be assessed as part of quality at the full proposal stage.

How will you assess projects that propose to repurpose existing physics methods to investigate a biological concept - such that there isn't necessarily huge novelty in the physics? Will these be assessed less favourably?

Proposals must include physics research which is in remit for the EPSRC biophysics and soft matter physics portfolio, integrated with research questions or applications within BBSRC or MRC remit.

We are looking to fund proposals that are 'of sufficient ambition that it requires the contribution of substantive expertise and research activity from both physics and life sciences disciplines, to yield interdisciplinary outcomes which are greater than the sum of their parts'.

In some cases, applying existing technology in a new area is a challenging problem and requires significant multi-disciplinary collaboration; such proposals will be able to make a strong case for meeting the assessment criteria.

Is the novel perspective coming from the Physics side supposed to cover novelty of methods at all scales (micro, nano...) or for a specific scale would be sufficient?

We are not being prescriptive as to the scale over which the research is focussed. This will depend on the shared research goals of the research team.

Eligibility

Investigators need to have a position at an approved UK institution in order to be eligible for this call. Specific departments are not excluded from the call as long as the individual's involvement can be justified suitably.

Non-UK based researchers could collaborate as visiting researchers but would not be eligible to be a PI or Co-I. Other information about international collaborators can be found at the EPSRC [website](#). Please contact your organisation's research office in the first instance to confirm the UKRI standard terms for international collaborations; the standard UKRI terms will apply for this funding opportunity.

Following is a brief summary of the standard UKRI funding rules regarding collaboration with foreign institutions and researchers:

Funding Summary – What we can and can't fund

- ✓ Travel for UK researchers to partner labs
- ✓ Extended visits of UK based research staff to overseas group
- ✓ Hosting costs for overseas visitors in UK
- ✓ Consumables cost incurred by UK researchers while working in overseas lab
- ✓ Cost of transporting equipment used in joint experiments
- ✓ Cost of access to facilities – (if not free at point of access or already UK sponsored)
- ✓ Cost of extended visits as part of a fellowship
- ✓ Use of DTP funds to support EPSRC funded students in visits to overseas labs
- ✗ Costs of international collaborator salaries at foreign institutions
- ✗ Research projects led by non-UK universities
- ✗ Costs incurred by research undertaken by collaborators



Are PI's who already hold a PoL grant eligible to apply with a fundamentally different project?

Yes, PI's who hold a grant from the first round of Physics of Life are eligible to apply for round two as long as their proposal is significantly different to the first and the research proposed in this call is clearly not already funded through the first call.

Can a PI be involved in more than one proposal to this call, for example as Co-PI in one proposal and Co-I in another?

Yes, however, the planned research and teams involved in each proposal should be significantly different.

Applicants also need to be able to deliver any commitment they make and be able to demonstrate they have not committed more than 100% of their time.

Can named PDRA's be added onto the proposal?

Yes, named PDRAs can be included on a proposal. Where PDRAs have provided significant intellectual input into the grant, they could be included as Researcher Co-Investigators.

If a PI has submitted a related proposal as an EPSRC Open Fellowship (or to another call), can they still submit to this call?

We would not expect to see a resubmission of previously unsuccessful proposals.

Proposals that are deemed to be resubmissions, and have been assessed by postal peer review, will be rejected. (Proposals submitted to the first Physics of Life call were not assessed by postal peer review and would not be rejected as resubmissions, although UKRI would expect to see that ideas had been developed since the first submission.)

Each proposal should be independent to other ongoing applications and one should not be impacted on if the other application is rejected.

Can you have a project across more than 2 institutions? Will these be looked on favourably or is it primarily focused on interdisciplinarity?

Yes, multi-institution bids are eligible. They will be considered in the same manner as bids from a single institution. The main focus should be the interdisciplinarity of the submission and how it brings together the best group of researchers to tackle the research challenge, regardless of their institutional affiliation in the UK.

Is there a limit on the number of PI's and Co-I's that can be included as part of the team?

There are no upper limits on the number of staff that are associated with the proposal, but the roles and contributions of each should be clear and well-justified.

Each proposal must identify two co-principal investigators with complementary expertise who will lead on the proposal, one of whom will be named on the proposal as the initial contact for UKRI.

Will there be restrictions on the use of animal models of disease in grants submitted to this call?

Animal usage is permitted in line with UKRI's normal guidance. Please bear in mind the timescale available to do the project (particularly start/end date) and thus the need to be able to meet the relevant requirements (ethics, home office license, etc) within that timeframe. Applications involving the use of animals should provide well-justified information concerning experimental design and its suitability to answering the research questions posed.

Finance and Funding

Are the costs of initiatives to support the EDI culture within the project an eligible cost?

Yes, and, as with all costs, they would need to be properly justified.

Why is there a lower threshold for the funding (1.5M)? Is that a strict threshold?

These thresholds are indicative of the ambition that we want to see and our expectations of the cost of such research.

Lower values can still meet the objectives of the call and would not be excluded simply because of the low value. However, Standard or Responsive mode within the individual councils could be a more suitable route for applicants looking for funding below this threshold.

Is the £2.95 million the total cost of the grant or the 80% FEC funded by UKRI?

£2.95 million is the maximum cost to UKRI of a full proposal, bearing in mind that UKRI will fund 100% of the full economic costs of equipment and 80% of full economic cost of other costs.

Also please note, the figure of £2.95M is inclusive of any variance between outline and full proposal. If your outline proposal cost is £2.95M, you would not be able to increase this figure in your full proposal.

In the case of joint applications, does the lead applicant include the other partner's budget in their budget - i.e. does the Lead state the total budget applied for?

For the Outline Stage, the lead applicant should state the whole budget for the submission including partners in a single outline application. At the Full Proposal Stage, applicants will have the option to submit a single or a joint proposal from the individual institutions that may be involved.

Other Relevant Funding Opportunities

Will EPSRC continue to accept programme grant applications in the area of Physics of Life while this SPF call is open?

EPSRC's standard mode and fellowship funding routes remain open for applications (as well as equivalents offered by in other councils) and may be more appropriate in some cases.

Please bear in mind that budgets are fairly bound on programme grants (£10M per annum), and the Physical Science theme needs to ensure there is broad strategic coverage across key disciplinary areas – which range from anti-matter to chemical biology.

It is hard to make the strategic case for a Programme Grant route when there are currently significant opportunities in this area. Therefore, at this moment in time, EPSRC are not taking forward prospective programme grant applications in areas that overlap with the strategic intent of this Physics of Life call. If, however, after this call closes, there remain key strategic gaps, we will explore these and initiate appropriate conversations. For reference, the budget for EPSRC programme grants is fully committed for 2021/22 and 2022/23 already, so current discussions on prospective programme grants would not be likely to lead to funding until 2023/24.