Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council

EPSRC Transition of Responsive Mode and Fellowship Opportunities to The Funding Service Webinar Q&A, 21st June 2023

Where to find Guidance

- To find out about how to apply and the application requirements for the funding opportunity you wish to apply for, see the relevant UKRI Funding Finder page.
- For information about EPSRC's transition to The Funding Service and for a recording of the webinar please see our Council Transition to the new Funding Service – EPSRC page.
- For information about other research councils and their transition timelines please see the relevant transition page for each council here.
- Information about UKRI's Simpler and Better Funding Programme can be found here.

Questions and Answers

References

- How do I use the reference section? Does the Vision and Approach document include references or are they included separately in the references part? Why is the word count for references so short?

You should list the references you have used to support your application in the references section. Please note that the word count has been extended to 1000 words following feedback from the community. The Funding Finder opportunities have been updated to reflect the new word count.

Vision and Approach Document

- How does the Vision and Approach document differ from a Case for Support?

We're no longer using a Case for Support. In the Vision and Approach document, you should address the published questions and assessment criteria. You can find the assessment criteria on the relevant UKRI Funding Finder opportunity.

- How should I format my vision and approach document? What should be the balance between the two sections?

Please balance the sections in a way that you feel is best to address the application questions and assessment criteria.

- Does the project plan, including milestones and timelines, go into the six-page vision and approach document or the additional one-page workplan (making seven pages in total)?

You should upload a seven-page PDF document (see here for further details):

- The vision and approach document should be six-pages
- The diagrammatic workplan should be one-page.

- Should I include objectives in the vision or approach section?

As specified in the guidance, in the Approach section you must ‘explain how you have designed your work so that it is effective and appropriate to achieve your objectives’. Please look at the guidance on the UKRI Funding Finder for full details about areas of assessment and expectations.

- Where do I write about impact and national importance in my application?

Application questions and areas of assessment have been developed using existing criteria across UKRI opportunities. This webpage gives guidance about where and how to embed impact in your application.

- Should the 550-word summary be included in the vision and approach document?

No, there is a specific section for this and details about what is required can be found on the UKRI Funding Finder page for your opportunity.

Multi-Institution Applications

- Can we have joint applications between several institutions like in Je-S? How can applicants handle multi-institutional applications? Will the finances now have to flow through the lead institution?

You’re welcome to submit joint applications but the application must be submitted by a single project lead and organisation. Within the cost section of the application form you will be asked to breakdown cost by institution, however, the funding will flow through the lead organisation if successful.

Applying to multiple opportunities in the same round

- Can multiple applications from the same teams be submitted to the same round? Or should we submit to different rounds?

There are no limits on applications per round. We recommend that you submit your proposals when you feel they are ready, however, it should be noted that proposals in similar subject areas are likely to be assessed at the same panels. We do not accept duplicate proposals and require that applicants make sure that their proposals represent distinct scientific endeavours.

Equipment

- Do instrument development rules still apply?

Yes, the same rules still apply and can be found here.

- Can we ask for equipment funding in our application?

Yes, please see your opportunity guidance on the UKRI Funding Finder and EPSRC's guidance for applicants pages.

Responsible Research and Innovation

- For Section 9 on ethics and RRI, is there any guidance about the management of ethical considerations and responsible research?

As a public funder of research, we have a responsibility to ensure that our activities and the research we fund, are aligned with the principles of responsible research and innovation, creating value for society in an ethical and responsible way. EPSRC does not wish to be prescriptive about how responsible research and innovation is embedded in the research and innovation process. We also recognise that different approaches might be required for different research areas and that the consideration must be proportionate to the research proposed.

We ask our research community to conduct their work in an ethical and legal manner, and anticipate the wider ethical and societal impacts, implications and value of their work. The benefit of reflecting on the RRI and ethical implications of your research are that unintended negative impacts are avoided, that barriers to dissemination, adoption and diffusion of research and innovation are reduced, and that positive societal and economic benefits of research and innovation are fully realised. For further guidance on this please see here for EPSRC's RRI framework.

