EPSRC Strategic Infrastructure Outline Opportunity Webinar

12 February 2024

epsrcequipmentfunding@epsrc.ukri.org

Agenda

- **Introduction – 3mins**

- **How to apply? – 15mins**

- **Accessibility plan – 5mins**

- **How we assess your applications? – 5mins**

- **Key messages – 2mins**

- **Q&A – 30mins**

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What is Research Infrastructure?

Research Infrastructure in EPSRC covers capital equipment, facilities, high-performance computing (HPC), access to facilities, software, and people. It is vitally important to every area of EPSRC

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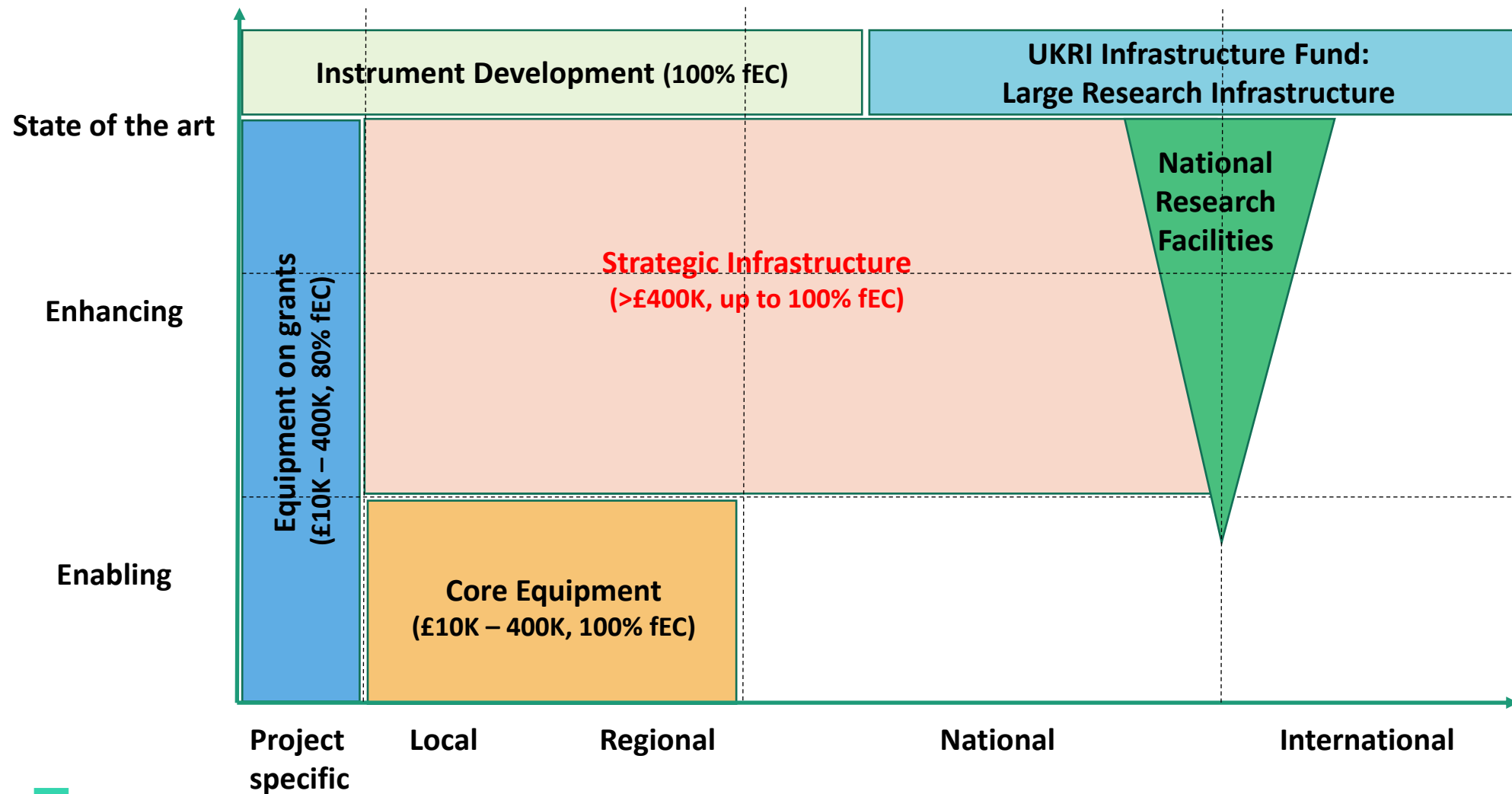
Infrastructure Budget

