

U.S.-Ireland R&D Partnership Programme

Centre-to-Centre Mechanism

Guidance for Republic of Ireland (RoI) and Northern Ireland (NI) applicants for Submission of Tri-Partite Centre-to-Centre (C2C) Proposals to the National Science Foundation (NSF)

Version: April 2026

Key dates

Mandatory Expression of Interest (EoI) is required to be submitted to Research Ireland, Department for the Economy (DfE) and NSF **at least 18 weeks** in advance of the full submission deadline at NSF (23 weeks in advance of the ERC site review).

Draft Tri-Partite Proposal to be submitted to Research Ireland and DfE **at least 6 weeks** in advance of NSF deadline or, if applicable, the deadline at the U.S. University's Research Office in advance of the NSF submission deadline (11 weeks in advance of the ERC site visit).

NSF full proposal deadline is **5 weeks** in advance of the ERC site visit.

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1. Background and Objectives

The U.S.-Ireland Research and Development Partnership, launched in July 2006, is a unique initiative involving funding agencies across three jurisdictions: United States of America (U.S.), Republic of Ireland (RoI) and Northern Ireland (NI).

The overall goal of the Partnership is to increase the level of collaborative R&D amongst researchers and industry across the three jurisdictions. This collaboration aims to generate valuable discoveries and innovations which are transferable to the marketplace, or will lead to enhancements in health, disease prevention or healthcare.

The Partnership achieves its goals through tri-partite research projects in which the funding agencies fund the elements of research undertaken in their own jurisdiction.

Under the U.S.-Ireland R&D Partnership Programme, the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) (U.S.), together with Research Ireland (RoI) and the Department for the Economy (DfE) (NI) have expanded existing opportunities for individual investigator-driven collaborations to include Research Centre-based collaborations between researchers in the three jurisdictions.

This guidance document outlines the objectives, eligibility, funding available, review process, and application procedures for submission of a U.S.-Ireland R&D Partnership Centre-to-Centre (C2C) proposal to the **U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF)** in the Sensors & Sensor Networks, Nanoscale Science & Engineering, Telecommunications, Energy & Sustainability, and Cybersecurity themes.

2. How the Centre-to-Centre Mechanism Operates

The Centre-to-Centre mechanism is currently open to existing Research Ireland Centres, NSF-funded Engineering Research Centers (ERC) and researchers in Centres in Northern Ireland.

Each U.S.-Ireland R&D Partnership proposal must have a minimum of one applicant from each jurisdiction and significant research participation by all three jurisdictions. The work proposed for each jurisdiction must add significant value, so that the overall programme of research goes beyond what might be achieved by any one PI working alone supported by national funding only.

The mechanism is a two-step process with Centres being required to submit a two-page Expression of Interest (see **Section 2.1**), and if successful, the Centres partnership is invited to submit a single tri-jurisdictional proposal in the format required by NSF, which undergoes the review at the annual ERC site visit. Proposals are evaluated in accordance with the standard NSF merit review criteria of intellectual merit and broader impacts of the proposed effort, and additional Centre-specific criteria (see **Appendix 1**) in support of vision, strategic plan, and ongoing activities within each Centre. The funding agencies on the island of Ireland have agreed to accept the decisions of NSF with regard to the suitability for funding of individual proposals.

2.1 Expression of Interest

To gauge whether the proposed collaboration fits within the scope of the U.S.-Ireland C2C agreement, partners are required to submit a short summary of the proposed collaboration to their respective funding agency. This summary should be composed of two sections, each approximately one-page in length. The first section should address the intellectual merit and broader impacts of the proposed collaboration – focusing on the proposed

research, the value of international collaboration, role of each participant, anticipated industry engagement, and the anticipated budget scale (detailed information on the budget is not necessary). The second section should focus on how the proposed project fits within the larger scope of the Research centre and include a statement on how intellectual property issues will be addressed. As a part of this submission, brief information (e.g., names and affiliations) on all of the PIs and co-PIs involved should be provided.