Resubmissions, Office Withdrawals and Rejections

- Do office rejects count against resubmissions?

If a rejection happens prior to peer review, due to failure to meet standard checks or requirements of the funding opportunity, it will not count towards our resubmissions policy. If the proposal is rejected after reviewer reports are received, then it does count towards the policy. Please see this webpage for further guidance.

- Would you be able to give some examples as to what counts as a substantive error resulting in a rejection of a proposal prior to peer review?

We're reducing the number of attachments we ask for and there are automated validations in The Funding Service that will reduce the reasons for rejection. However, if your proposal is rejected prior to peer review, reasons may include: errors such as the vision and approach document being overlength or there being major gaps in an application that would make a proposal difficult to peer review.

Assessment

- Have reviewer forms changed? Where can I find these? Will EPSRC be publishing details of the questions which reviewers will be asked when they assess the proposal?

Reviewers are expected to use a digital form within TFS so we do not plan to publish forms on our website. The areas of assessment are published on the UKRI Funding Finder Opportunities under the ‘How to Apply’ and ‘How we will assess your application’ sections. Areas of assessment guide what applicants should write in their proposals and how reviewers should assess them.

- Is it envisaged that colleagues will be able to nominate reviewers again in future?

UKRI has adopted a harmonised approach, which means that, at present, it is not possible to nominate reviewers. However, we are continually reviewing our processes and will seek to ensure the best outcomes for our applicants.

- Is EPSRC moving to general panels for evaluating proposals?

There is no change to our current panel structure. The assessment process for applications is specified on the UKRI Funding Finder opportunities.

- Please may you consider providing feedback to applicants whose proposals were considered at panel?

Due to the volume of applications we receive, we are unable to provide individual feedback for proposals beyond the reviewer comments. It’s worth remembering that the panel acts as a jury and uses the reviews to determine their assessment of proposals. The panel does not bring in new information, so the reviewer comments are already an accurate representation of the feedback for your proposal.

- Can we still access peer review feedback on the new system?

Applicants and Research Offices have visibility of reviews on TFS.

- Are you able to speak about how panels for different teams will map onto the round deadlines?

We expect decisions for round one to be communicated in April 2024, with most panels taking place between January and March 2024.

- Has the panel information and guidance been updated?

No. Published panel guidance and information is currently the same due to the fact most of the panels we are currently running are considering proposals submitted via Je-S. We will be updating our guidance for TFS opportunities over the coming months, to incorporate our new areas of assessment, and in advance of TFS panels taking place.

- Will there be a requirement for reviewers to undergo training before they start reviewing applications on the funding service?

We're working on updating our peer review college training over the coming months and will update reviewer guidance on our website. Guidance is also embedded into TFS for reviewers.

- Will we still be able to provide a PI response (now referred to as the applicant response)?

Yes, provided the reviews are sufficiently supportive.

Research Office

- Is there functionality within application forms to allow research support staff to have access to edit?

In the Funding Service, research officers with an administrator account can see when an application is first created and view all applications being prepared at their organisation. They can also return an application to an applicant for further editing. Research offices authorise and submit the application to UKRI.

Research officers can filter applications by status, sort applications by 'recently started' and 'ending soon,' and search for applications using key words.

Some administrative functionality available on Je-S is not immediately available on the Funding Service, such as co-edit and filtering notifications. We are aware of these and understand that such capabilities will make it easier for research organisations to manage applications. The programme is continuing to work to improve research office functionality and will deliver improvements to the service by September 2023, with more to come.

In the meantime, research organisations may need to adjust their own processes to manage applications and support applicants. Notice periods and key dates are published by councils in advance to enable research organisations to plan and put in place necessary adjustments to processes and internal deadlines.

- Which funding service account type is most appropriate for research office staff to assist with the development of the proposal?