- In our last budget settlement, UKRI received a total budget of **£25.1bn** for three FY (22-23 – 24-25). Of this, the core EPSRC budget is **£1.9bn** (£620m - £660m per year)

- On top of this, across UKRI, there is a *total budget for Infrastructure* of £3.05bn over this period. Of this, **£1.07bn** is classed as **WORLD CLASS LABS**. This is the source of the EPSRC infrastructure core budget, which is approximately **£60m** per year. This is *our* budget, where we have the greatest degree of autonomy over spending. Other sources of funding include the UKRI Infrastructure Fund and short-notice funding.

Arts and Humanities Research Council **£207m**	Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council **£944m**	Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council **£1,929m**
Economic and Social Research Council **£362m**	Medical Research Council **£1,750m**	Natural Environment Research Council **£925m**
Science and Technology Facilities Council **£1,651m**	Research England **£6,227m**	Innovate UK **£2,438m**
Infrastructure **£3,053m**	Existing time limited commitments and Centrally Managed Funding* **£3,674m**	Collective Talent Funding and new cross-UKRI Strategic Programmes **£2,805m**

*includes existing cross-UKRI Strategic Programmes (and other time limited commitments such as COVID interventions), support for UKRI transformation, public engagement, and open access

EPSRC Capital Framework

Strategic Infrastructure Opportunity Details

- Intended to enhance UK scientific capability and support a portfolio of high-quality, cutting-edge research of high priority to EPSRC.

- The request should fit within the host institution strategy and enable research that predominantly falls within EPSRC's remit.

- Two routes:
  - Route 1: Strategic infrastructure
  - Route 2: Resources to support existing strategic infrastructure

- Infrastructure must be multi-user in nature and non-project specific.

- EPSRC wishes to encourage a culture of sharing with regards to strategic equipment in order to gain appropriate maximum usage.

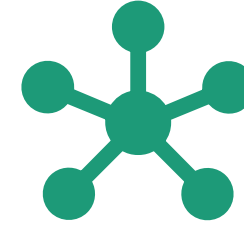- You must be based at a UK research organisation eligible for EPSRC funding.

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Strategic Infrastructure routes

Route 1: Strategic infrastructure

Capital equipment FEC over £400,000

Resource costs for procurement and installation

Route 2: Resources to support existing strategic infrastructure

Invitation only

Maximise usage of existing infrastructure

Improve access and **sustainability**

What we will not fund

Strategic Infrastructure:

- Costs associated with the support of individual research projects

- Underpinning infrastructure that we would expect to see in a well-found lab

- Software, research software development or cloud computing credits

Resources to support Strategic Infrastructure:

- Capital costs over £10,000

- Long-term research projects

- Replacement of existing support, maintenance, service contracts or capital costs

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How to apply: Applicant questions

How to apply

All strategic infrastructure opportunity applications must be submitted from the UKRI Funding Service

When applying

- All applicant questions and assessment criteria are listed at [Strategic infrastructure outlines – UKRI](#)
- Send the completed application to your research office for checking
- We must receive your application by **7 March 2024** at **4pm UK time**.

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How to apply

- **Summary**

(250 words) – Succinctly describe your proposed infrastructure in terms of:

  - What the proposed infrastructure is

  - Its context

In this section you should also indicate:

  - Which [EPSRC theme](#) your application fits into

  - If your application is a resubmission agreed with EPSRC

  - Not assessed – the purpose is for EPSRC to identify panellists

- **Applicants**

List the key members of your team and assign them to one of the roles listed on the application page.

