

EPSRC Strategic Infrastructure Full Proposal Stage (October 2023)

Webinar Q&A

This document provides answers to the questions asked at the EPSRC Strategic Infrastructure Full Proposal Stage webinar, held on 22nd November 2023. Most questions were answered live during the webinar and are repeated in this document. Some questions required further clarifications and could not be answered live are answered here with written responses.

Preparing an application

1. Are references, R4RI and ethics sections assessed or not assessed at the full proposal stage?

Answer: References and Responsible research and innovations do not form part of the assessment criteria. However, the R4RI will be assessed as part of the applicant and team capability to deliver.

2. Do letters of support from key users need to estimate usage?

Answer: The applicant team is encouraged to take a holistic approach and have an estimated internal academic, external academic and industry usage for the proposed infrastructure. However, we don't expect letters of support for individual or specific users to give an estimated usage.

3. Do we need to attach a signed letter of support from the host organisation or is this covered entirely by the 1000 words input in the "Your organisation's support"?

Answer: Detailed support from the host organisation should be covered in the textbox (1000 words) for "Your organisation's support". We don't require a signed letter, but applicants should work with senior leadership team and research offices to ensure a contact name and email address from the organisational senior management team are included in this section. Please refer to the [call page on funding finder](#) for more details.

4. In the Purpose section the second part of the question asks about alternative plans for the research should the infrastructure not be funded. The detail of this question asks about strategy for the infrastructure and its uniqueness. The detail doesn't seem to match up to the topic of that question. Can you please explain clearly what this question intends to ask?

Answer: As the first two bullet points listed, what we're looking for in this section is how the infrastructure fits into the host organisation's strategy and how is the host institution committed to the landscape of the infrastructure if it is not funded. We are also looking at how it fits into the existing regional/national capability and what makes it unique compared to other existing equipment.

5. Which is the best section for a technical diagram/schematic description of the facility as it may consist of several components put together? Can the additions section be used to provide further technical details/diagrams of the facility?

Answer: Applicants should use the 'Approach' section for a technical description or diagram of the facility. The 'additions' from the 'Applicant and team capability to deliver' section can be used to describe any factors that provide context for the R4RI.

6. Are changes in the Core team permitted from outline to full proposal? Can we add additional co-investigators at the full application stage?

Answer: Applicants can include an additional project co-lead if the change can be justified. However, the cost of the grant should not change by more than 10% compared to the outline stage.

7. For the 'Approach' upload document: is this 3 pages plus a 1-page management plans and a 1-page work plan - all uploaded as one pdf?

Answer: This section should be uploaded as a single pdf no longer than 3 pages. Of these 3 pages, up to 1 page is allowed for the workplan (as a Gantt chart) and up to 1 page for the management plan.

Project Partners Letters of Support

8. If we have an advisory board, should the members' letters of support form part of the project partners' letters of support document or the general letters of support document? (are these members project partners?)

Answer: Project partners are from a collaborating organisation who have an integral role in the proposed infrastructure. For example, they may include cash and in-kind contributions which differs from users of the infrastructure. Therefore, it depends on the other roles of the advisory board members on the proposed infrastructure. See further information on how a project partner is defined: <https://www.ukri.org/councils/epsrc/guidance-for-applicants/what-to-include-in-your-proposal/project-partners-letter-of-support/>

9. Can we clarify where to place letters of support from an organisation that is part of the wider user base and is not an integral part of the project (indicating section 3), but could provide some in-kind or cash support to the project (indicating section 12).

Answer: The organisation would be considered a project partner if they were providing in-kind or cash support to the project but not receiving funds for it, otherwise their letter should go in section 3. <https://www.ukri.org/councils/epsrc/guidance-for-applicants/what-to-include-in-your-proposal/project-partners-letter-of-support/>

10. We are seeking to include specialists from government depts in the bid, can you confirm if these are more appropriate as technical specialists or project partners or project co-leads?

Answer: It depends on what role they have on the project and whether they are receiving funds from the project or not. If they are policy advisors from external institutions project partners would be more suitable.

11. Following an invitation to submit in this round, can the submission of a full proposal be postponed to the next round if needed? Will it be automatically eligible for full stage application in the next round?

Answer: Please be aware that EPSRC will not accept deferrals of applications to future rounds once the applications have been submitted on TFS except in exceptional circumstances where prior EPSRC approval has been confirmed.

12. I understand that budgets shouldn't change by more than 10% between outline and full. Does this 10% also include the match stated in the outline i.e. can the match go up or down by more than 10%?

Answer: The 10% fluctuation from outline stage to full stage only applies to the cost requested from EPSRC.

Host Institution Contributions

13. What sort of expectation of host institution 'match' or co-funding is there? Would it be looked on unfavourably to request 100% of equipment costs, is there an expectation that the host will match some of that equipment cost?