The EoIs from each Centre must be submitted by the applicants to their respective funding agencies **no later than 18 weeks in advance of the NSF deadline** (23 weeks in advance of the ERC annual site visit).

For RoI applicants, please submit to usireland@researchireland.ie

For NI applicants, please submit to USIreland@economy-ni.gov.uk.

The EoIs are shared amongst partner agencies and assessed by them at a joint meeting. If approved, the applicants are invited to submit a full proposal.

2.2 Draft “tri-partite” Centre-to -Centre proposal submission

The peer review of the full proposal is undertaken by the NSF ERC annual site visit panel. The deadline for submission of the full proposal is determined by the date of the ERC’s annual site visit. The joint proposal must be submitted to the NSF at least 5 weeks in advance of the annual site visit along with the ERC’s annual report.

A draft of the “tri-partite” Centre-to-Centre proposal must be simultaneously submitted to Research Ireland, DfE, and NSF **at least 6 weeks in advance of the NSF deadline** (11 weeks in advance of the ERC annual site visit) or, *if applicable*, the deadline at the U.S. University’s Research Office in advance of the NSF submission deadline.

Following submission of the draft proposal, Research Ireland and DfE will assess the proposal in order to

- a) determine if there is evidence of significant participation by all partners,
- b) to pre-approve the budget for the project and, if supportive
- c) to inform the relevant personnel at the NSF of the RoI/NI support for the proposal should it be approved for funding, and
- d) to provide a funding commitment letter to the applicant for inclusion in the full proposal submission to NSF.

2.3 Submission Steps Timelines

Please note that the above timelines are the **latest dates** for submission of forms/proposals.

3. Eligibility Criteria

For Research Body and applicant eligibility criteria please refer to U.S.-Ireland R&D Partnership Programme Guidance for RoI and NI applicants for Submission of Tri-Partite Proposals to the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF). This guidance is available to download from the programme webpages for each funder.

4. Funding

The partner funding agencies have their own specific funding streams available for researchers in the US, NI and RoI applying to the U.S.-Ireland R&D Partnership programme C2C mechanism.

U.S. National Science Foundation

U.S. applicants can request up to \$800,000 (direct and indirect costs) for up to a 4-year duration, including the no-cost extension period.

Department for the Economy Northern Ireland

NI applicants can apply to DfE for total costs of up to £400k for a three to five-year duration.

DfE eligible costs are staff, equipment, materials, and travel. DfE will also consider other specified costs if demonstrated to be essential for the project to proceed. However, the programme will not meet costs related to new premises, refurbishment, or major items of equipment (costing more than £25,000). An allowance for indirect costs can be included at a rate of up to 30% of the staff costs (Post Doctoral salary costs and PhD stipends). See DfE U.S.- Ireland Research and Development Partnership Budget Policy [online](#) for further details.

Research Ireland

RoI applicants can apply to Research Ireland for up to a max of 50% of the total direct cost of the project for a 3-4 years' duration. In addition to the direct costs, Research Ireland also makes an indirect, or overhead, contribution to the host Research Body, which is reflected as 30% of the direct costs (excluding equipment). The overhead should not be included by the applicant in the budget request. See Research Ireland Grant Budget Policy for further details.

Please note that for projects that are three years in duration, requests for contributions towards PhD stipends and fees are not permitted, unless accompanied by a signed Letter of Support from a relevant senior member of academic staff (i.e. Head of Department/School or above) confirming that the student(s) will be supported for four years and that the cost of the fourth year of stipend and fees will be borne by the Eligible Research Body.

5. Submission of Draft Tri-Partite Proposal to Funding Agencies

In advance of submission of the final tri-partite proposal to the NSF, Research Ireland and DfE will evaluate the draft proposal and either approve or decline support. Therefore, a draft of the “tri-partite” proposal for submission to the NSF **must be submitted to the NI, RoI, and U.S. funding agencies as outlined in Section 2.2.**

Draft proposals will only be accepted from applicants who have submitted an Expression of Interest as outlined in Section 2.1 and have been invited to submit a full proposal.