Applicant questions

Purpose and vision (300 words)

Provide evidence on how the infrastructure sought will:

- enable transformative research that cannot be achieved elsewhere

- enhance and complement the existing regional and/or national research capability

- underpin EPSRC research areas and meet EPSRC's six world-class objectives and eight strategic priorities

- have a strong demand from the user base

Applicant questions

Approach, accessibility and sustainability (500 words)

For **approach,** explain how you will:

- effectively manage the infrastructure

- identify, prioritise and support users across the landscape

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Applicant questions

Approach, accessibility and sustainability (500 words)

For **accessibility** explain how you will:

- consider and demonstrate your pathway to ensuring and improving accessibility of this infrastructure and its user diversity during and beyond the duration of the grant

Applicant questions

Approach, accessibility and sustainability (500 words)

For **sustainability** evidence how your plan will include:

- an appropriate cost recovery model

- training and development of specialist technical staff

- steps to enhance the environmental sustainability of the proposed infrastructure

- development or expansion of the user base after the initial period of funding

Applicant questions

Applicant and host institution capability to deliver
(300 words)

Provide evidence of how you, and if relevant your team, have:

- the relevant experience, appropriate to your career stage, to deliver the proposed work

- the right balance of skills and expertise to cover the proposed work, including the appropriate leadership and management skills on your approach to develop others

For the host institution, provide evidence of

- why it is the most appropriate place for the proposed infrastructure

- how it will use its existing capacity to best complement the proposed infrastructure

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Applicant questions

Outline Costs

Please provide the expected costs of the proposed infrastructure in pounds sterling (including VAT) by providing totals for:

- Directly Incurred Costs

- Directly Allocated Costs

- Indirect Costs

- Exceptions Costs (equipment costs should be listed here)

ensure the costs are as accurate as possible at this stage. The costs in a full proposal must be within + or -10% of the outline proposal

Applicant questions

Resource and cost justification (250 words)

- Make a clear distinction between cost of equipment items and the cost of any associated resources. State the anticipated funds that would be requested from:
  - EPSRC
  - Host Institution and Project Partners including the nature and level of contributions if applicable
- describe the timescales associated with procurement of the equipment and when you anticipate you will spend any capital provision made

Applicant questions

Resource and cost justification (250 words)

Assessors are not looking for detailed costs or a line-by-line breakdown of all project resources.

Overall, they want you to demonstrate how the resources you anticipate needing for the proposed work:

- are comprehensive, appropriate and justified

- represent the optimal use of resources to achieve the intended outcomes

- maximise potential outcomes and impacts

Accessibility Plan

Rachel Rothwell

Senior Portfolio Manager, EDI, EPSRC

Background

In 2022 we published our 3 Year EDI Action Plan which outlines the activities we will take to make engineering and physical sciences system more inclusive for everyone.

- **Our plan builds on** **knowledge, research, data, and expertise** from across the R&I sector

- **Our thinking has been informed by** **conversations** with people from across our community.

- **We have reflected on the challenges, issues and recommendations** fed back to us in our **'have your say' surveys** and **community engagement activities**

- **We have built upon our own existing activity and portfolio investigations**, deepened our understanding from the research findings of our **Inclusion Matters portfolio**

- **We will work in partnership** to share ideas, approaches and learn from each other's experiences, **supporting and empowering people in our community to take action**
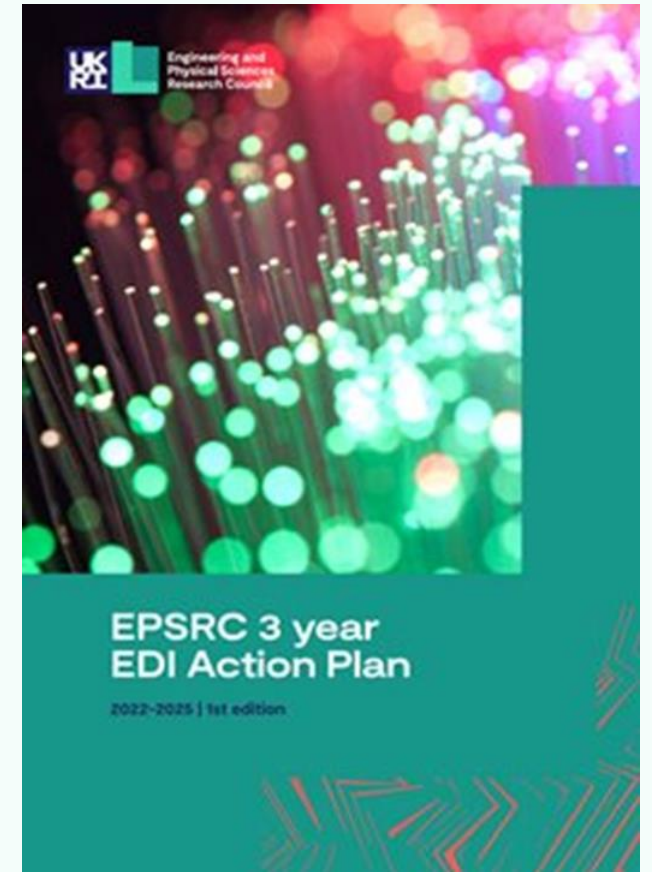
Action Set 5

