



S I F

**Strategic
Innovation
Fund**

Terms of Reference

1. Introduction

The Strategic Innovation Fund (SIF) supports the development of new strategic innovation projects that will accelerate impact of the excellent research by growing innovation activities at Oxford and attracting substantial external funding. The aim is to unlock significant opportunities either by pump-priming new or sustaining strategic and critical activities. It is aligned to the local and global (priority 4) of the emerging strategic plan (2025-30) – *Supporting society and the local and national economy by further developing a world-leading and inclusive innovation ecosystem*. More specifically it is designed to:

- i) develop a world-class innovation ecosystem,
- ii) support entrepreneurship in line with the outcomes of the spin-out review
- iii) enhance our local and global impact

This document contains the Terms of Reference for the SIF. It includes the aims and objectives of the scheme, descriptions of eligible projects, assessment criteria, operating framework and composition of the panel.

2. Objectives

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

- i) **Accelerating Innovation:** Support the transition of innovative ideas and concepts into impactful propositions, offering appropriate frameworks for growth.
- ii) **Expanding Investment and Partnerships:** Increase and diversify investment sources and attract corporate presence in Oxfordshire.
- iii) **Strengthening Networks:** Develop robust international and interdisciplinary networks to advance innovation and entrepreneurship.
- iv) **Embedding Inclusivity:** Promote equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in all activities, attracting diverse talent to Oxfordshire's ecosystem.
- v) **Enhancing Visibility and Alignment:** Support a coordinated pipeline of projects aligned with the University's strategic regional, national, and global plans.
- vi) **Developing a Collaborative Oxfordshire:** Position Oxfordshire as a leading destination for innovation, growth, and collaboration.
- vii) **Gather Evidence to Sustain Innovation:** Develop robust evidence base of the impact of funded activities to support the case for additional income generation, ensuring the continued growth of innovation-focused initiatives.

3. The Panel

A panel chaired by the PVC (Innovation) will make funding decisions and the scheme will be administered by Research Services. Their role is to review submitted application to ensure that they fit with the criteria, quality of submission, project viability and sustainability plans. The panel will also decide on the level of SIF award to be made. Collectively, members will have expertise in the strategic areas outlined in the aims and objectives. Members will be drawn from:

- Divisions
- A college representative
- Subject matter specialists such as academic leads
- Global innovation expertise – internal or external

Divisions will nominate their panel members, and external/other members will be nominated by the PVC (I) in line with the required expertise in the panel. In accordance with this criterion, panel members are:

Chair	Division representation	Division	Subject Matter Specialist	Subject	College representative
Chas Bountra PVC (I)	Abigail Williams	Humanities	Mairi Gibbs	OUI	Mike Jacobs
	Mathew Wood	MSD	Tim Bestwick	UKEA	
	Dermot O'Hare	MPLS	Constantin Coussios	Bio-Medical Engineering	
	Louise Slater	SSD	Alex Betts	Oxford Local & Global Engagement	
			Molly Stevens	Academic Entrepreneurship	

Panel membership will be reviewed every 3 years, or as necessitated by events, and the panel can have a minimum of 5 members and a maximum number of 10 members.

4. Eligibility and assessment criteria

The SIF is open to receiving projects from any source across the University and successful projects will need to meet most of the following criteria:

- i) **Strategic Alignment:** Align with the University's Strategic Plan and SIF objectives as outlined above.
- ii) **Transformational Impact:** Demonstrate potential for significant and measurable economic or social benefits through cross-institutional collaboration.
- iii) **Scalability and Sustainability:** Present a clear plan for outputs, outcomes, and sustained impact beyond the funding period.
- iv) **Leverage Opportunities:** Indicate how the project could unlock larger opportunities, such as substantial external investment or expanded regional/global influence.
- v) **Strong Foundations:** Be supported by robust partnerships and governance structures, including clear deliverables and monitoring plans.
- vi) **Complementary Funding:** Where other funds have been secured, demonstrate no duplication and outline how SIF funding complement these sources.

5. The Operating Framework

The SIF operates within the following framework:

- a) It is a limited pot, with a maximum of £2.5m in any particular year. This figure is based on OUI profits and is the ceiling. Therefore, it is not guaranteed, and available funds may be lower in any particular year.
- b) Based on a) above, not all good projects can be funded. Therefore, the panel will make decisions based on available funding at the time projects are assessed.
- c) The SIF will strive to promote an inclusive access of the funds to eligible projects.

6. Other activities

Where projects are eligible, the SIF can also fund the process of bid development and its associated activities, including external expertise that may be required.

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.

7. Application process and deadlines

Applications will be managed by Research Services and Prospective applicants are encouraged to engage with the process through emailing sif@admin.ox.ac.uk to discuss whether their project concept is suited to the SIF, and if an application should be submitted.

Calls for applications will be announced on the Research Services website and Divisional channels, 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.

There will be at least one planned funding call per term, but this will always be determined by the remaining funds. A funding round may be cancelled if funds have been depleted pending receipt of the next annual allocation.

8. Project monitoring and evaluation

To ensure the continual evaluation and improvement of the fund Research Services will maintain an 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.

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](#) and the [University Action Plan for Equity and Inclusivity in Research Funding](#). Applicants and panel members should consider the impact of their decisions or 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](#)