It is expected that all partners will contribute to designing the research programme and to writing tri-jurisdictional proposal. Equitable participation of all partners is critical to achieving a truly collaborative programme of scientifically excellent, impactful research that takes advantage of the scope, scale, synergy, multi-disciplinarity, equipment and facilities that centres can provide.

The outline of the full proposal composition as per NSF requirements and evaluation criteria that should be taken into account when preparing application, can be found in Appendix 1.

5.1 Research Ireland Requirements

Research Ireland will accept a draft version of the tri-partite proposal **in NSF format (see Appendix 1)**; however, the following documents must be included in order for Research Ireland to accurately and fairly assess the level of support required:

- (i) A detailed overview of the research programme including a breakdown of the work packages and tasks to be undertaken by partners in each jurisdiction.
- (ii) A standard coversheet signed by the applicant and approved by the appropriate signatory from their institution; for template, please refer to the programme website.
- (iii) CVs of each applicant in each jurisdiction in NSF format.
- (iv) Copies of the requested budget in each jurisdiction. RoI applicants should use the budget template provided on the programme website.
- (v) Budget justification for the funding requested (max. 3 pages).
- (vi) An **'added value' appendix** (1 page) which includes an outline of how the work proposed for each jurisdiction adds significant value so that the overall programme of research goes beyond what might be achieved by any one PI working alone supported only by national funding.
- (vii) If a Gantt chart or equivalent has not been included in the draft of the research programme, it should be included in the appendix.
- (viii) **Multi-applicant Management and Communication Plan** - please include a section where it is clearly outlined how the multi-applicant team will manage the programme. It is advisable that you refer to regular conference calls or annual team meetings, for example, or other methods of communication that you expect to use to enable the efficient management and a successful outcome of the proposed partnership project.

All documents must be converted into a single Adobe pdf document and emailed to usireland@researchireland.ie for RoI applicants seeking funding from Research Ireland.

5.2 DfE Requirements

DfE will accept a draft version of the tri-partite proposal in NSF format; however, the following documents (templates available online) must be included in order for DfE to accurately and fairly assess the level of support required:

- (i) A standard DfE coversheet signed by the applicant and approved by the appropriate signatories;
- (ii) Details of the requested NI budget. NI applicants should use the budget template provided online.
- (iii) Completed DfE requirements template (max. 6 pages), to include the following information:
 - An overview of the research programme, including a breakdown of the work packages and tasks to be undertaken by partners in each jurisdiction. The goal of the research programme should be set out clearly in layman's terms.

- Gantt chart or equivalent.
- Details of the requested NI budget and the requested partner budgets in Rol and U.S.
- Budget justification for the NI funding requested (max. 2 pages).
- An ‘added value’ section (1 page). This should include an outline of how the work proposed for each jurisdiction adds significant value, so that the overall programme of research goes beyond what might be achieved by any one PI working alone supported only by national funding. The commercial potential / potential route to market of the project should also be included in this section.

Please refer to the DfE [website](#) for further details, and for copies of the cover sheet, DfE requirements template and budget template. All documents must be collated and sent as a single email to usireland@economy-ni.gov.uk for NI applicants seeking funding from DfE.

6. Tri-Partite Draft Proposal – Review Process and Criteria

Each agency will review the draft tri-partite proposal based on the following criteria:

- Evidence of significant participation by all partners
- The budget is well-justified and represents value for money.
- The work proposed for each jurisdiction adds significant value so that the overall programme of research goes beyond what might be achieved by any one PI working alone supported by national funding only.
- The proposed research fits within one of the five NSF thematic areas.
- The alignment of the research with the strategic focus of the relevant centre(s)
- Assessment of broader impacts.
- The overall quality of the proposal (e.g., structure, clarity, completeness, etc.).

Scientific merit of the proposal is **not** evaluated. The final decision on the scientific merit of the tri-partite proposal lies with the NSF peer review process.

7. Submission of Final Tri-Partite Proposal to NSF

Once eligibility of the proposal has been confirmed by the Rol and NI funding agencies and the draft tri-partite proposal has been approved, the Rol and NI PIs are permitted to submit the tri-partite proposal to the NSF via their U.S. partner. It is the responsibility of the relevant participating ERC to submit the joint proposal to NSF.