At present, the Project Lead has responsibility for completing and editing their application. Research officers with an administrator account can see an application from when it is first created, and view all applications being prepared at their organisation. They can also return an application to an applicant for further editing. When ready, the Research officer can authorise and submit the application to UKRI.

The Funding Service is continuing to improve research office functionality and will deliver improvements to the service by September 2023, with more to come.

Research offices are responsible for managing their Funding Service accounts and there is a verification process in place to manage these. Find out more here https://www.ukri.org/apply-for-funding/improving-your-funding-experience/how-research-offices-use-the-ukri-funding-service/

- Can an applicant download a PDF to share with research support for checks prior to submission?

Yes – there is a read application tab from which a PDF of an application can be downloaded. Currently, the digital form content and completed attachments need to be downloaded separately.

- Once a Project Lead has submitted, who in the research office has access to submit?

Once the Project Lead has submitted their application to their research office, any member of staff with a TFS Research Office account can submit to UKRI. Research organisations may have internal approval processes, so we recommend that Project leads and Research Officers work together in advance of submission deadlines to ensure a smooth process.

- Can research officers download completed applications including all attachments all at once rather than having to download each attachment individually?

Currently, the digital form content and completed attachments need to be downloaded separately.

System

- Can co-leads edit the form? When will they be able to?

The Funding Service is still in its early stages of development and there are many more enhancements and updates expected in the coming months.

The priority functionality was designed to allow the Project Lead the ability to create, edit and submit their application. Recent enhancements to this journey include digital costings and finances sections (moving away from the word template previously provided), as well as improvements to the rich text editing (formatting) and allowing for embedded images. In addition to the guidance we have also provided training resources for how to apply.

Our user research shows that even in Je-S much of the application is often created and shared offline, or using alternative systems. The Project Lead is able to view all of the sections and questions and guidance, then copy and paste, or upload the relevant sections into the Funding Service. Where appropriate PDF attachments have been enabled to allow for the full application information to be provided. The Project Lead is then able to view the application in print view which can also be saved and shared, although PDFs uploaded to the Funding Service application must be shared separately.

Collaborators are able to view all the application guidance in the funding finder, complete their personal profile, and create their own draft applications in the service so that they can test and explore the precise requirements for an opportunity.

In addition to this, administrators are able to view the application in full and once everything is finished they will be able to authorise the application and submit it to UKRI.

We are aware of that further improvements are needed to make it easier for applicants, collaborators and their organisation to complete and manage applications. The programme is continuing to work to improve functionality and will deliver additional functionality to meet these needs. In the meantime, researchers and their organisations may need to adjust their own processes to manage applications.

- What does the EDI form look like? How do I complete it?

When you set up an account on The Funding Service you will be prompted to fill out the EDI questionnaire. The questions are based on ONS standards.

- How can I share my application across my team?

By downloading and sharing a PDF. Please finalise your content offline before inputting it into the form for ease of collaboration.

- What if my organisation is not on the list given as options for the core team?

If your organisation is not listed please contact support@funding-service.ukri.org.

- How can I delete an obsolete application from the TFS system?

Applications cannot be deleted at present. To help manage growing portfolios, the Project Lead can change the project title name to reflect this.

- Can the new system accept LaTeX?

Currently, the digital form is not compatible with LaTeX, but we are committed to applicants submitting information via PDF for their Vision and Approach document until such a time interoperability is possible.

- Will formatting stay the same if copying and pasting text from word into the digital form?

There may be some alterations to formatting needed after copying and pasting your text into the form, so we would recommend you check before submission to make sure you’re happy with the presentation of your text.

- Does the justification of resources box allow tables?

Yes, you can copy in a table if you wish.

- Is there a way to download a draft PDF of a full application?

Yes, via the 'read view' tab in your application. Currently, the digital form content and completed attachments need to be downloaded separately.

- On the download of the read application it does not show the finances is this something that will be added at a later date?

This functionality has recently been enabled on the system and the costs table will show in the read application view, as well as pull through to the download.

- Please can we use figures and tables in the online form like we do in the case for support please?

