

# STFC Visions Concept Guidance

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Updated: September 2022

## 1. CONTEXT AND POSITIONING

As UKRI has evolved, the Councils have been engaged in a whole suite of cross-UKRI strategic activities including:

- Setting the priorities and influencing the direction of UKRI strategic initiatives
- Contributing to the UKRI Spending Review submission
- Mobilising community interest and engagement in cross-council multidisciplinary areas of research
- Connecting ideas to develop larger programmes of activity

As STFC, we need to build our capacity to react quickly to emerging opportunities such as a new area of strategic focus, fiscal event, or funding opportunity.

The STFC Visions programme addresses this challenge. Visions is an addition to STFC's suite of existing tools and is designed to **develop concepts that are most likely to be supported by cross UKRI initiatives** outside of STFC's core budget. It aims to identify ambitious concepts with a focus on interdisciplinary including cross council working, additionality and delivering on government priorities and develop these concepts for strategic opportunities as they arise.

Explicitly, this programme is not a replacement process for STFC's core science funding schemes or 'business as usual' arrangements for creating, developing, and prioritising projects within STFC. Where a concept is submitted that is better suited to assessment via a different STFC review mechanism, the Visions team will re-direct the concept accordingly.

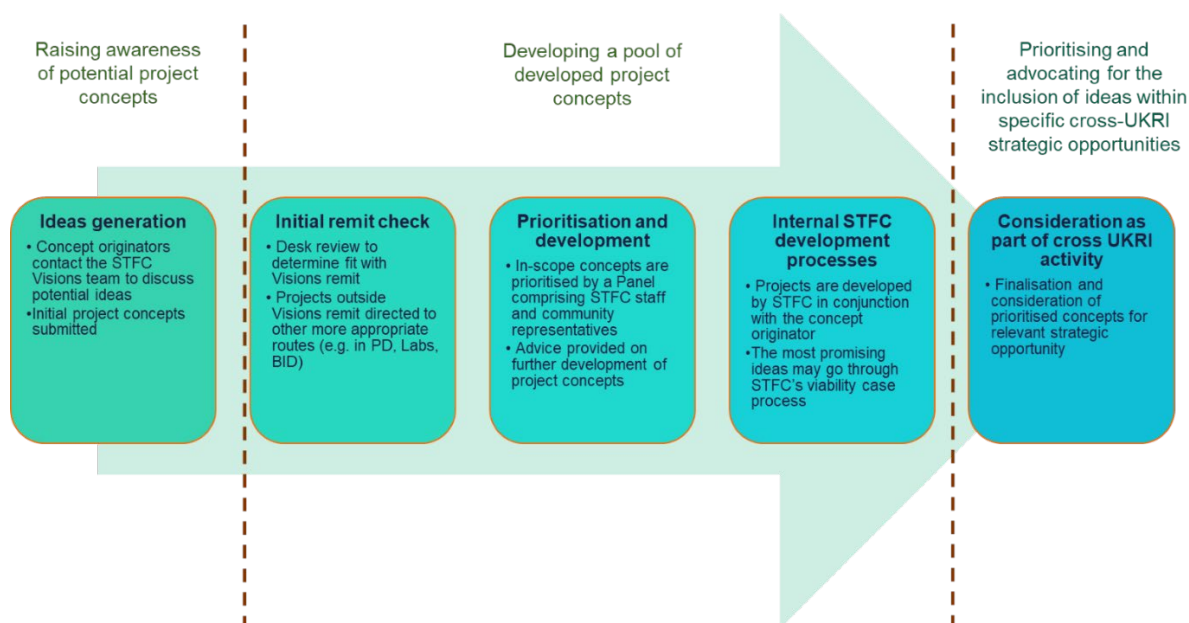
The majority of programmes going through Visions will be of a scale greater than £5 million. STFC welcomes submissions across all disciplinary areas of STFC's remit including the science areas of the core programmes and our multidisciplinary facilities, alongside technology development, innovation, and skills.

The Visions process does not aim to provide a detailed technical assessment of any concept. **Visions examines the timeliness and likelihood that a concept will deliver a step-change for research and innovation communities** and identifies the most compelling concepts for further development and increasingly detailed technical review. Concepts entering this process will move through stage gates, designed to ensure a good fit to the Visions programme remit and aid the development of transformative concepts.

Throughout this process, the STFC Visions team will work with the originator to develop the concept, drawing on expertise within STFC, with the aim of better positioning STFC to influence and respond to new opportunities, outside of core STFC activities, increasing STFC's strategic contributions to these initiatives. As part of this process, the submitted concept will be shared with staff and the relevant advisory structures both within STFC, and across UKRI (as applicable).

**Please note there is no direct funding provided by Visions: resourcing of a concept will be dependent on the availability of a suitable strategic funding opportunity.**

The process of identifying suitable concepts will remain competitive as STFC aims to make best use of available resources. Concepts developed via Visions will be held in a pool of high-potential concepts that are regularly reviewed by STFC's Executive Board to assess their suitability for current strategic opportunities.



## 2. VISIONS PROGRAMME SCOPE AND REMIT

### What is a suitable concept?

A suitable concept is likely to be ambitious and transformative. The concept should hold appeal beyond any individual research group and be compelling to the research and innovation communities that would be expected to play a part in delivering and/or would benefit from the concept. The excitement and potential of a concept should be apparent to a broad audience (e.g., across disciplines or industries), and the potential societal or economic benefits should be convincingly articulated.

Visions is primarily looking to target concepts that have multi-disciplinarity and government priorities as their focus.

Given the strategic importance of the Infrastructure Fund to STFC, we will also be welcoming multidisciplinary and single discipline infrastructure concepts to ensure we have a healthy pipeline of new ideas in the system.