Each of the Rol and NI funding agencies will write a Funding Commitment Letter outlining their level of budget commitment, subject to NSF approval, to the tri-jurisdictional proposal. Funding Commitment Letters are sent to the applicants by their funding agency and **must** be included in the final NSF submission.

A copy of the final NSF-submitted proposal along with NSF proposal number must be sent to the relevant funding agencies by the applicants within two weeks of the NSF submission deadline.

8. Post-Award Review

For reporting guidelines please refer to U.S.-Ireland R&D Partnership Programme Guidance for RoI and NI applicants for Submission of Tri-Partite Proposals to the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF)⁸ and Research Ireland Centres Award Management.

For further information, RoI applicants should contact Research Ireland at usireland@researchireland.ie and NI applicants should contact DfE at usireland@economy-ni.gov.uk.

PLEASE NOTE: Applicants must adhere to and comply with the Terms and Conditions of the relevant funding agency who will govern the administration of the award.

9. General Data Protection Regulation Statements

9.1 Research Ireland Statement

The General Data Protection Regulation is a legal framework that sets out guidelines for the collection and processing of personal information of individuals within the European Union. Applicants are advised that they must be compliant with this regulation if they collect or process personal data.

Research Ireland may collect, use and disclose personal data provided in the application and/or otherwise obtained under, or in connection with, the application for processing the submission, for the performance of its statutory powers and functions, and for the general activities of Research Ireland. Further details regarding Research Ireland's collection, use and disclosure of personal data, and the rights of individuals with respect to any personal data held by Research Ireland, are available in the Research Ireland Privacy Statement.

During peer-review procedures, information may be sent to external experts in countries outside of the European Economic Area, including countries that are not recognised by the European Commission as having adequate data protection laws. By submitting an application to Research Ireland, the Research Body and members of the Research Team are agreeing that they consent to the processing and transfer of personal information in this way.

During the application process or at any time thereafter, Research Ireland may contact the Research Body, the Principal Investigator, or any member of the Research Team with regard to funding opportunities, activities or events organised by Research Ireland or other relevant bodies, or for the purposes of monitoring and evaluation (including, but not limited to, the collection of scientific data or data relating to the application process). Research Ireland may choose to authorise a third party to contact the Research Body, the Principal Investigator or any member of the Research Team on its behalf.

9.2 DfE Statement

DfE will collect and process personal data to manage and administer the relationship between researchers, the Higher Education Institution (HEI) and Department for the Economy (DfE) in respect of the U.S.-Ireland Research & Development (R&D) Partnership programme. Personal data is required to fulfil our statutory functions, to comply with our statutory obligations and to evaluate and improve DfE performance. DfE will only use personal data for the purpose for which it was collected.

By submitting an application to DfE, the HEI and members of the Research Team are agreeing that they consent to the processing and transfer of personal information.

Further details regarding DfE's collection, use and disclosure of personal data, and the rights of individuals with respect to any personal data held by DfE, are available in the DfE Privacy Notice and the US Ireland R&D Partnership Privacy Notice.

APPENDIX 1: FULL PROPOSAL OUTLINE AND EVALUATION CRITERIA

CENTRE-TO-CENTRE PARTNERSHIPS WITHIN THE U.S.-IRELAND R&D PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMME

Under the U.S.-Ireland R&D Partnership Programme, the U.S. National Science Foundation (US) together with Research Ireland (RoI) and the Department for the Economy (Northern Ireland) in addition to the existing opportunities for individual investigator-driven collaborations also includes Research Centre-based collaborations between the United States, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Funding decisions will be based upon a combination of the standard NSF Merit Review Criteria and additional Centre-specific criteria in support of the vision, strategic plan, and ongoing activities within each Centre. Criteria to be used in eliciting reviewer feedback on the proposed research programme are specified below.

