



NORF 2025 Open Research Fund

Sustainability and Growth

Call Specification Document

The National Open Research Forum reserves the right to amend this call document.

Deadline: 17:00 (Irish local time), Wednesday, 7 May 2025

1. Aim and Objectives

The National Open Research Forum (NORF) is pleased to announce the 2025 Open Research Fund. **This is a targeted call aimed at existing networks formed in response to the implementation of priority actions funded under the [NORF 2022 Open Research Fund](#).**

A3.4 of the [National Action Plan for Open Research 2022-2030](#) sets out a role for NORF to “support institutional and community networks for open research”. In line with A3.4, NORF has supported a variety of research networks in successive funding schemes formed in response to requests for expressions of interest for proposals to address priority actions in the *National Action Plan for Open Research*.

The NORF open research networks’ sustainability and growth funding scheme recognises the value of its prior investments in response to a defined need and aims to support these networks as they transition from grant-funded projects to self-sustaining entities. It ensures network funding applications can be reviewed and benchmarked through an open and transparent process aligned with best practice.

Key Objectives:

- **Sustainability:** Assist existing networks in transitioning from grant-funded projects to self-sustaining entities.
- **Growth:** Enable networks to expand their activities, outreach, and impact.
- **Collaboration:** Encourage partnerships between eligible networks to foster a cohesive open research ecosystem in Ireland.
- **Governance:** Establish a network governance that ensures a transparent, inclusive, and ongoing process for bringing in new members.

N.B. The NORF 2025 open research networks' sustainability and growth funding scheme excludes the funding of e-infrastructures piloted in response to the 2022 Open Research Fund call for expressions of interest.

2. Guidelines

2.1 Eligibility Criteria

2.1.1 Host Institution

Each application must have one Host Institution (HI). The HI will be regarded as the **Lead Administrative/Governance Institution** for NORF communication, award governance and management purposes. The HI **must**:

- Be a publicly funded higher education institution. These organisations are listed on the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science website:
<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/5088c-list-of-publicly-funded-higher-education-institutions/> **OR**
- Be one of the following organisations:
 - Health Service Executive (HSE)
 - HEAnet
 - ICHEC
 - Marine Institute (Foras na Mara)
 - Research Ireland Centres
 - Teagasc (Agriculture and Food Development Authority)

2.1.2 Lead Applicant

Each application must have a **Lead Applicant (LA)**. The LA will serve as the **primary point of contact for NORF during the review process and on the award, if successful**. The LA **must** hold a salaried position that covers the duration of the award at the HI.

- LAs to the 2025 Open Research Fund who were not the LA of the associated project funded under the 2022 Open Research Fund must provide **clear and verifiable evidence** of their role in the 2022 project. Specifically, they **must**:
 - Demonstrate a well-defined role by outlining their specific responsibilities and role within the 2022 project, including their position and areas of contribution.
 - Prove a critical and substantial contribution by providing measurable outputs or outcomes that they directly influenced, such

as leadership of key work packages, authorship of major project deliverables, or coordination of significant activities.

- Justify the change in leadership by explaining the reason for the transition and providing endorsements (e.g. from the original LA, project partners, and/or governance bodies).

Examples of supporting evidence may include project reports, deliverables, letters of support or endorsement or other relevant documentation.

Where a LA fails to meet the eligibility criteria, the application will be deemed ineligible and will not be accepted for review. NORF will contact the LA if this situation arises.

2.1.3 Co-Lead Applicants

The inclusion of co-leads is permissible, however an administrative lead should be identified for the purposes of administration of the scheme, such as for communication, progress reporting, and financial transfers (see [section 2.1.2 Lead Applicant](#)).

2.1.4 Network Partners

A network partner is an individual or an organisation that plays an active role in the collaboration, development and delivery of the network's objectives. Partner organisations are eligible to request funding from the award where justified.

Network partners may contribute expertise, infrastructure or resources to strengthen the network's impact and sustainability. Network partners do not need to meet the conditions laid out above for the LA.

Profile details must be provided for ALL network partners. In addition, **each network partner must sign a consortium agreement within three months of the project start date** ([see section 5. Award Offers and Feedback](#)).

2.1.5 Network Affiliates

A network affiliate is an individual or organisation that contributes to the funded research network in an advisory or governance capacity. This may include participation in advisory boards, oversight committees, steering groups or similar roles that provide strategic guidance and oversight. Network partners do not need to meet the conditions laid out above for the LA. **Affiliate organisations are not eligible to request funding from the award.**

Network affiliates do not directly undertake network activities or tasks and are NOT required to sign a consortium agreement.