Answer: EPSRC does not quantify the amount of "match" funding we expect but host institution contributions should reflect both the cost of the equipment and how it's strategically important to the host institution. A host institution contribution does not need to be a direct contribution to the equipment; in-kind contributions to staff or consumables are also considered appropriate by the panel. For example, some applicants have claimed 100% of the cost of the equipment but have the host contributing all the staff or resources costs.

14. If there are 2 or 3 other universities in addition to the PI's university involved in the bid, what type of contributions the EPSRC is expected the participating universities to offer?

Answer: This would depend on the roles of these universities and how they're involved. For example, we have different expectations for universities hosting the infrastructure and contributing as project partners. Applicants should refer to the 'Your organisation's support' and 'Project partner' sections for further details.

15. Can you give some examples of in-kind contributions from the host?

Answer: The in-kind contributions from the host organisation can differ depending on the specific infrastructure requested. Resource cost including staff time, cost of consumables and lab refurbishment are considered appropriate host institution contributions.

16. Can in-kind contributions be access costs to other kit in Co-I institutions that are not the host if they are complementary facilities?

Answer: There would need to be an explanation as to how this access was complementary to the equipment being purchased.

Costings

17. In the finance section, do we add the 100% cost of the equipment under the 'Exceptions' section, or the costs that we are requesting from EPSRC?

Answer: Equipment costs should be entered under Exceptions. Firstly, applicants should input 100% equipment costs in the automated resource and cost form. Secondly, applicants should ensure to explain in the text box what % FEC and value they request from EPSRC and what % FEC and value the contributions are from the host institution/ project partners (if applicable).

18. Because the Funding System can only have equipment at 80% or 100% what happens if with match the requested amount is less than 80%?

Answer: Firstly, applicants should enter the equipment cost into the automated resource and cost form under 'Exceptions' as 100%. Secondly, applicants should ensure to explain in the text box what % FEC and value they request from EPSRC and what % FEC and value for the contributions from elsewhere.

19. If an application is contributing toward significant refurbishment costs as part of a bid, should this be included in the 100% figure exception equipment as discussed?

Answer: EPSRC expects laboratory refurbishment to be a host institution contribution unless in exceptional circumstances there is a clear justification for it to be paid for by EPSRC. The exceptional circumstances need to be discussed and agreed with EPSRC prior to the applications.

20. Should the 100% FEC cost box include the instrument discount?

Answer: The full economic cost should be the total cost of the infrastructure after the deduction of a vendor's academic discount, but prior to the deduction of any contributions received from other sources.

21. Can costs not initially identified at the outline stage (for example a safety feature/item) be added as part of our full proposal submission?

Answer: The cost difference between the outline stage and full proposal stage should not change by more than 10%. Additional costs at the full proposal stage within the 10% range will also have to be justified.

22. Inflation is going up significantly for raw materials and components, therefore large infrastructure may exceed the 10% allowance by the time of award or time before we are able to procure the equipment. Typically, the quoted price will only be valid for 1 month (or 3 months max). Are there any recommended actions or is there any flexibility to account for high inflation?

Answer: Please contact EPSRC as soon as possible if the change in cost of the proposal is expected to exceed 10% due to inflation between submission of your outline proposal and submission of your full proposal. We can only fund what is bid for at the full proposal stage, so we cannot adjust for inflation once a full proposal is submitted. However, at the award stage there may be an indexation to account for inflation.

Success Rates

23. How many submissions did EPSRC receive for the outline stage and how many were successful and invited to submit a full proposal? How many full proposals do you intend to invite for interview? On average, how many successful applications are funded in each round of this strategic call?

Answer: EPSRC does not publish funding and success rates of individual opportunities as a standard practice. You can access successful grants we awarded from previous panels on EPSRC grants on web and Tableau tool webpage [EPSRC Grants on the Web - Notice \(ukri.org\)](https://www.ukri.org/infrastructure/grants-on-the-web-notice). Full proposals will be invited to interview if they receive sufficient support at expert review stage.

24. Can you estimate how many full applications may be funded?

Answer: The number of proposals that can be funded will depend on applications received, associated expert review comments, interview panel's recommendations and the Research Infrastructure theme budget available.

25. How many full proposals do you intend to invite for interview?

Answer: The number of full proposals EPSRC invited to interview will depend on the expert reviews received. Proposals will be invited to interview if they receive sufficient support at expert review stage.

Other

26. For future rounds, could you clarify what EPSRC expects institutions to do when prioritising submissions (e.g. beyond supporting the most urgent needs)?

Answer: EPSRC expects universities to take a strategic approach to the submission of draft applications and to prioritise the submissions they make. We'd also like to remind applicants that this is a recurring funding opportunity and applicants should take time to work with leadership teams, research offices, project partners and users to prepare high-quality applications.

27. Can you advise if there is a plan to set a limit on the number of institutional submissions?

Answer: EPSRC expects universities to take a strategic approach to the submission of draft applications and to prioritise the submissions they make. No more than 3 applications are expected from each institution at the next round of the strategic infrastructure outline call.