Development and review via **Visions is the primary process by which STFC will identify future submissions to cross UKRI funds**. We welcome concepts linked to both fundamental science and applied research: both must clearly demonstrate their strong alignment to the work of STFC.

Concepts are likely to be at an early stage and require further development before they are ready for delivery. Prior to submission to Visions, it is important that concepts have developed an appropriate level of community or stakeholder support. Stakeholder engagement will be examined during the Visions process, although it is recognised that due to the early stage of development not all potential partners may yet be actively engaged. Prior to submission, engagement could be carried out through roundtable discussions, town hall meetings, surveys, workshops and/or engagement with the relevant STFC advisory panel or board.

The Visions process does not have any dedicated funding associated with it: Visions is not a formal 'call for proposals'. We are looking to establish and develop a pipeline of suitable concepts that will be used in the development and delivery of STFC strategy and could be used to contribute to cross-UKRI initiatives as appropriate.

## Research and Innovation Concepts

To ensure relevance to future cross-UKRI opportunities, in addition to the £5M financial threshold, suitable science and innovation concepts are also likely to be one or more of the following (please note this is not an exhaustive list):

- Inter- or multi-disciplinary, requiring new collaborations to uncover new areas of science and innovation
- Driven by one or more clear strategic programme objectives, delivered by inter-connected and co-dependent research strands or work packages
- Focussed on applying STFC's science or technology to a well-defined government priority, which may also have significant interest from public and industry.

## Infrastructure Concepts

Both **multidisciplinary and single discipline projects** for significant Research and Innovation infrastructure investment will be in scope for Visions providing they meet the following criteria:

- Be focussed on development of research and innovation infrastructure, for which there is key benefit that can be articulated for the research and innovation community.
- Must provide national or international level capability that will provide access or related services to the wider UK community outside of the home institution/site of the infrastructure itself.
- Will lead to a large capital project with the total costs of the UK contribution likely exceeding £15m.

Please get in touch with the Visions Team to discuss the appropriateness of the scheme if you're concept is of significant ambition but does not quite meet the financial thresholds indicated for the two types of concept.

## Who can submit to STFC Visions?

Concepts can be submitted at any time. To ensure we make the most effective use of the Visions process, **the originators should contact the Visions team (VISIONS@stfc.ukri.org) prior to submission** to check whether the concept is ready for consideration or requires further development.

Visions is open to the wider STFC community alongside STFC staff. Applications from STFC staff and the external community will undergo the same assessment process.

Concepts should be submitted using the proforma available on the webpage.

### **Submission notes: STFC staff submissions**

- Concepts should be discussed with departmental or facility directors prior to submission. The Visions team will cross-check department or facility director awareness prior to a concept being presented to the assessment panel.
- Concepts that have already been formally reviewed and prioritised by STFC's Executive Board prior to the launch of STFC Visions do not need to be submitted to Visions.
- Estates programmes without a clear 'science need' should not be submitted to Visions.

## What are the benefits of submitting to Visions for the originator?

By submitting a prospective concept into this process, you are raising the profile of the idea on behalf of your community and capitalising on STFC's expertise in facilitating connections and developing early-stage concepts into more detailed strategic cases for inclusion in cross-UKRI initiatives as the opportunity arises.

Please note that the concept originator would not be guaranteed funding should the concept be progressed and STFC will work to identify the most appropriate delivery partners within the broader community when funding opportunities arise, which may be via open competition.

### **What are the benefits of developing Visions for STFC?**

By engaging with the Visions programme, STFC will remain responsive to developing UK research and innovation priorities. Within a rapidly changing and developing research and innovation landscape, STFC needs to ensure it remains agile through stimulating the creation of innovative and timely concepts that can influence and be considered for cross-UKRI opportunities as they are developed.

### **3. VISIONS PROGRAMME PROCESS OUTLINE**

Visions develops concepts via a simple process:

- Concept generation and submission
- Initial remit checking
- Panel review and recommendation
- STFC Executive Board decision

Concept originators are asked to complete the proforma to submit to the Visions process. Originators are also asked to contact the STFC Visions team ([VISIONS@stfc.ukri.org](mailto:VISIONS@stfc.ukri.org)) for an informal discussion **prior to submission of the documentation**.

An **initial remit check** will be conducted by a panel of STFC staff, which will check two separate aspects of the proposed concept:

1. Is the majority of the concept within STFC remit and the scope of the Visions scheme?
2. Does the proforma contain sufficient information for the panel to make a decision on the concept?

Following successful remit checking, the concept will be batched for **consideration by an assessment panel** composed of STFC staff and members from our Advisory Boards, who will assess the submission against the following criteria:

1. Is the concept going to deliver a step-change for the Research and Innovation community?
2. Is the proposal timely within the current strategic landscape?

Concept originators will be invited to discuss the concept as part of the panel review.

Following consideration of the material, the **panel will make recommendations to STFC's Executive Board**, who decide on the appropriate next steps for each concept in light of the panel's recommendations. A decision on next steps for the concept will be provided to the originators once the panel outcomes and Executive Board decisions have been determined.

## USEFUL REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

### UKRI Documents

[Existing STFC funding opportunities](#)

[UKRI Strategy](#) (See Priorities 5.1 and 5.2 for current cross-UKRI challenge areas)

[STFC Delivery Plan](#)

<https://sway.office.com/NByDzONhkhb5yYv0?ref=Link&loc=play> UKRI Infrastructure Roadmap  
([Opportunities to grow our capability](#) and [Landscape analysis](#) documents)

[UKRI Environmental Sustainability Strategy](#)

### Government documents

[UK Government Innovation Strategy](#)

[UK Government Space Strategy](#)

[Government R&D Roadmap](#)

[Government Areas of Research Interest](#)

[Principles for Science and Technology Moon-Shots](#)