2.2 Additional Conditions

- To be considered, the network proposal must originate from a project funded under the 2022 Open Research Fund.
- Only one network arising from a project funded under the 2022 Open Research Fund will be considered.
- Two or more eligible networks (i.e. networks arising from projects funded under the 2022 Open Research Fund) may partner on a joint proposal, with one designated as the administrative coordinator.
- Only one application per network is permitted, whether submitted individually or as part of a joint proposal.
- While networks arising from projects funded under the 2023 Open Research Fund are ineligible to apply, their participation in proposed networks is encouraged.
- Co-funding from other research funding agencies for networks is allowed. However, double funding for the same work is not permitted ([see section 3.2 Co-funding](#)).

2.3 Funding Amount and Duration:

- Each network will receive between **€75,000 – €100,000** (inclusive of overheads) for a duration of **12 months**.
- Joint proposals will be permitted to apply for an increased budget based on the number of eligible 2022-funded projects involved (e.g., two priority action projects funded in 2022 can jointly apply for **€150,000 – €200,000**).

2.4 Conditions on Granting

- **Governance:** Applicants must demonstrate robust governance structures, including financial and risk management plans.
- **Stakeholder engagement:** Proposals should detail active involvement of stakeholders, including how new members will be recruited, and outline national and international collaborations or partnerships.
- **Alignment with policies:** Projects must align with national and international open research policy positions, including the [National Action Plan for Open Research 2022–2030](#).
- **Open research requirements:** Open research practices should be followed and identified; a Data Management Plan is required as part of the full application (mandatory- as a separate document: [see Science Europe's DMP template](#)), describing how it will be periodically reviewed

and updated during the term of the reward. It will be a condition of the grant that solutions are open (i.e., no vendor lock-in), that the dissemination of project outputs are not embargoed, and that project data are managed and shared in compliance with FAIR principles.

2.5 Reporting Requirements

The LA will act as the primary contact point for NORF and is responsible for ensuring that progress on project implementation across all consortium partners and/or affiliates is being adequately monitored. They have primary fiduciary responsibility and accountability for the project. Within one month of completion of the grant aided work, the LA of funded projects must submit a final report and a financial statement to NORF. Reporting templates and schedules will be provided for these purposes.

As part of project dissemination and reporting activities, successful applicants will be required to provide a final report on the exploitation, translation and reuse potential for project results, and to actively disseminate findings to reach relevant audiences. Consider that the final report will be expected to:

- Demonstrate how the network engaged stakeholders to create awareness, ensure appropriateness and understanding of the importance of national approaches/solutions;
- Deliver presentation of outputs to NORF and policymakers and help create awareness and maintain interest in the development of a national approach.

Representatives of each of the funded networks must attend the National Open Research Festival, **6-7 November 2025** which will take place at the **Royal Irish Academy, Dublin**. LAs, or a nominated representative, must attend an in-person meeting on **7 November 2025** which will be held as part of the National Open Research Festival. Associated costs may be included in the project budget.

2.6 Grant Funding Principles

- **Value for Money:** Budgets should be justified with clear explanations of how funds will be utilised effectively.
- **Transparency:** Applicants are expected to maintain transparency in financial reporting and project progress.
- **Accountability:** A final report will be required to ensure compliance with the NORF 2025 Open Research Fund objectives.

Institutions should be aware of the requirements of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform circular (13/2014) relating to the Management of and Accountability of Grants.

Institutions will be asked to confirm that the funds provided by the HEA as outlined in the grant allocation letter will be used for the purposes intended and that the institution will comply with the Statement of Principles for Grantees ([Appendix 2 of Circular 13/2014](#)) relating to: Clarity; Governance; Value for money; and Fairness.

3 Project Budget

3.1 Eligible costs

Personnel Costs:

In relation to personnel, costs for both existing staff and/or newly hired staff for the network are eligible. Buyout costs for existing staff are allowed (to support their participation in the network coordination through buyout of teaching or other duties) and must be clearly justified, as with other costs requested.

FAIR Data Management Costs

FAIR data management costs refer to data management costs for data generated by the project and incurred within the lifetime of the project (i.e., necessary to manage, store, and archive data produced by, during and about the project). Only costs incurred during the lifetime of the award will be eligible. Personnel costs related to FAIR Data Management (e.g. data managers) should be included in the personnel costs category.

Overheads:

Overheads are calculated at 25% of full staff costs, including personnel costs related to FAIR data management.

Equipment Costs:

Costs for suitably justified equipment required to implement the proposed programme of work.

