



**S I F**

**Strategic  
Innovation  
Fund**

# Guidance

# Strategic Innovation Fund guidance

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# Introduction

The Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF) supports the development of new strategic innovation or creative projects that will enable excellent research to have material and far-reaching impact by attracting substantial external funding. It is aligned to the following priorities in the University's Strategic Plan 2018-23:

- 12: 'Continue to broaden and invest in our innovation activities and foster the entrepreneurial environment for staff and students'
- 19: 'Expansion of the innovation districts in and around Oxford, including at Begbroke Science Park and Osney Mead'

Funds can be spent on:

- Developing strategic high impact and high value partnerships.
- Economic or social evaluation of projects, including developing models to project the impact and outcomes of projects e.g. Value for Money, CBR, GVA, Social impact, or jobs created.
- Acquisition of specialist skills required to complete a full business case, e.g. project costings, quantifying environmental, archaeological, social or economic impact of the project.
- Activities that may strengthen partnerships involved in the project, e.g. enabling cultivation of complex or specialist partnership with an SME who may not have the resources to, or with an international partner.
- Preliminary enabling/piloting/preparatory activities, e.g. a short term survey that will strengthen the case being made, or engagement of certain key participants to the projects.

This document provides guidance for prospective SIF applicants. Further information on the application process, Frequently Asked Questions and the application form are available on the [Research Support website](#).

## Aims and objectives

The SIF aims to increase the University's innovation and creativity through:

- Accelerating the development of ideas and concepts into investable, externally-funded propositions.
- Improving the chances of success in securing significant funding from a variety of external sources (including Government, Industry, and Philanthropy).
- Increasing visibility, coordination, and development of a pipeline of short and long term projects aligned to the University's plans, and regional strategic planning such as the [Oxfordshire Local Industrial Strategy](#) or the Oxford-Cambridge ARC.
- Promoting more coordination and university-wide collaboration, between Divisions and disciplines, to effectively develop larger innovation projects.
- Establishing strategic actions that respond to institutional imperatives e.g. the REF/KEC/KEF or which otherwise promote a thriving and inclusive innovation environment at Oxford.

## Types of projects that can be funded

The types of projects which could benefit from the SIF include:

- **Innovation Infrastructure Projects (IIPs):** These are large, Government funded projects that enable innovation for regional and national growth. They are assessed using the HMG

Green Book methodology. The SIF may fund the technical skills required to demonstrate that a project meets the Green Book requirements; e.g. Gross Value Add (GVA), Cost Benefit Ratio (CBR), or Value For Money (VFM).

- **Multi-partner Innovation Collaborations (MICs):** These include programmes and activities that enable knowledge exchange, innovation, commercialisation, and collaborations between a number of collaborative partners. These projects can later be funded by schemes such as the Research England Development (RED) Fund, or Innovate UK.
- **Strategic Innovation Collaboration Partnerships (ICPs):** These projects are highly attuned to the requirements of a commercial partner, private or philanthropic funders, and are often highly confidential and sensitive.
- **Enabling Projects:** These are unique and independent projects that enable the further development of innovation activities across the University, such as sectoral analysis or initiatives aligned to the PVCs (innovation) strategic objectives. For example, the **IDEA project**, which aims to reduce gender inequalities in entrepreneurship.

## Eligibility and assessment criteria

The SIF is open to all divisions and disciplines across the University, Successful projects will generally meet most of the following criteria:

- Good alignment to the objectives of the SIF (see above)
- Supportive of the university's research and innovation priorities, including creativity. (also see strategic alignment below)
- Could enable larger opportunities (e.g. size of external investment being sought, or the breadth of the impact on the innovation environment in Oxfordshire and beyond)
- Have a named academic and/or a professional services lead.
- Can demonstrate potential for significant and quantifiable economic or social benefits
- Well aligned to key societal challenges, or national agendas e.g. Net-zero, levelling up, equality, and social inclusion.
- Are clear on SIF outputs and the potential outcomes that could be enabled by the SIF funding.
- Projects that are built on strong partnerships
- Evidence that the project has departmental and divisional support
- Where relevant, projects that have developed cross-divisional awareness and support.

## Strategic alignment

Projects will need to be aligned to the key pillars in the University's Knowledge Exchange strategy [Knowledge Exchange Strategy](#) as follows:

### Pillar 1: Innovative and commercialisable Projects that support Business and Economy

This includes projects which have the potential to deliver key economic outcomes e.g. jobs, commercial floor space, commercialisation of IP through spinouts and licensing, developing links to investors or the creation of accelerator programmes such as those supported by OUI, Foundry, CDL, Bio-Escalator etc.

These projects could be delivered through research partnerships with external organisations, including third sector and heritage organisations. These projects may also contribute to the achievement of wider regional aspirations such as those in the [Oxfordshire Local Industrial Strategy](#) or to solve the national grand challenges and policy directions such as Net Zero, or Levelling up.

#### Pillar 2: Projects that support Society

The SIF will support projects which have the potential to deliver societal impact. This includes those that promote Public Engagement with Research, Policy Engagement, Community Engagement, Creativity and Social Innovation, and Entrepreneurship (especially via OUI). It also includes those that create social enterprises, partnerships with external organisations, or corporate organisations, to deliver societal, cultural and economic impact.