New functionality will be enabled in round two of Responsive Mode. Embedded images, which will enable the inclusion of pictures and tables in certain sections will be allowed. However, as we will still be using the PDF attachment for Vision and Approach, this will not be relevant for that section and images/tables can be included in your PDF as long as the page length is adhered to.

Timeline

- The EPSRC website mentions that the outcomes for the first round of responsive mode funding will be announced in April 2024. Is that the maximum time that it will take or the time that the outcome for all applications will be announced?

April 2024 is when we expect the outcomes for applications will be announced. Applications will be sent out to review after the round deadline on 28th September.

- Will all proposals be reviewed after the September closing deadline or on a rolling basis?

We will send out to review after the round deadline for the first round on TFS.

- When will the deadlines for round two applications be published?

We aim to publish these in August and they will be available on this page.

- The current round of new investigator awards closes in September 2023 when is the new round opening?

The new round opens 2 October 2023.

- When should I put my start date for?

We recommend it's at least three months from when you expect to receive a decision, so for the first round we would recommend 1 August 2024 onwards.

- Is there a date for fellowship interviews?

These will take place in April or May 2024, with outcomes communicated soon after.

- Is the move to rounds temporary and will they go back to being always open?

During the first year or more of the Funding Service, the system will continue to develop in response to internal and external user needs.

By opening as rounds, we will be able to accommodate system developments in a way that means applications can be assessed in a batch submitted under the same conditions.

You will be informed of application details and of any relevant system developments in advance of a round opening.

By taking a round-based approach EPSRC will be able to better manage the transition internally, ensuring we continue to deliver a high-quality service.

The round-based approach will be reviewed after one year, and EPSRC, along with other councils, will decide whether to move back to an always open format or continue with some form of round-based application system. The approach is therefore likely to change once the new Funding Service is established.

- When will programme grants transfer to TFS?

Je-S will close to new programme grant outlines on 13 July 2023 at 4:00pm UK time.

Outlines submitted in Je-S before 4:00pm UK time on 13 July 2023 can expect to be assessed at an outline panel in September 2023.

If successful at the March or the September outline meetings, you can expect to submit a full proposal via the Funding Service. Those applicants invited to the full proposal stage will be guided through the transition process by their programme grant contact at EPSRC.

Programme grants will fully reopen (outlines and full stage assessments) in the Funding Service. A timeline for their reopening will be published at least eight weeks in advance.

As part of the Funding Service transition, we are reviewing the way we assess programme grants. This will not impact on programme grants in progress, and any changes will be implemented at the time programme grants fully reopen on the Funding Service.

In the first instance potential applicants should continue to contact the programme grant contact in the theme they wish to apply to, to discuss their interest and suitability in applying for a programme grant.

Costs

- Is there a limit for funding we can apply for in the proposal?

Limits are specified in the UKRI Funding Finder guidance for the opportunity you are applying to, but if you are unsure as to whether your proposed costs are suitable, please contact your relevant EPSRC team to discuss.

- Can you give us a finance template to fill out and copy into the form?

Due to organisational differences, finance templates should be led by your local pre-award team. Please see our training video for an overview of the resources and costs sections.

- Will funding be allocated across the rounds pro rata?

The transition to the Funding Service will not affect EPSRC budgets, and the commitments made in EPSRC strategic delivery plan for 2023 to 2024 and 2024 to 2025 remain the same. Our internal processing timelines and activities have been planned to ensure that the transition will not impact our strategic commitments.

- Will a breakdown of itemised costs be required later?

At present, please use the call guidance on the UKRI Funding Finder to read about what is required for resources and cost information for each opportunity.

- 1000 words for the Resources and Cost justification is very limiting, are there any plans to review this?

This is broadly equivalent to our current 2-page limit on Je-S, but we continuously review our application processes to best suit the peer review process.

- Does the Justification of Resources template that we have had under UKRI for some time still apply for new applications?

