

STFC 21st Century Challenges Exploration Award

1. Background and Introduction

- 1.1 The 21st Century Challenges Enabling Fund supports the STFC research community to engage with and provide solutions to complex, multidisciplinary challenges.
- 1.2 The STFC 21st Century Challenges Exploration Award scheme can provide support for small, exploratory projects (<£20k), including stakeholder engagement, challenge-capability mapping and early stage scoping studies. Outputs from projects should be published and identify opportunities for further development e.g. next stage actions and funding routes.
- 1.3 Projects must demonstrate that they are challenge-led, and have strategic relevance and timeliness.
- 1.4 Proposals can be submitted at any time under this scheme but will be assessed on a quarterly basis by a subset of the 21st Century Challenges Assessment Panel. Applicants should, at an early stage, contact the 21st Century Challenges Programme (21cc@stfc.ac.uk) with an outline of their idea to establish the suitability of their proposal. Information on how to submit will be provided at that point.
- 1.5 Applicants must demonstrate that they are aware of and have considered the other funding schemes available to determine whether there is an alternative call that would be suitable for their proposal. Funding routes of particular relevance are:

[Innovation Partnership Scheme](#) – to support the transfer of technology and expertise developed through STFC funding to the marketplace in partnership with industry and other academic disciplines.

[Follow-on Funding](#) – to support the very early or pre-seed stage of turning research outputs into a commercial proposition. Industry partners are not allowed.

[CLASP](#) - to support the application and commercialisation of STFC research in key global challenge areas. Individual annual calls are aligned to specific challenge areas.

[21st Century Challenges Networks](#) – to support the creation of new multidisciplinary research communities at the interface between the STFC community and 21st Century Challenges. Network+s have funding for small scale projects relevant to the challenges they are addressing.

[Impact Acceleration Account](#) - provides flexible funding directly to the research organisation's Knowledge Exchange (KE) / Technology Transfer (TT) Office (or

equivalent) to support STFC-funded academics to take their ideas towards commercialisation, through activities not currently supported by an STFC funding programme. Not all STFC-funded research organisations receive an IAA.

2. Equality of opportunities

2.1 As a funder of scientific research, STFC is committed to:

- ensuring that people from the protected groups are not discriminated against by our policies, strategies or procedures in the consideration of applications for funding;
- monitoring annually the outcomes of funding applications for evidence of bias;
- consulting on measures to remove barriers to the participation of women in STFC activities, including: involvement in advisory bodies; applying for and being in receipt of funding; and, hence support the retention and career progression of women working in STFC areas of science;
- working proactively with our partners – the universities where we fund research and the international organisations to which the UK subscribes through STFC – to embed there the same equality and diversity principles enshrined in [STFC's Equality Scheme](#).

1.1.1. Further information on STFC's equality of diversity policy can be found on the [STFC website](#).

3. Eligibility

3.1 Normal UK Research and Innovation Research Council eligibility rules apply to this scheme <https://www.ukri.org/funding/how-to-apply/eligibility/>.

3.2 In addition to this, projects must clearly show that the science, technology, applications and expertise has been developed through the STFC Science Programme (nuclear physics, particle physics, particle astrophysics, astronomy, space science, and accelerators and computing in support of these) or the STFC national facilities and laboratories.

3.3 Each project must involve at least one Principal Investigator or Co-Investigator employed in a research group previously or currently funded in the science areas outlined above or in an STFC facility/laboratory. There should also be appropriate stakeholder and/or interdisciplinary involvement.

4. How to Apply

4.1 Before drafting a full proposal please contact the 21st Century Challenges Programme to establish the suitability of your idea (email to 21cc@stfc.ac.uk).

4.2 Applications should be submitted through Je-S <https://je-s.rcuk.ac.uk/JeS2WebLoginSite/Login.aspx>. Details of which options to select and documents to submit will be provided once suitability of your proposed project has been agreed with STFC.

5. Assessment Criteria

5.1 Your proposal will be assessed against the following criteria:

Quality

- Appropriateness of the proposed methodology
- Scientific Excellence

Importance and Impact

- Quality of the impact pathways described to facilitate impacts of the project
- Engagement with users
- Strategic and user need

Resources and management

- Effectiveness of the proposed planning and management
- Track Record of the applicant(s)
- Appropriateness of the resources requested and value for money