#### Pillar 3: Projects that enhance the impact of the University in its Place and Region:

The scheme will support projects which benefit Oxfordshire, or our local partners. This includes projects linked to the University's innovation districts, the Ox-Cam Arc, Oxfordshire and the Local Industrial Strategy. Natural local partners include the Ox-LEP, local NHS organisations, and partners at Harwell, Culham, and other innovation and Science Parks in Oxfordshire. This also includes ideas that help Oxford "Establish a globally connected innovation economy."

## The operating framework

The SIF operates within the following framework:

- It is a limited funding pot, with a maximum of £2.5m in any particular year. (N.B it has received £1.3m for 2020/2021).
- Not all good projects can be funded.
- The SIF will strive to promote an inclusive access of the funds across the University and between various disciplines and divisions.
- In order to broaden access, and to diversify the project portfolio, there is a *guiding* maximum amount of £100,000 per project.

## Other activities

The SIF is intended to fund the process of bid development and its associated activities, including external expertise that may be required. However, the panel acknowledges that bid development takes time and resources, and that different divisions and departments may have different resourcing capabilities, and may require different funding models. Applicants who intend to include such costs should note the following:

#### Staff costs :

- Applications which include costs for "**existing staff**" should include a justification for this arrangement.
- Generally, staff costs are expected to make the smaller, rather than the significant proportion of the project costs.
- Bids with staff costs are still expected to stay within a reasonable range of the guiding maximum amount of 100k per application.

#### In-house Consultancy Fees:

Some applicants may wish to include costs for expertise from existing staff. Such requests will be looked at on a case by case basis, but applicants must:

- include a clear justification for such arrangements, and why this activity is above and beyond their day to day role
- address any potential accountability, conflict of interest, or ethical issues that such arrangements could raise.

#### **Partnerships:**

The SIF is an *internal university fund*, so ideas that have wide application across disciplines should strive to be pan-university e.g. through:

- Drawing on networks outside their own divisions.
- Connecting or expanding scopes within their own discipline.
- Reflecting the breadth and depth of expertise across the university.

The SIF also welcomes bids that involve external applicants, but such applicants should note the following:

- the University PIs must be the lead applicants.
- bids must adequately reflect the breadth and depth of the university's expertise or how that will be enhanced.
- bids must clarify the partner roles.
- the extent to which any anticipated benefits would enhance the University's work or its impact must be explained.

**Travel/subsistence/marketing material/workshop/event type activities:** These types of costs are not considered essential to bid development. However, applicants who include these should also provide a clear rationale on how essential they are to the project, and they must endeavour to keep such costs to a minimum.

**Other funding sources** – bids are expected to also explore other relevant funding sources including internal ones. Where applicants have received other types of internal funds such as; IAAs, SRF or KE Seed Fund, they should provide details of the funds received and demonstrate that there is no overlap between the funds.

## **Application process and deadlines**

Prospective applicants are encouraged engage with the process early and to maintain ongoing engagement as follows:

- 1) Contact their Departmental Heads to notify them of the intention to apply to the SIF. This will be an opportunity for them to discuss and get some feedback on the idea, and to address any departmental requirements that may arise. If the decision to apply to the SIF is acceptable, Departments will need to confirm their approval by the set deadlines in IRAMS.
- 2) Contact **Thandiwe Hara** in Research Services email: [sif@admin.ox.ac.uk](mailto:sif@admin.ox.ac.uk) to discuss whether their project concept is suited to the SIF, and if an application should be submitted.
- 3) Submit your application in IRAMS by the advertised deadline.

Where appropriate, applicants may be connected to further bid development support or they may be directed to other funding channels such as the IAA, [SRF](#) or Knowledge Exchange Seed fund.

Calls for applications will be announced via departmental channels as and when they are ready, but applicants can make an inquiry to Research Services at any time. Application to advertised rounds must be made using the application form available on advertised links in IRAMS.

The SIF receives funds on an annual basis. We anticipate at least one funding call per term, but this will be determined by the number of awards made against the remaining funds. This means that if funding has not been fully allocated in previous rounds, additional funding calls will be made. Equally, if a funding round may be postponed or cancelled if funds have been depleted pending receipt of the next annual allocation.

## **Award panel and decision making**

The application process will be managed by Research Services. Assessment and review of the application will be made by a panel chaired by the PVC (Innovation) and comprising the Associate Heads of Innovation, (or their delegate) from each Division.

The Panel will consider the funding request and will decide on the level of SIF award (full or partial) to be made. Unsuccessful project leads will receive feedback and if appropriate how the application could be amended to allow Consideration and approval by the PVC (I), with input from by the Panel as appropriate.

## **Project monitoring and evaluation**

To ensure the continual evaluation and improvement of the fund Research Services will maintain a light-touch engagement schedule with the project leads. These are intended to provide an opportunity to identify emerging issues and solutions, and will guide the level of monitoring that may be required. Information gathered during this process will also inform evaluation of the impact of the SIF fund.

## **Post SIF-award support**

Where SIF funded projects go on to win external awards, Research Services support will offer ongoing project set up and support as normal.

## **Equality and diversity**

The panel is committed to promoting equality and diversity, including through the SIF-funded enabling project, Increasing Diversity in Enterprising Activities ([IDEA](#)), and in line with the Universities strategic goals and objectives, such as the [Knowledge Exchange Strategy](#). Applicants should consider the impact of their project on diverse communities both within and out of the University, including in the makeup of project teams.

This applies to all equality protected characteristics (age, disability, gender identity, pregnancy/maternity, religion/belief, race, sex, sexual orientation) in line with the Equality Act 2010. Advice and Information on whether and how a project might affect equality and diversity as well as various relevant policies can be obtained from the [Equality and Diversity Unit](#)