
R&I Shared Services Collaboration Fund – Call for proposals

Introduction

1. The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) is pleased to invite proposals for funding from a new R&I Shared Services Collaboration Fund.
2. The SFC R&I Shared Services Collaboration Fund will allow universities to apply for funding to develop sustainable models to implement shared services, including but not limited to sharing technology transfer office (TTO) facilities and research offices.
3. The Fund will kick-start longer-term collaboration by supporting the initial costs of change, enabling institutions to navigate the difficult proof of concept stage and de-risk the exploration of new approaches in a financially constrained environment. Ultimately, the Fund will support the sector to work differently and create efficiencies through the sharing of essential R&I back-office services.
4. Collaborative approaches will consolidate existing services and/or build new specialist shared capacity where there is a clear rationale. For example, by:
 - Consolidating existing distinct functions and replacing them with a single shared function.
 - Supporting an institution with a smaller research portfolio to work with a larger institution to gain access to expertise and capability that they don't currently have.
 - Creating shared capacity between groups of institutions where limited functions currently exist but new shared capability would drive efficiencies.
5. A total of up to £3m is available over AY25/26 and AY26/27 with individual awards ranging from £250K-£750K. It is not SFC's intention to fund projects on an ongoing basis as funding is intended to support the transition to a different way of working by proving the feasibility and viability of a shared approach.

Background

6. The Scottish higher education sector faces challenges that threaten the sustainability of the research and innovation (R&I) activities of many institutions. As part of addressing these challenges, there are opportunities for sharing, collaborating and developing inter-institutional R&I services such as technology transfer offices (TTOs) and research offices.
7. While the sector has significant experience of successful research collaboration, the default approach to essential R&I services is to 'go it alone' and seek solutions to provide these in isolation. But many universities are facing the same issues, need the same expertise and policies, and use the same systems. SFC considers there to be opportunities for improved efficiency through the sharing of key R&I services.

8. Sharing and increasing access to TTO facilities also provides an opportunity to further Scottish Government innovation ambitions as outlined in [the National Innovation Strategy](#). University research commercialisation is central to the Strategy and ensuring that world-leading research from across all of Scotland's research active universities can be successfully commercialised requires access to critical expertise. Therefore, strategic collaboration would boost both financial viability and Scotland's research commercialisation pipeline.
9. The UK Government's recent [Spin Out Review](#) also highlights the value of shared technology transfer expertise across universities.

Aims

10. This funding opportunity aims to:
 - Seed new shared R&I service capacity across Scotland by supporting the early stages of development.
 - Promote sector efficiencies and system sustainability by supporting increased inter-institutional operational collaboration.
 - Where relevant, increase Scotland's research commercialisation pipeline by expanding access to key TTO facilities across institutions.
11. The focus of this funding opportunity is not on building more R&I service capacity but on making existing capacity and the system generally more effective and efficient through sharing.

Key information

SFC R&I Shared Services Collaboration Fund	
Funding type	Grant awarded through open competition
Total fund	Up to £3m over AY25/26 and 26/27
Individual award range	£250K - £750K
Timeline	Awards will be made so that activity begins during AY25/26 and is complete by the end of AY26/27.
Institutional contribution	There is no match funding requirement. However, we would expect to see clear evidence that partners are contributing in a measurable and meaningful way to the project.
Who can apply	<p>Groups of minimum two Scottish universities, EITHER with at least one partner with relevant and effective services and/or functions to be shared, OR clear foundations and/or rationale for building new collaborative functions.</p> <p>Individual universities can lead a single application as either the main recipient of support or the provider of support or as part of a group developing new support functions.</p> <p>Individual universities can be a partner on any number of projects but can only lead one proposal. It is expected that applications will be submitted and led by Vice-Principals for Research (or equivalents).</p> <p>Where appropriate, colleges can be included within the groups of institutions, as long as there is a minimum of two universities involved in the group and the application is led by a university. Colleges cannot receive funds because funding is drawn from HE capital.</p> <p>Non-Scottish institutions may not apply.</p>
Review point	There will be a review point after a suitable period into the grant to determine feasibility of successful completion of the project.
Evaluation	<p>The application requests detailed outputs, outcomes, and short/medium/ longer-term impacts to report against. See Annex for a programme-level theory of change model.</p> <p>At the end of the award period, SFC will convene a cohort workshop where awardees will present outcomes and learnings.</p>