Running costs:

Costs required to run the network including materials and consumables, meeting costs, travel etc. Access to necessary special facilities or services which are not available in the host or associated institutions, e.g., consultancy fees, methodological support.

3.2 Network Co-Funding

Co-funding from other research funding agencies and other sources for networks is allowed. **However, double funding for the same work is not permitted.**

If applicable, please include details on **any co-funding commitment** and indicate the total amount secured from this co-funding.

Any other financial or in-kind support for the proposed network should be detailed, including the award title (if applicable), the organisation providing the additional support, the amount of support, and the activities it will fund.

4. Application Procedure

4.1 Applications

To submit a proposal the following documents should be submitted as individual files:

- A completed and signed application form in PDF format.
- A data management plan in PDF format.
- A gantt chart to illustrate the project timelines, milestones and deliverables in PDF format.

Please note that application forms require institutional sign-off by the HI (see [section 2.1.1 Host Institution](#)).

In submitting an application, LAs and their host institution will be deemed to have accepted the conditions outlined in this call document and to have agreed to be bound by them.

4.2 Submission Process

All submissions must be submitted via the Jotform. The Jotform link is available on the NORF website (<https://norf.ie/2025-open-research-fund/>) under the heading “Application Process” by **17:00 (Irish local time) Wednesday, 7 May 2025**. Please note the following:

- Late applications will not be considered.
- Applications must be submitted in PDF format.
- Applications must be submitted by the Lead Applicant.

4.3 Assessment

The key steps in the assessment process are as follows:

- NORF staff review applications for eligibility.
- An external reviewer who is a member of an international panel of reviewers makes a written assessment and assigns an overall score to the application

(based on the set criteria). Each application is reviewed by at least two panellists.

- The international review panel will meet online to discuss the applications. All applications and assessments are made available to the panel in advance of the meeting.
- At the assessment meeting the panelists examine the written assessments and marks of the remote assessors and each provides a score (based on the set criteria) for each application.
- A ranked list of proposals recommended for funding is agreed by the panel. The panel may suggest items that require follow up by the applicant team prior to the allocation of funding.
- The NORF Grants Oversight Committee will be notified of the final list of proposals recommended for funding by the assessment panel.

Scoring Criteria (100 points total):

Support of fund's objectives (50 points)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compatibility of the network's vision, scope and objectives with the open research networks' sustainability and growth fund objectives. 	<i>10 points</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribution of the proposal to achieving the goals and objectives of national and international open research policy, including the <i>National Action Plan for Open Research 2022-2030</i> 	<i>10 points</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstration of the adequacy and specificity of arrangements for formal governance management, financial and risk management and coordination of the work. 	<i>10 points</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Substance, level and quality of stakeholder involvement, collaborations/partnerships (national and international). 	<i>20 points</i>
Proposal Quality (50 points)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expertise and track record of the applicant team. 	<i>10 points</i>

Quality and added-value of proposed network and activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate activities and work plan to deliver objectives and to achieve the Network vision. (15 points) • Proposed investment has clear added-value above and beyond any research activities, collaboration or networking currently taking place. (10 points) • Potential of activities to build further capacity for open research. (10 points) 	35 points
Budget justifications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear justifications of budget requests and value for money (5 points) 	5 points

5. Award Offers and Feedback

- All applicants will be informed of the outcome of their applications.
- Successful applicants will receive a **Letter of Offer** detailing the award's terms and conditions, to be signed by the Lead Investigator and institutional representatives such as the President or President's nominee.
- The network must be understood (and therefore implemented) as consortium-based. In practical terms it entails that:
 - An agreement on the use of funds between members of the consortium that will be in receipt of funding must be in place before the first payment can be issued. NORF must be provided with a copy of the agreement.
 - A research agreement between consortium partners must be in place (signed by all partners) within three months of the project start date. NORF must be provided with a copy of the Consortium Agreement. For the purpose of this programme adherence to the [National IP Protocol](#) is required.

6. Key Dates

27 March 2025	Call opens
16 April 2025	FAQ deadline
7 May 2025	Submission deadline (with research office endorsement)

w/c 19 May 2025	Assessment Panel Meeting
w/c 26 May 2025	NORF Grants Oversight Committee informed of outcome
June 2025	Contracting
July 2025	Earliest start date
September 2025	Latest start date

7. Contact Details

For more information on the 2025 Open Research Fund call contact:

Dr. Ailís O'Carroll

Open Research Support Officer

National Open Research Forum

norf@ria.ie