Investigating the barriers to greater access and participation to provide better support for people in our community

Actions include:

a. working with colleagues across UKRI to explore how **socioeconomic background affects the participation and success of people in research** with a view to ensuring widening access and participation to our doctoral education investments working with our training grant holders

b. improving our support (policies and practices) to ensure **greater accessibility and working environments for researchers with disabilities** e.g. to lab spaces.

c. improving accessibility to and the **user diversity** of **EPSRC's National Research Facilities**.

d. exploring how we can **improve support and access for people who are neurodivergent**. We are undertaking an independent **neuro-inclusion audit** of our processes and routes to engagement to understand and mitigate against any barriers and improve accessibility.
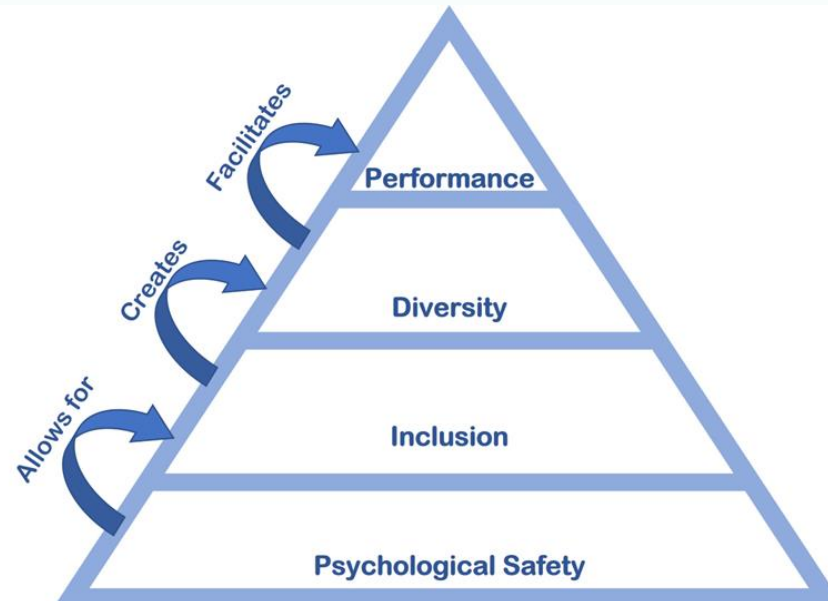
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Why is Accessibility important in Research Infrastructure?

Accessibility is usually the last thing thought about in EDI, if at all, but it's one of the most fundamental aspects of universal inclusion

- 1 in 4 people in the UK have a disability (gov.uk stats)

- Disabled academics are under-represented in EPS academia, with 3% declaring (HESA, 2020-21)

- The lack of accessible working environments in academic settings means disabled people face unnecessary burdens and extra challenges to achieve an acceptable employment status (Sang et al., 2022)

- Accessibility is about removing barriers enabling users to engage and participate in everyday activities

- Creating an inclusive and accessible environment gives everyone a chance to access the same opportunities, enabling them to reach their full potential

- All of us have a role to play in reshaping the system to create welcoming and equitable structures, where everyone feels supported, respected and valued.

- This in turn will increase diversity which will improve research and innovation outcomes

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Facilitates → Performance
Creates → Diversity
Allows for → Inclusion
Psychological Safety

How will you ensure that the proposed infrastructure is an accessible and inclusive space?