12. Eligible activities to deliver shared functions could include:
- Costs of recruiting shared temporary staff to, for example, undertake scoping and feasibility studies or develop a business case or a shared governance framework.
 - Costs of recruiting shared permanent staff (provided that permanent staff will be retained by institutions after the end of funding for a reasonable period).
 - Fixed-term project managers and consultants.
 - Events and networking to explore and realise collaborative opportunities.
 - Shared resource development (e.g. toolkits).
 - Commercialisation pipeline horizon scanning.
 - Legal and regulatory advice and due diligence, including partnering and IP administration and contracting.
 - Finance including interface with university finance, investment portfolio management, audit, tax and more.
 - Marketing, communications and demand advice.
 - IP and technology audit.
 - Mentorship and initial advice.
 - Evidence pack development.
13. These illustrative examples are by no means exhaustive, and we will welcome submissions of diverse approaches not considered here.
14. The focus of the Fund is the sharing of back-office R&I services, therefore the sharing of specialist research and innovation facilities, such as shared equipment, is not within scope.

Funding and costs

15. SFC will provide funding of up to £750,000 per successful application over AYs 2025/26 and AY 2026/27. This funding can be used to cover relevant direct and indirect costs over the course of the award. An indicative budget is requested as part of the application form.

Review point

16. An initial review point will be built into awarded grants after a suitable period. This review will determine whether initial testing and exploration has proved initial feasibility and unlock full funding. If, however, initial testing shows that projects are not viable and unlikely to lead to sustainable collaborations, then this is a point when projects can rescope and/or discontinue.
17. The review will involve a brief written assessment on feasibility and discussion with SFC.

How to apply

18. Applications should be submitted using the [SFC Shared R&I Services Collaboration Fund template](#). The length of the proposal should be proportionate to size of funds requested, with a maximum length of eight pages, including tables. Further instructions are provided within the template.

19. Letters of support can be included where they are complimentary to the activities described. Letters of support will not be counted as part of the eight-page limit.
20. The deadline for proposals is **noon on Friday 29 August 2025**. Proposals should be submitted to res@sfc.ac.uk

How we will assess your application

Assessment process

21. We will assess applications utilising advice from our Research & Knowledge Exchange Committee (RKEC). We will apply the assessment criteria to all applications.

Feedback

22. Feedback will not be given on applications during development, and this is a single stage competitive process.

Assessment criteria

23. The assessment criteria are:
24. **Building shared capabilities** - Applications demonstrate that the funded activity will allow the capabilities of the university/universities involved to develop and build upon individual experiences to support shared functions. Shared capabilities should make sense when considered at a national, Scotland-wide level.
25. **Delivery of efficient operating processes and access to expertise** - Applications provide detailed evidence outlining the efficiencies and improvements that would be delivered within a sustainable model. The detailed evidence demonstrates the proposed model is best placed for delivering long-term cost savings and, where relevant, increasing potential for research commercialisation, including details of the outlined functions.
26. **Sustainability** - Applications demonstrate clear plans of what sustainability will look like with evidence for continuation of activity beyond the end of the SFC funding.
27. **Delivery and funding** - Project costs and activities are justified by need and evidence, providing value for money, including additionality, appropriate project team, and risks considered and appropriately addressed.

Cohort meeting for successful applications

28. Successful applications will need to include activity at the end of the project to summarise and share learnings on successes and challenges. This will help inform SFC's policy development.

29. As part of this, successful applicants will be required to attend a meeting of the cohort of projects at the end of the award period to present on their outcomes and learnings. This will provide an opportunity for cohort learning on successes and challenges and to give SFC advice on learning and implications for next steps. SFC will share learnings and insights with the sector more broadly.

Equality and diversity

30. SFC considers equality and diversity in all its activities. SFC asks institutions to be mindful of the Equality Act (2010), including the statutory requirement for Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessments (EHRIs) of new and revised strategies and policies. R&I Shared Services Collaboration Fund proposals must include an EHRIA. Applicants can use their institution's EHRIA form or SFC's EHRIA form which is available upon request to res@sfc.ac.uk.

Indicative timetable

Action	Date
Call for proposals published	Tuesday 29 April
Deadline for call for proposals	Friday 29 August
Award panel	Mid-September
Exec Team approval of award panel decisions	Late September
Awards announced	Early October

Data protection

31. Any materials produced, reporting required, promotional information, etc. must be compliant with data protection and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requirements. Institutions must ensure any participants are aware of how their information will be processed in accordance with GDPR. For more information about how SFC uses personal data please see our [Privacy Notice](#).
32. SFC reserves the right to share content, reports and other information with the Scottish Government and other relevant stakeholders to promote and evidence the way in which funding has been used.

Further information

33. For further information and informal enquiries please contact: Dr Cat Ball, cball@sfc.ac.uk

Annex – Theory of change