No, UKRI are now using a resources and cost section, and the information required for your opportunity can be found on the UKRI Funding Finder.

Deadlines and Timelines

- The second round closing in mid-January could cause issues for research offices due to staff absence over the Christmas break. Can the deadline be moved to later in January?

You’re free to submit at any point during the application period and can choose which round to submit to.

- Can applications be moved between rounds if I miss a deadline?

If you do not submit by the round one deadline you will have to submit your proposal to round two instead, and your proposal will be processed in accordance with that timeline and round funding opportunity criteria.

Eligibility, Team, and Grant Roles

- When will we see additional guidance on the policy change about estates and indirect costs for technicians and enabling staff? Professional enabling staff such as project managers now attract overheads following the change in policy can you confirm this is correct?

Information about grant roles can be found here on a page that was updated with further information on 4th July 2023. The UKRI terms and conditions guidance has also been updated and further information can be found here.

- Is only one project lead possible? Why can we not have joint PLs for an interdisciplinary project?

Currently the UKRI policy is one Project Lead from the lead organisation. There is some policy work taking place on different leadership models across UKRI. EPSRC are currently piloting this in the EDI Sharing Hub opportunity.

- Can you add an unnamed postdoc (to be hired later) to the core team?

Yes.

- Will eligibility be changing in future rounds?

Any new guidance on eligibility will be published in advance of rounds opening.

- Can my team include members that are not currently affiliated with a UK university?

You can read about EPSRC eligibility here. Eligible organisations are listed here. There are specific circumstances under which you may include team members that are not currently affiliated with a UK university, for example due to UKRI's agreement with Research Council of Norway. It is important that you read the guidance for the opportunity you are applying for carefully. If the team member will be affiliated with a UK university at the commencement of the grant, then they may be included in the application and you should explain the circumstances in the sensitive information section.

- Can we have a Co-lead for new investigator awards?

Yes, under specific circumstances stated in the guidance that can be found here.

- How many project co-leads am I allowed?

This depends on the opportunity you are applying for and will be detailed in the opportunity guidance on the UKRI Funding Finder.

- Can I fund doctoral students on my responsive mode grant?

No, this is not an available grant role on our Responsive Mode and Fellowship opportunities.

Facilities

- Do I only need to include facilities on the list? How will access to Research Council facilities be recorded within the proposal and managed in this round?

You can include non-research council facilities in your costs section. Research Council facilities can be recorded within the 'facilities' section of the application, and guidance is available for each opportunity on the UKRI Funding Finder.

- I am a bit perplexed that technical assessments are not being asked for? What if reviewers ask for them?

Technical Assessments are not being asked for in TFS. Applicants should, however, speak to National Research Facilities to confirm the technical feasibility of their project before application. EPSRC will review our approach to technical assessments over time.

New Investigator Awards and Fellowships

- What do I need to do in the research organisation support section?

Please refer to the guidance here. As the guidance states, you should use the text box to explain who you have engaged with in your research organisation (name and role) and what they have said your research organisation will provide referring to the bullet point list of expectations in the guidance. This is the approach we have been asked to trial by the funding policy team and we will review this over the coming months. Please ensure you get this section reviewed and signed off by your relevant internal team.

- Do I need to nominate a mentor?

EPSRC encourage the use of a mentor for New Investigators starting their career journeys but it is not a mandatory requirement. More information can be found in the opportunity guidance here.

- Can an applicant work on an Open Fellowship in TFS for round 2 whilst round 1 is still open?

You can only have one fellowship application under consideration in a 12-month rolling period.

- For new investigators, having to wait until the deadline and then a few months longer to get the result could stop applicants going for other opportunities out of fear of affecting their eligibility. Could the eligibility rules be adjusted to allow for this?

For New Investigator Awards we check your eligibility at the point of application, so if you're eligible at that point then the date of decision doesn't impact whether you could continue with the New Investigator Award. However, if you do submit other proposals when your NIA is being assessed they should be evidentially distinct.