It is expected that all partners will contribute to designing the research programme and to writing the tri-jurisdictional proposal. Equitable participation of all partners is critical to achieving a truly collaborative programme of scientifically excellent, impactful research that takes advantage of the scope, scale, synergy, multi-disciplinarity, equipment, and facilities that centres can provide.

The relevant participating ERC will be responsible for submitting the joint proposal to NSF. This will undergo external peer review at the annual site visit of the respective Engineering Research Center.

The proposal should comprise the following elements:

RESEARCH PROGRAMME (15 pages max. CVs, Budget, and Letters of Support not included in this limit):

- *Details of what is proposed i.e. the specific aims and objectives of the project, how it advances the current state of the art, how it is expected to have impact and how it fits with the objectives of each Centre involved*
- *An outline of the tasks to be undertaken by each partner and how the work proposed requires participation by the three partners.*
- *Outline of the added value of the partnership outlining the strategic importance of the collaboration to all partners involved, including industry engagement.*

CVs:

- *CVs of the applicants for each jurisdiction – (two-page CV)*

BUDGET:

- *Separate budget request required for each partner along with full justification of the budget. Please use the template provided by your home funding agency.*
- *Budget templates for RoI and NI partners will be submitted as supplemental information.*

LETTERS of SUPPORT:

- *Letters of support from industry and/or practitioner partners from each jurisdiction who may intend to participate in trilateral industrial/practitioner advisory board that will be coordinated to the project.*

- *Letters of support from the funding bodies in Ireland and Northern Ireland, outlining their commitment to fund should the proposal be deemed fundable by the NSF merit review process.*
- *If the Centre Director is not the applicant/co-applicant, a letter of support from the Centre Director outlining their support for the partnership.*

CRITERIA FOR FEEDBACK/ANALYSIS OF CENTRE-TO-CENTRE (C2C) PLAN

1. INTELLECTUAL MERIT

a) Significance: What progress is envisioned in the proposed C2C project?

Additional Guiding Questions:

- *What is the anticipated impact of the proposed C2C project and what strengths/capacities of respective participants are leveraged to achieve the defined outcomes?*
- *How does the proposed C2C project relate to the research Centres' system vision?*
- *What advances proposed in the project are benchmarked vs. state-of-the-art?*

b) Complementarity: How is the proposed C2C project mutually beneficial for participating Centres?

Additional Guiding Questions:

- *Does the proposed C2C collaboration reflect an equal and mutually beneficial partnership between all Centres involved?*
- *How will the proposed C2C project go beyond the current activities of the individual Centres?*
- *What are the potential barriers to a successful collaboration?*
- *What is the risk mitigation strategy?*

2. BROADER IMPACTS

a) Extended Team Diversity: How will existing relationships and plans for new connections be maintained to support a productive C2C collaboration?

Additional Guiding Questions:

- *Who will be involved in the proposed C2C collaboration (specify: faculty, post docs, students, industry, etc.)?*
- *Does the proposed C2C team seem cohesive?*
- *What will support seamless/cohesive interactions (for example, plans for teleconferences, face-to-face meetings, information exchange)?*
- *Are there mechanisms in place to support diverse participants and/or students who are adjusting to being abroad for the first time?*

b) Innovation: What real, tangible innovative outcomes will result from this collaboration?

Additional Guiding Questions:

- *Does this proposed C2C have the potential to impact (discuss all that apply)*
 - Industry innovation*
 - Societal infrastructure*
 - Global sustainability issues?*
- *Is the route for achieving any of the above clearly described? Is it feasible and realistic?*

- *How will participants engage with industry or other outside organizations in the proposed C2C?*
- *Are agreements in place to manage intellectual property and address conflicts of interest/ related issues?*
- *Are there strategies in place to support technology transfer related to the C2C collaboration?*

c) Infrastructure: What resources will support the realization of the proposed C2C interactions within projected timelines?

Additional Guiding Questions:

- *What policies and personnel are in place to support all dimensions of this proposed C2C (for example, interactions of faculty and students, mentoring, diversity, innovation)?*
- *What are indications that participating institutions are committed to the success of the proposed C2C?*
- *Are there arrangements in place to ensure access to necessary facilities and resources on all sides?*