At the outline stage this will form part of the 'Approach section' to give a top-level overview of:

- What aspects will you consider to ensure and improve accessibility of this infrastructure and its user diversity?

- What mechanisms will you employ (e.g., Equality Impact Assessments, User Accessibility Surveys and Codes of Conduct) to ensure inclusive and accessible practices are embedded into the way the infrastructure operates and is managed throughout its lifetime?

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Assessment criteria

- Assessment criteria mirror the applicant questions

Applicant question	Assessment criteria
Summary	✘
Purpose and Vision	√
Approach, accessibility and sustainability	√
Applicant and host institution capability to deliver	√
Outline costs	√
Justification of resources	√
References	✘
Facilities	✘

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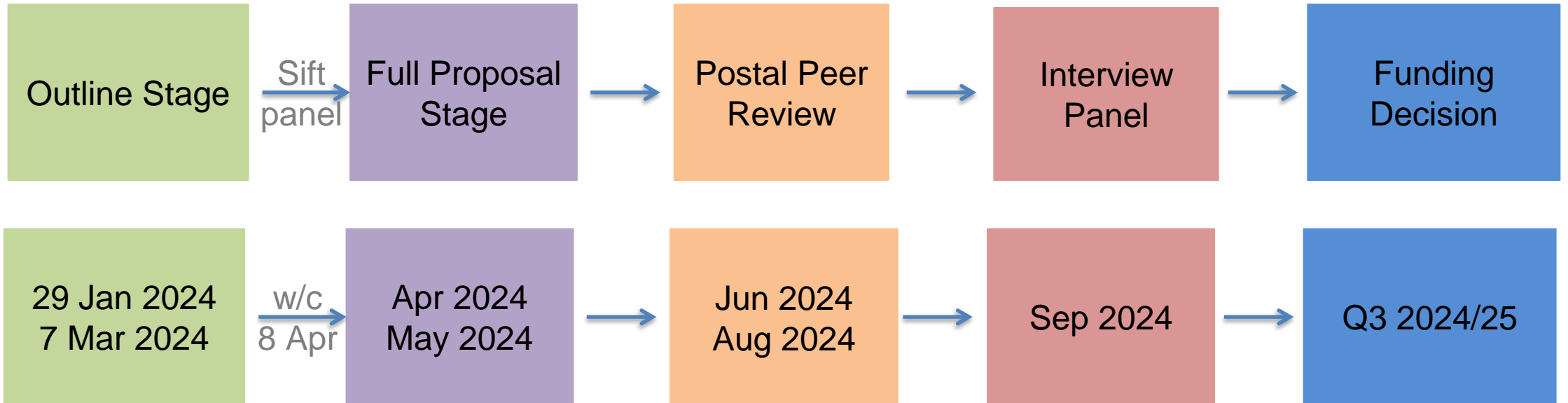
How do we score your outline?

Score	Description	Definition
5	Invite to submit a full proposal as a high priority	The proposal clearly evidenced and justified that it meets **all of** the assessment criteria. It strongly aligns with EPSRC's strategy and will enable world-leading transformative research.
4	Invite to submit a full proposal stage as a low priority	The proposal clearly evidenced and justified that it meets **most of** the assessment criteria. The assessment criteria that are not fully addressed could be addressed in a full submission.
3	Invite to an outline resubmission	The proposal meets most of the assessment criteria but has **weaknesses** that should be addressed before the proposal can progress to the full proposal stage.
2	Do not invite to an outline resubmission	The proposal does not meet all assessment criteria and is not competitive. It should not be invited for a resubmission.
1	Out of scope	The proposal does not fit into the scope or the remit of the EPSRC strategic infrastructure opportunity. The applicants should not be invited to resubmit.

Key messages

Key messages:

- Institutions should take **a strong strategic approach** and prioritise applications based on institutional strategies.

- EPSRC expect **no more than three submissions** from each institution at this outline call.

- **Right proposals at the right time.**

- The institutional limit will be reviewed in FY 2025/26. If you have an oversight and would like to take part in the review process please email epsrcequipmentfunding@epsrc.ukri.org.

- The budget for strategic infrastructure and number of proposals we intend to fund have not changed.

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Q&A

Contact us via:
Epsrcequipmentfunding@epsrc.ukri.org