- Can I apply for multiple types of fellowship in the same round across UKRI?

You can only have one fellowship under consideration across UKRI over a 12-month rolling period.

- Are you expecting universities to prioritise how many New Investigator Awards they submit per round given they will go to the same panel and compete with one another?

No. There is no institutional demand management expected.

- Please can you clarify what public engagement/outreach requirements there are for the Stephen Hawking postdoctoral fellowship?

This is no longer mandatory, but we encourage candidates to consider outreach as part of their career development and broader programme of work.

- Can a fellowship have an additional Co-lead?

Please see the guidance on the UKRI Funding Finder here to see the circumstances under which this is allowed.

- Can I submit my fellowship application after submission of my PhD thesis and before my Viva for round one?

Yes, if you will meet the eligibility criteria when you commence the fellowship.

- For EPSRC postdoctoral fellowships can applicants ask for money to purchase multiple pieces of equipment under 10K or does the cost of purchase of all equipment have to be below 10K?

You may request the equipment you need to do the research proposed and the guidance on Funding Available on postdoctoral fellowships for equipment can be found here.

- Would it be possible to explain the difference between EPSRC open fellowship applications on discovery science versus applications on innovation?

The EPSRC open fellowship guidance describes which areas of focus you can apply to in detail and can be found here.

- For EPSRC postdoctoral fellowship applications, do we need team members or is mentioning just the fellow fine?

Please see the opportunity guidance for information about applicants to your opportunity.

- Are NIAs subject to interviews?

Not currently, please see the opportunity guidance for details about assessment.

- For NIA, is 10% of my working time paid or more?

Please see the opportunity guidance for details about what costs you can apply for.

Letters of Support

- There is no space to upload a cover letter or host organisation letter of support. Are these no longer needed? How can I submit a cover letter?

Within our opportunities’ guidance on the UKRI Funding Finder you can find details about how to submit sensitive information regarding your application to EPSRC.

- Can I submit letters of support from non-project partners anywhere?

No – our policy on this for Responsive Mode and Fellowships has not changed. There may be specific opportunities where additional letters are required, but this will be requested in the guidance. You can write about collaborators that you would like to include in relevant sections of your proposal.

Panel

- Can I indicate which EPSRC thematic panel I would like my proposal to go to or will it be selected by EPSRC?

EPSRC have the final decision on the panel, but applicants can submit a thematic area during their application.

Partners

- Can a project partner be international and industrial for New Investigator Awards?

Yes.

- There no longer seems to be a section in the application for the applicant to explain the roles of different project partners and how they add value to the proposal. How can applicants do this?

Applicants can use the Applicant and Team Capability to Deliver section within The Funding Service and are also required to submit letters of support from their project partners which detail their contributions to the project.

Working with Overseas Scientists

- How long will it take to receive a response on an expression of interest form?

We endeavour to provide a response within three months.

- What is the maximum budget available for working with overseas scientists?

Working with overseas scientists is the opportunity through which lead agency applications should be submitted. The budgets for these applications should be in line with applications to standard responsive mode. All applications to the working with overseas scientists opportunity will go to standard responsive mode panels and be assessed alongside these applications. Please see the guidance page: International agreements – UKRI.

Post Award

- How do we manage grants post award in TFS?

Post award is in the development pipeline and will be available on TFS in due course.

R4RI

- Can some examples be published on the UKRI website? Can you provide more information on how to approach the R4RI when covering a large team?

There is guidance on the UKRI website about writing an R4RI and this can be found here.

- Are details of past research expected to be in the vision and approach document or in the R4RI?

In the R4RI, as specified by the application guidance on the UKRI Funding Finder.

- Can the R4RI modules handle mathematical formula?

Currently, no, due to it being part of the digital form. Applicants should focus on responding to the questions specified.

- Do we include details of project partners in the R4RI?

If appropriate, for example if they form part of the team delivering the research or the project has been co-created with your partners. Project Partner letters of support can also be submitted, which will detail the contributions of partners.